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A Suburb of the City of Dis

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Mythcon 51: The Mythic, the Fantastic, and the Alien
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A Suburb of the City of Dis

by

Joe R. Christopher

*Halfway through my life, I found myself
standing in a bus queue on a long, mean street;
evening was closing in, and soon enough
a light rain fell—my hair was wet; no treat,
it seemed, remembering miles on miles of wandering,
always the evening, often in rain, on foot,
cheerless shop-windows unlit, and I, meandering.
In some old book (I thought) I've read of this—
this meaningless existence; I stood there wondering.
Meanwhile, quarrelsome people before me, pissed
(they shouted), left their places by time assigned;
two fought and swore. A couple of hot ones kissed,
and left. Withdrawing, one drawled out, "Unrefined."
I waited, hoping a bus still ran on that line.*

NOTE (by Joe Christopher): This sonnet uses imagery from the first part of C. S. Lewis's *The Great Divorce*; in that book, the narrator, after the problems with those waiting for the bus, takes the bus that comes to a trip to a place in sight of Heaven. The last sentence of this sonnet leaves the destination a bit more ambiguous, but to have "hope" is perhaps positive in this theological position. (The uncertainty also makes it clear that this narrator is not the same person as Lewis's narrator.) Lewis's fiction imitates Dante's *Divine Comedy* in various ways, and this poem also imitates Dante—in different ways: (1) The title refers to the City of Dis, which is lower in Hell (in Dante's poem) than Lewis's story seems to be placed; (2) the opening "Halfway through my life" echoes the opening of Dante's poem; and (3) I write about this in a terza-rima sonnet (ABA BCB CDC DED EE), to echo Dante's use of terza-rima in his poem. (Dante does not use a couplet at the end of his sections—and, of course, his sections are far longer than fourteen lines.)