

Rave On

... wild to be wreckage forever.
James Dickey, "Cherrylog Road"

Rumbling over caliche with a busted muffler,
radio blasting Buddy Holly over Baptist wheat fields,
Travis screaming out *Prepare ye the way of the Lord*
at jackrabbits skittering beneath our headlights,
the Messiah coming to Kansas in a flat-head Ford
with bad plates, the whole high plains holding its breath,
night is fast upon us, lo, in these the days of our youth,
and we were hell to pay, or thought we were. Boredom
grows thick as maize in Kansas, heavy as drill pipe
littering the racks of oil rigs where in summer boys
roustabout or work on combine crews north as far
as Canada. The ones left back in town begin
to die, dragging main street shit-faced on 3.2 beer
and hanging on the whorehouse door in Garden City
where the ancient madam laughed and turned us down
since we were only boys and she knew our fathers.
We sat out front spitting Red Man and scanned a landscape
flat as Dresden: me, Mike Luckinbill, Billy Heinz,
and Travis Doyle, who sang, *I'm gonna live fast,
love hard, and die young*. We had eaten all the life
there was in Seward County but hungry still, hauled ass
to old Arkalon, the ghost town on the Cimarron
that lay in half-shadow and a scattering of starlight,

and its stillness was a kind of death, the last breath
 of whatever in our lives was ending. We had drunk there
 and tossed our bottles at the walls and pissed great arcs
 into the Kansas earth where the dust groweth hard
 and the clods cleave fast together, yea, where night yawns
 above the river in its long, dark dream, above
 haggard branches of mesquite, chicken hawks scudding
 into the tree line, and moon-glitter on caliche
 like the silver plates of Coronado's treasure
 buried all these years, but the absence of treasure,
 absence of whatever would return the world
 to the strangeness that as children we embraced
 and recognized as *life. Rave on.*

Cars are cheap
 at Roman's Salvage strewn along the fence out back
 where cattle graze and chew rotting fabric from the seats.
 Twenty bucks for spare parts and a night in the garage
 could make them run as far as death and stupidity
 required—on Johnson Road where two miles of low shoulders
 and no fence line would take you up to sixty, say,
 and when you flipped the wheel clockwise, you were there
 rolling in the belly of the whale, belly of hell,
 and your soul fainteth within you for we had seen it done
 by big Ed Ravenscroft who said you would go in a boy
 and come out a man, and so we headed back through town
 where the marquee of the Plaza flashed CREATURE FROM
 THE BLACK LAGOON in storefront windows and the Snack Shack
 where we had spent our lives was shutting down and we
sang rave on, it's a crazy feeling out into the night

that loomed now like a wall
 and louder still for we were

out of the long tunnel of
 Johnson Road, Travis
 of that old Ford came
 the dash with his disheveled
 and eyes lit up by some
 had never seen, and Max
 in back with Billy who
 that moved but now like
 like a prayer, as the Ford
 and coughing but then
 and the fence line quaked
then, I think, we were
 of remembering what
 Samantha Dobbins saw
 light from the moon spill
 trout leaping all silver in
 the hand of my mother
 across my face at night
 it was all good now
 past and Travis with
 too late

*and the water
 as mud slams against
 the car in its slow turn
 the frame in agony
 and when the wheel's*

that loomed now like a darkened church, and sang loud
and louder still for we were sore afraid.

Coming up

out of the long tunnel of cottonwoods that opens onto
Johnson Road, Travis with his foot stuck deep into the *soul*
of that old Ford *come on, Bubba, come on* beating
the dash with his fist, hair flaring back in the wind
and eyes lit up by some fire in his head that I
had never seen, and Mike, iron Mike, sitting tall
in back with Billy, who would pick a fight with anything
that moved but now hunched over mumbling something
like a prayer, as the Ford lurched on spitting
and coughing but then smoothing out suddenly fast
and the fence line quitting so it was open field, then,
then, I think, we were butt-deep in regret and a rush
of remembering whatever we would leave behind—
Samantha Dobbins smelling like fresh laundry,
light from the movie spilling down her long blonde hair,
trout leaping all silver and pink from Black Bear Creek,
the hand of my mother, I confess, passing gentle
across my face at night when I was a child—oh, yes,
it was all good now and too late, too late, trees blurring
past and Travis wild, popping the wheel, oh too late
too late

*and the waters pass over us the air thick
as mud slams against our chests though turning now
the car in its slow turning seems almost graceful
the frame in agony like some huge animal groaning
and when the wheels leave the ground the engine cuts loose*

*with a wail thin and ragged as a bandsaw cutting tin
and we are drowning breathless heads jammed against
our knees and it's a thick swirling purple nightmare
we cannot wake up from for the world is turning too
and I hear Billy screaming and then the whomp
sick crunch of glass and metal whomp again back window
popping loose and glass exploding someone crying out
tink tink of iron on iron overhead and then at last
it's over and the quiet comes*

Oh so quiet. Somewhere
the creak and grind of a pumping unit. Crickets.
The tall grass sifting the wind in a mass of whispers
that I know I'll be hearing when I die. And so
we crawled trembling from doors and windows borne out
of rage and boredom into weed-choked fields barren
as Golgotha. Blood raked the side of Travis's face
grinning rapt, ecstatic, Mike's arm was hanging down
like a broken curtain rod, Billy kneeled, stunned,
listening as we all did to the rustling silence
and the spinning wheels in their sad, manic song
as the Ford's high beams hurled their crossed poles of light
forever out into the deep and future darkness. *Rave on.*

I survived. We all did. And then came the long surrender,
the long, slow drifting down like young hawks riding on
the purest, thinnest air, the very palm of God
holding them aloft so close to something hidden there,
and then the letting go, the fluttering descent, claws
spread wide against the world, and we become, at last,

our fathers. And I no longer know each other
in town for years. Each
remarried, then took
I found this house and
take new names and I
a quiet place for and
of earth whose unyield
and so, after vespers, I
from men who had not
and one of them I had
and I am telling you I
and his eyes were green
and I knew this man.

our fathers. And do not know ourselves and therefore
 no longer know each other. Mike Luckinbill ran a Texaco
 in town for years. Billy Heinz survived a cruel divorce,
 remarried, then took to drink. But finally last week
 I found this house in Arizona where the brothers
 take new names and keep a vow of silence and make
 a quiet place for any weary, or lost, passenger
 of earth whose unquiet life has brought him there,
 and so, after vespers, I sat across the table
 from men who had not surrendered to the world,
 and one of them looked at me and looked into me,
 and I am telling you there was *a fire in his head*
 and his eyes were coming fast down a caliche road,
 and I knew this man, and his name was Travis Doyle.