

Silent Running

D E N N I S F I N N E L L

Forty years ago I drove a yellow Studebaker, a friend on my hood.

One or two more clung to the roof, and inside five or six of us
singing O roll your leg over. . . .

Two plumes of drying barf streaked away like painted flames
from the two rear side windows.

A little print of Bruegel's Peasant Wedding hung from the
clothes hook in back, to class up the act.

More than once Sundays 2 a.m.-ish we would drive like this
down the hill of Charbonier Road

Until just the right speed, and then I'd cut the flathead engine,
push in the clutch, and we'd coast

Powerless downhill in silence, and if in moonlight I'd cut the
headlights

And we'd go in near-darkness, all of us quieted, until a driver
coming toward us

Got within range, when I'd pull the headlights on and tweak the
ignition key,

The engine backfiring like a twelve-gauge just as our fellow
traveler passed by going uphill.

::

Today I am that fellow traveler jacklit by a beast half-young-man,
half-Studebaker.

I am a flathead six-cylinder engine firing its coup de grace,
headlights giving myself the third degree.

The windows of the self rolled down, I am a blue eye in the ditch
of Charbonier Road, I am a pink ear,

And 2 a.m. blows by, and a minute later, 2 a.m. blows by, and a
minute later, 2 a.m. blows by,

So clearly I live now and then in Bruegel's peasant bride who
herself keeps her eyes closed, clasped hands

Resting in her lap, the quiet everlasting being magnetizing the
Babel of her own wedding.

::

And my friends? Jim lies spreadeagle, gripping the chrome winged
hood ornament.

Bob and I reach out our windows, hold him by his ankles,

Triangulating him. Mike and Ron lie on the roof, grab on to the
rain gutters,

Friends in back reaching out to hold them on by their legs.

All of us coast downhill toward the Missouri River bottomlands.
Each of us holding on to another,

Ignorant we would live forever, true, but in moonlight at most,

And without one word, save the wind's admonitions.