

James Dickey

### Cherrylog Road

Off Highway 106  
At Cherrylog Road I entered  
The '34 Ford without wheels,  
Smothered in kudzu,  
With a seat pulled out to run  
Corn whiskey down from the hills,

And then from the other side  
Crept into an Essex  
With a rumble seat of red leather  
And then out again, aboard  
A blue Chevrolet, releasing  
The rust from its other color,

Reared up on three building blocks.  
None had the same body heat;  
I changed with them inward, toward  
The weedy heart of the junkyard,  
For I knew that Doris Holbrook  
Would escape from her father at noon

And would come from the farm  
To seek parts owned by the sun  
Among the abandoned chassis,  
Sitting in each in turn  
As I did, leaning forward  
As in a wild stock-car race

In the parking lot of the dead.  
Time after time, I climbed in  
And out the other side, like  
An envoy or movie star  
Met at the station by crickets.  
A radiator cap raised its head,

Become a real toad or a kingsnake  
As I neared the hub of the yard,  
Passing through many states,  
Many lives, to reach  
Some grandmother's long Pierce-Arrow  
Sending platters of blindness forth

From its nickel hubcaps  
And spilling its tender upholstery  
On sleepy roaches,  
The glass panel in between  
Lady and colored driver  
Not all the way broken out,

The back-seat phone  
Still on its hook.  
I got in as though to exclaim,  
"Let us go to the orphan asylum,  
John; I have some old toys  
For children who say their prayers."

I popped with sweat as I thought  
I heard Doris Holbrook scrape  
Like a mouse in the southern-state sun  
That was eating the paint in blisters  
From a hundred car tops and hoods.  
She was tapping like code,

Loosening the screws,  
Carrying off headlights,  
Sparkplugs, bumpers,  
Cracked mirrors and gear-knobs,  
Getting ready, already,  
To go back with something to show

Other than her lips' new trembling  
I would hold to me soon, soon,  
Where I sat in the ripped back seat  
Talking over the interphone,  
Praying for Doris Holbrook  
To come from her father's farm

And to get back there  
With no trace of me on her face  
To be seen by her red-haired father  
Who would change, in the squalling barn,  
Her back's pale skin with a strop,  
Then lay for me

In a bootlegger's roasting car  
With a string-triggered 12-gauge shotgun  
To blast the breath from the air.  
Not cut by the jagged windshields,  
Through the acres of wrecks she came  
With a wrench in her hand,

Through dust where the blacksnake dies  
Of boredom, and the beetle knows  
The compost has no more life.  
Someone outside would have seen  
The oldest car's door inexplicably  
Close from within:

I held her and held her and held her,  
Convoyed at terrific speed  
By the stalled, dreaming traffic around us,  
So the blacksnake, stiff  
With inaction, curved back  
Into life, and hunted the mouse

With deadly overexcitement,  
The beetles reclaimed their field  
As we clung, glued together,  
With the hooks of the seat springs  
Working through to catch us red-handed  
Amidst the gray breathless batting

That burst from the seat at our backs.  
We left by separate doors  
Into the changed, other bodies  
Of cars, she down Cherrylog Road  
And I to my motorcycle  
Parked like the soul of the junkyard

Restored, a bicycle fleshed  
With power, and tore off  
Up Highway 106, continually  
Drunk on the wind in my mouth,  
Wringing the handlebar for speed,  
Wild to be wreckage forever.