Driving Backwards

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Even when you’re not ready, it just happens: it’s dusk, and your car begins to roll slowly backwards. Your leg is numb and you can’t quite reach for the brake and the landscape in front of you pulls away, a little faster each second. You panic at first, try to move your tingling foot but the car doesn’t stop, no matter how hard you press the brake. You look ahead and see the past, the places where you just drove, sliding quickly beyond you: intersections you used to cross, favorite trees you once climbed, houses where you lived glide past you and into the flat line of the horizon where your windshield is steadily staring. The car looks suddenly newer, the nick on the glass healing over, the split on the upholstery sealing itself, the chrome shift lever brightening to a shine, and soon you’re okay with this backing up: You feel the scars on your body smoothing over and disappearing. The odometer, too, is reversing itself, each mile sliding up into the forehead of the dashboard. You glance in the rearview mirror, see
someone who looks like you,
a teenager standing on the gravel roadside
hitchhiking, his thumb lifted high as if he could poke a hole
in the darkness. As you pass him, he looks up at you briefly,
nods in recognition. For an instant you wonder
if this is what dying might be like: Passing your younger self
without touching. He shrinks smaller and smaller
into the horizon, and just before he disappears he raises one arm
and waves at you, the same way
you’re waving at him, if you’re saying
hello, or goodbye, or both at the same time.

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