

Interstate

by John Riley

By Jackson, you called and said, I'll be too drunk to drive. Hell, if I do my very best, I could be blind by Shreveport.

I warn you son, you whispered, everything's losing its shape. The sky cracks like knuckles all day. Now my dog has decided I'm no friend. I can't outrun the end much longer. But my boy ain't no coward. Fly down, meet your old dad, we'll take a ride to see my new grave.

The plane bounced along a gyrating sky. The stewardess hung over me like a flesh angel. You're just a boy, she said, and your face says you're sweet. Don't fear the tumult outside. I told her it's more dangerous down below, where everyone wore a bullseye.

In Jackson I stood outside the Dust and Ash Hotel. Your traveling dog, he was a German, said he knew you loved me but I was too late. I didn't want to step through the door, he said. Who knows what you'll be on the other side.

Come in, you yelled. I smiled at the dog and said I can't. Your hound is guarding the gate. It was a hell of a predicament, you agreed. There was always one asshole who wouldn't get with the plan.

You shot the dog and we moved on.

I drove while you snored. The car sped inside a song once sung. Beyond dawn morning mist gave way. At dark you took the wheel. Night ripped open. I flipped dog-eared corners, watched new universes boom, felt my own animal swim inside. Wondered how the dog had died. Was it a final explosion like rage behind the eyes. Or was it warm soup, with soft bread, a glass of cold milk on the side.

