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Is it a Crime?

The sound of the sirens stymied the progress we were making on our journey to Hollywood. I glanced in the vanity that hung just above my head to see what troubled the officers. Rodney, my boyfriend, pulled over as the sirens ordered us to. As our car crept to the side of the road, a dozen men in blue emerged from their vehicles with their guns drawn. It took a moment to realize we had been captured.

"Keep your hands where we can see them! Shut off the car! Throw the keys out of the window! Exit the car with your hands up!" The officer's voice blasted through the megaphone.

I froze. Rodney obeyed. He whispered, "God cover us, God cover us." His weathered sienna brown hands parted from a prayer position to upright and into full view of the police. I made use of my right to remain silent as visions of my lifeless body on the well-traveled freeway reigned over my mind like a successful invasion. My heart raced as I felt the indifference of the officer that would commission my death. I saw it—me on the ground—and got lost in that scene. My life and their Hollywood crashed into one another. Pieces of the calamity were everywhere. Their shiny metal guns glared at us; the officers scowled. I thought, *How fast was he going?* I watched as Rodney abandoned me in the car. Removing himself, robotically, hands up, feet first, walking away.

“Lie face down, spread eagle!” The officer barked at the figure as I watched Rodney lower himself onto the ground in front of a roadblock of blue, losing the dignity and humanity he'd carried all his life.

“Come out with your hands up!” *They weren't talking to me. Couldn't be talking to me.* What seemed an absurd situation quickly became a desperate one as I knew what I had to do to stay alive. Obey.

Getting out of the car, I followed their directions, carefully. I put one low-heeled shoe in front of the other while balancing my hands above my head. Somehow I managed to find myself lying next to Rodney who was already pressed against the asphalt that was the 101 South. The army of weapons stayed trained on us. My body twitched against the hard road, the tiniest pebbles scoured my stomach and legs. *Maybe if I play dead they'll go away. Maybe if I play dead they'll begin to believe I should be.*

An officer—tall, blond, guilty in the eyes—handcuffed me and lifted me to my feet. He led me to the side of the road where another cop who was tall, mocha-skinned, and looked like he could be family pointed a shotgun at my chest.

Fear. It separated Rodney and me, then they did. They hoisted Rodney, all six-feet-two-hundred pounds of him, onto his feet and led him twenty yards away from me, past the place where his car used to be. The blond held one of my arms, still handcuffed to the other, and asked if I was okay. I nodded yes. It was a convenient lie.

While I waited in the metal handcuffs, I felt as if I were about to combust. *How did we get here?* I tried to remember.

I had just moved to Los Angeles from the Midwest and few things were as they should be. L.A. was a cluster of masked—souls hidden by circumstances. Stars, and those still shaded, characters taking the forms of actors, singers, writers, tunneling toward their Hollywood dream. I was among them.

On a slow moving April evening, my journey got derailed. I was en route to the Writers' Guild of America, after receiving an invitation to an exclusive meet-and-greet. I wore a trendy black pantsuit with a low-heel nothing and even combed over Rodney's clothing options to ensure some level of acceptance into the world we both coveted.

We traveled southbound on the Hollywood freeway. The Chevrolet Cavalier, our carriage for the evening, was being chased by a school of eco-friendly luxury SUVs.

I'd rehearsed what to say and what not to say to those who'd accomplished what we hoped to one day. Peeking into the unlit vanity that hung just above my head, I noticed the herd of Mercedes Benz's and Audi's was overwhelmed by the intimidation of the LAPD. They were in pursuit.

The rush of life and death circling me made me settle into sadness. Fear kept me from making eye contact with the monster with the gun. I hung my head, convicted, on the side of the road. The traffic we had clogged while lying motionless in the freeway, began to flow. I didn't look up, but I felt the stares of condemnation from rubber necking motorists and was ashamed. In those everlasting minutes my purpose and my original destination were not important. I just wanted the monsters to go away. Again the overseer asked "Are you okay?" I nodded again obediently. *Were we under arrest? For what?* I thought.

"Let her go!" I heard someone yelling in the distance and hoped it was the voice of the Almighty. They uncuffed me and lowered their weapons. I didn't feel safe. The olive-skinned Latino detective escorted Rodney to my side. They were discussing the play of events we got caught up in. The car we drove was moved onto the off-ramp. We walked toward the old Chevy accompanied by the detective. It too had been violated. The police had searched the seats, the glovebox, my purse. I heard them, but I couldn't really listen. The detective said something about an armed robber hiding out in our apartment complex. We were

unaware. The police followed him, then us, to this place, this nightmare. They showed us a picture of the person that I would have expected to be Rodney's identical twin.

They got the black part right.

I stood facing the car waiting for Rodney to fully digest the detective's story. I couldn't care less about the reasoning behind this nightmare I just needed to escape the scene of the crime. We got into the car offering little comfort to one another. What could we say? Are you alright? No. Rodney was rendered silent, but I had to release. My cries shook our vehicle that was unable to drive us away fast enough southbound on the road to Hollywood. The end of that saga saw to the end of my peace shattering it.

I spent that night, and some time after, considering for the first time the consequences of being black and if it is, in this society, considered a legitimate crime. Being. Black. I couldn't deny the evidence, only learn as others have, to cope, and earnestly pray that maybe the next time we wouldn't so conveniently fit the description.