

*In this poem, the speaker's grandfather is teaching the speaker and his sister to drive in a rural area of New Mexico. Read "Driving Lesson" and answer the questions that follow.*

## Driving Lesson

Beside him in the old Ford pickup  
that smelled of rope and grease and cattle feed,  
sat my sister and I, ten and eight, big,  
now our grandfather would teach us  
5 that powerful secret, how to drive.  
Horizon of high mountain peaks visible  
above the blue hood, steering wheel huge  
in our hands, pedals at our toe-tips,  
we heard his sure voice urge us  
10 *Give it gas, give it gas.* Over the roar  
of the engine our hearts banged  
like never before and banged on  
furiously in the silence after  
we bucked and stalled the truck.  
15 How infinitely empty it then seemed—  
windy flat rangeland of silver-green  
gramma grass dotted with blooming cactus  
and jagged outcrops of red rock, beginnings  
of the Sangre de Cristos\* fifty miles off.  
20 All Guadalupe County, New Mexico,  
nothing to hit, and we could not  
get the damn thing going. Nothing to hit  
was no help. It was not the mechanics  
of accelerator and clutch, muscle and bone,  
25 but our sheer unruly spirits  
that kept us small with the great desire  
to move the world by us, earth and sky  
and all the earth and sky contained.  
And how hard it was when,  
30 after our grandfather who was a god  
said *Let it out slow, slow* time and again  
until we did and were at long last rolling

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\* *Sangre de Cristos* — a mountain range

over the earth, his happy little angels,  
how hard it was to listen  
35 not to our own thrilled inner voices  
saying *Go, go*, but to his saying  
the *Good, good* we loved but also  
the *Keep it in the ruts* we hated to hear.  
How hard to hold to it—  
40 single red vein of a ranch road  
running out straight across the mesa,  
blood we were bound to follow—  
when what we wanted with all our hearts  
was to scatter everywhere, everywhere.

—*Michael Pettit*