

The Rumble Strip

by A. W. Pafford

Pulled from sleep again by drums of the rumble strip. The Driver's face, cool and white. The Cadillac console illuminating that pale skin and fine yellow. No smile now.

The Driver's pulling over— in a hurry. Once, he'd done this after I'd seen the lights behind us. I rise up enough to see over the leather. No lights this time. Nobody on the road. Just black and the too long gone. Maybe he's got to piss. I'd seen him do it before in an empty plastic milk jug. He didn't like to stop.

But, The Driver talked about speed. Something about pulling her off easy or we'll blow our tires. “No telling what's off that shoulder,” he'd say.

I scan The Driver's face for the correct emotion. He's calm. He knows where he's going. I always over-react.

He had told me we could go seven over without getting stopped along these parts. The Driver had some game he'd play with truckers where he'd flash his brights and they'd flash back. This told him when to drive faster. I never understood how to play.

This is faster.

Eyes open, confident and calm like I'd never seen him.

He doesn't hear it. The drums. So loud now. I'm shaking.

I say his name. The beat has been replaced by a sickening hiss. Out the front the line divides us. We roll on hard. To the right, black. That's where I'm going.

Louder.

The Driver pulls hard left. Cold glass against my warm ear.

The drums are gone. The hiss.

We're between the lines.

