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In the Slave Cemetery

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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.*

* 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.  
*  
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?