

In the Slave Cemetery · *Philip Pierson*

They will not lie still.
Cool here, wildness one comes to: unhinged johnseat
tangled in reddening creeper,

pile of recenter tincans gone to rust,
rubbers, inner tubes—all
things shot to hell & planted shallow. It's under

these weeds where it works out
sometimes legibly, sometimes a language we know:
moss keeping the stones honest.

Their names, they had them secondhand like pants
from those up here at the house. Who
in turn planted their own

namesakes solider, deeper, with
more articulate weights to hold them down.
None of that for these, nothing so

claiming. *Ecclesiastes Ramsey*—hand-gouged
in giving limestone, rainblunted,
& let it go at that. *Ecclesiastes* our

advance-man to hell, is dead. We buried
his heart. Bless him, give him easy solace,
the blackhearted bastard.

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Billy, you know how it was. How
all of us took girls into this night cemetery,
nothing innocent

about it. JoAnn the stacked one, the squealer,
saying our leafy cot was
chilly to her bottom & I had it lucky.

Billy, I had it lucky, I haven't
tried to argue that. Later, my old man obliged
with a '53 Pontiac convertible

in which, thank God above, the heater worked.
Stepping up in the world.
But the mechanic who lay squinting

under that first seduction (I'll
call it that, I'll squeeze some little credit)
was more dispassionate, I think,

more critical & discreet.
I hope we jarred him some with our hard-won
innocence & sent down some of that heat.

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Ecclesiastes Ramsey, who had no respect,
we put him in the ground.
Sally Ramsey, who grinned all day,

we put her in the ground.
Romeo Ramsey, who chewed his lip,
we put him in the ground.

John Jacob Salvation Ramsey, who
kept the linens nice & wound up
speaking tongues ablaze on the corn crib roof

under barking dogs, refusing to let go ever,
the blackhearted bastard,
we put him here in the ground.

Then we let the thicket in to take it.
Then we let the hogsnakes in to keep it.
We even remembered to forget.

Billy, will our blood
speak for them? Is it our hearts or
something we'd sooner by far mistake for safety

saying: Brother can you bless us
who will lie here speechless? Keep us, brother,
& keep us somehow still?