

Main Street

by Michael Downing

You know when you see the flashing blue lights in your rearview mirror that you're not being pulled over because of a busted taillight or carelessly doing fifty in a thirty-five mile an hour school zone; your crime is being a Black man behind the wheel. It happens often enough that it's become routine, so you ease your Lexus to the shoulder, turn off the ignition, and get out your license while putting your hands on the dashboard where nobody can misunderstand your intentions. Two uniforms approach, one on each side of the car, and it's not surprising that their guns are drawn — they've determined that you look like somebody who stole the car or robbed a convenience store or mugged an elderly lady; being Black makes you a suspect in every crime in your neighborhood, even when you don't match any descriptions. They tell you to keep your hands where they can see them so you unbuckle your seat belt and lean forward, giving a detailed play by play of every move you make because this is what it's come to when you fit their profile of somebody who must be guilty of something. Your license falls between the seats and you reach for it, telling them what you're doing, but later the cop on the passenger side will tell the jury that he pulled the trigger eight times because it looked like you were grabbing a weapon and the other cop will agree. You won't live to see how it ends and nothing will change, except that your two year old son will grow up never knowing his father.

