Driving

Paul Meacham*
DRIVING

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After Bernardo Luini’s The Christ Child Asleep

There is the steel and black vinyl of the dashboard, its tachometer, the orange needle waves above, now below the constancy of my velocity, the miles click past and roll over in tenths, and, always, there is the image, pale and sad, the sleeping face of the child beneath her chin.

I am an observer in that circle, the innocent over her shoulder offering and roll of brown parchment tied with twine,
or in the foreground, cherubic, with white linen in my hands.

I am the one who looks out from the painting’s shadow, who presses the clutch, cuts the engine after the thousandth mile and coasts to a stop at the side of the highway, to stretch his legs beside a roadsign that says soft shoulder, to gaze into the star-saturated sky, the silent dark of the desert emptied.