



Autumn Rounds

Jacques Poulin

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In Jacques Poulin's lyrical novel *Autumn Rounds*, a Canadian bookmobile driver travels from Quebec City to the villages along the country's northern shore.

The Driver, as he calls himself, has an enduring love of books and a curious perspective. He has also decided to commit suicide while he is still middle-aged, to avoid growing older and suffering from the "disaster" of illness. But at a summer festival, he meets Marie, whose honed beauty and "mixture of tenderness and strength" remind him of Katharine Hepburn.

The manager of a small French circus group, Marie shares an instant rapport with The Driver. They are both tall, slim, and gray-haired, almost like twins; he is offbeat and engaging, while she is an appealing paradox of free-spirited maturity. She rides with him in the bookmobile and marvels over the region's mountains, rivers, and lakes. As they travel, they grow closer and become lovers. The Driver tells Marie about his suicidal designs, and though she's unnerved, she does not try to dissuade him; still, the couple's romance is shadowed by The Driver's quiet obsession with preemptive euthanasia. Even as he plans for the future, and decides that Marie will travel with him again, he makes no promises about his final plans.

A former milk delivery van, the bookmobile is revealed to have custom-built shelves, a kitchenette, and a foldout bed. Its arrangement also evinces particular pride in Quebec-based authors, who find their rightful place on its shelves next to other major writers: "Anne Hébert and Hemingway, Raymond Carver and Roch Carrier." This cozy arrangement becomes disturbing, however, as The Driver contemplates how to someday asphyxiate himself inside the vehicle.

Rich with humor, reflection, and the almost palpable magic of books, *Autumn Rounds* is a novel that explores an intimate yet expansive landscape.

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