

Four Exclamation Points

Jim Reese

The first time I had my hands on a steering wheel
was after baseball practice, little league, third grade,
when the whole team would pile into coach Shankie's station wagon.
I can still see the green, the rust and wood siding on the car.
He'd let one of us kids sitting on the hump up front
control the gas pedal while he kept his right foot on the brake,
both our hands white-knuckling the wheel, giving us rein.
He'd make sure we were ready and then someone would yell,
Give her hell! As fast as you can take her!

We'd barrel up the neighborhood streets, almost sailing,
skimming the concrete. The kid on the hump reaching
and pressing harder and harder on the gas pedal,
I got the brake kid, don't worry!
The windshield a moving picture show all blue sky
horizon and bright, almost hypnotic, the green
tops of trees and hills we seemed at that moment to
be climbing—peering in a rearview mirror for
the first time, an array of baseball hats all cockeyed,
a line of eyes showing all their white—open mouths
whoop-whooping our way to the nearest convenience store
where Shankie set us loose in the candy aisle to grab
whatever we wanted, Slim Jims, candy cigarettes, Big Gulps.
One time Charlie Ferguson had the gonads to
take a full-size bag of Doritos to the counter
and Shankie paid. The unlucky cashier rang the team
up and we climbed back in that beast and were off again—
some new knot-head almost driving with Shankie's big
hairy left hand at ten o'clock and a couple
of much smaller hands at two. Everything we were doing
was wrong and *Totally right on man!* We had wheels to prove it.