

Short Story:

DOWN THE BOULEVARD

by C. Melvina Nwanna

“Please!” You wave frantically, hoping the bus driver will spot you in his rear-view mirror. But he doesn’t.

Before you reach the Thistle Down bus stop, the bus is already rolling down the street. The bus number—118—glows brightly in the dark. It offers you a last glance, then turns out of sight.

“Fuck!” you scream.

You fall on the russet bus bench, and harsh breaths rush out of your nose and lips. You unzip and unbutton the top half of your utility jacket and welcome the chilly night amid swearing and heaving. You swing your backpack to your front, pull out your magenta water bottle, gulp down a large amount of water, and shove it back. Then you check your phone.

It’s 8:59 pm.

Thirty-five seconds. Bus 118 rolls away thirty-five seconds too early.

Your breathing and body temperature returns to its normal state, and the chilly night starts to bite your skin again. You zip-up and button the top half of your utility jacket. You’re cold, and your black boots feel heavy. You can run into the Shoppers Drug Mart across the bus stop and wait for the next bus. But you don’t.

You march down Thistle Down Blvd. You march to your house.

The closest intersection to Thistle Down Blvd is Albion and Islington. Thistle Down Blvd is a round neighbourhood. If you drive or walk around enough, you'll see the same brick house and the same yellowing trees.

You see bus 118 again. It heads back to Wilson Station. You get a glimpse of the bus driver: his olive skin, placid face, and squared shades shielding him from nothing but the night. You get an overwhelming desire to wag a middle finger at him, but as his bus rolls by the act remains undone. You doubt he will see your finger because your complexion blends well with the night.

You continue to march down Thistle Down Blvd.

The French school—Saint Noël Chabanel—is on the other side of the street. Its grand windows reveal a library and several hallways. The French school is a new addition to the street. Now there are two Catholic schools—one French, and the other English. But Thistle Down Blvd has mainly single-storey houses, varying in brick shades: pale yellow, blush, sandpaper, and grey. Residents have one or two large windows, white blinds or curtains, side entrances, and one or two trees in front of their houses. In the night, open blinds reveal bright living and dining rooms with bulky furniture and moving figures. You usually don't walk to your house late enough to observe this, and the revelation is both grim and thrilling.

Two cars trail down the street, and for a moment the night has red and yellow hues. An Italian woman and her Nova Scotia Retriever turn towards the sidewalk you're marching on. You acknowledge them, peer towards the edge, watch the road, and run to the other side of the street. You're close to the Fellowship Presbyterian Church. It's a small church with grey bricks and dark frames around its grand windows. The church has an LED digital board on its lawn,

projecting biblical messages in red texts. Attendants stand in front of its main entrance, conversing, and you swiftly pass the church.

As you march down Thistle Down Blvd, you hear sprinting footsteps. Your imagination takes over. You convince yourself that a serial killer has been following you and now wants to attack. The intruder approaches, and you prepare to slam your elbow into his face. But as you turn, you see a night runner and not a serial killer. He sprints into the corner path, and you march into it.

Two Indian women in black fall coats walk by, whispering and laughing. You smile kindly at them. The night brings out the serial killer, and you smile to assure them that you're not one. They smile back.

In this part of Thistle Down Blvd, most of the single-storey houses have motion sensor lights around them. When you walk by, they switch on and shine their white light on your figure. This usually annoys you. But today, you're cold, and your black boots feel heavy. You want to look at the bright side.

You pass where Thistle Down Blvd and Dashwood Crescent intersect. One car rolls by. A red Toyota. It turns into the driveway of one of the motion sensor houses, and you pass where Thistle Down Blvd and Kenhill Drive intersect.

Your house is just four houses away now. You hear the wind howl and watch the yellowing trees dance a final time. You stop in front of your house, and your neighbour's motion sensor bulbs shine over it. Your house has pale yellow bricks, one large window in front, white blinds, a side entrance before the driveway, and a white Bell van occupies your driveway. A Bell

technician is blocking your side entrance; the fair-faced, shaggy-haired technician holds a long wire over your front door.

You walk to the backdoor, open it, march up the basement steps, and into your main floor.

You're in the living room. You throw your backpack on the brown center couch and fall beside it. It's 9:15 pm. CP24 plays on the TV screen. Your mother sits on the dining table. A silver chandelier shines over her, and you stare at her dark skin, her black braids, her purple reading glasses, and the hydro bill in her hands. She drops the bill and smiles.

*“Nonye. You're back,”* she says. *“I didn't see the bus pass by.”*

You reply, *“Yeah, because I missed it.”*

Your mother's thinning brows furrow and lips slant because of your words. It's her pity look. She usually reserves it for special occasions. But she gives—gifts—you this look tonight because it's cold outside. *“How'd school go?”* she asks.

You shrug, *“Fine.” The same.*

You stand up and roam further into your house—into your siblings' bedrooms. After a long day, you enjoy pestering them.