

Crime Pays

Round 1: Heat 28 entry, NYC Midnight Short Story Challenge 2014
by L.S. Christopher

They stopped because it was the right thing to do. But had it been the right thing to do for them?

As accidents went, it could have been worse. The roads were just slightly wet from a recent rain, and there was just enough water to highlight the long black skid marks to their best advantage. The driver had tried to stop. It looked like he'd tried pretty hard, in fact.

He'd hit the limo anyway, a glancing blow that had left the little car mostly intact and still drivable. But the driver had still backed up, out of the intersection, and then driver and passenger had gotten out to try to help, even though there hadn't been much they could do. They had tried, though. They'd tried to help the victim, they'd actually pulled him out of the mangled back seat of the limo, and then the passenger – the driver's girlfriend – had called 911 to report the accident. She had tearfully told the operator that the passenger was a young black man wearing a lot of jewelry and that she thought he was dead.

The limo driver, who was unhurt, called it in at the same time – first to his rapper-boss's employer, Tri-Citi Records, and then to 911 himself. "It's The B, he's dead," he'd reported, and given the location. "Yeah, I know she already called it in, I'm callin' it in again – 'cause the little white college kid patrol over here don't know who they just took out. This is big. This is so big, you can't even imagine how big it's gonna get, The B bein' dead like this. The B just went from bein' a rap master to a rap fuckin' *god*, man, so you need to get someone out here who knows what's what, know what I mean?"

By the time the first police cruiser showed up, the limo driver had left the wrecked limo and his boss's body and the two people who had caused the accident and was wandering around picking broken bits of bling up off the asphalt and pocketing them. "Can't leave it here, man," he'd informed the police officer who'd chewed him out for disturbing a crime scene. "Tomorrow morning it would be on eBay, the label would fuckin' kill me. You want it for evidence you can have it, but I can't leave it layin' around here." He gave his statement, shrugging off the fact that he may or may not have run a red light at the intersection as unimportant, and commented that the metallic squeal of the little white car's brakes had made him think it may not have had all that much left of its brake pads to stop with in the first place. He shot a frowning glance at the young couple who had been in the little car, though, and leaned closer to the officer, lowering his voice. "I don't know what's goin' on with those two, man, so I kept my distance, didn't get on them or nothin'. 'Cause those college kids have got some big-ass guns layin' in their back seat – I was over there, I saw it."

The officer noted that down. "Stay right here, and don't pick any more of that shit up," he warned, and then walked over to look at the little car himself. A second cruiser had shown up, and the two officers who'd gotten out of it were measuring skid marks and documenting the spread of debris from the accident; he detoured around them and looked in the car's back window, then used his phone to take a picture and looked at that. He walked back to the limo driver. "Nice try, but they aren't real and I'm pretty sure you knew it – no way someone who's been drivin' The B around doesn't know what a fucking gun looks like." The driver just blinked

at him, and he rolled his eyes. “Right. Those aren’t real guns, stupid, they’re fake. As in ‘I made this in my living room out of cardboard and tape and then I spray painted it’ fake,” he said, holding up the phone. “See, the flash picked out the tape lines really nicely.” His partner walked over, and he showed the picture to him. “They say anything about this?”

“Oh yeah. You’re not gonna believe this one, wait’ll I tell you.” He shoed the limo driver away and the man wandered off, making phone calls; some of them probably to Tri-Citi or The B’s agent or for insurance, maybe one of them to someone who’d want to fence however much of the pocketed bling he could get away with keeping. “Doesn’t seem too broken up about it, does he?”

“I’m pretty sure he’s at least halfway to strung out, actually; he had to look over his shoulder at the intersection to remember if there was a traffic light there. But would you be all that upset if you’d been the one drivin’ The B around when he got sent to whatever level of hell bad-boy rappers go to? This guy just went from driver to celebrity, he’ll have three interviews and a tell-all book deal in the works by tomorrow night.”

“Probably, yeah. Not that I can blame him.”

“Nope, me either.” The first officer pocketed his phone and waved a hand in the direction of the college kids. “So what’s their story?”

“Speeding, tried to stop when they saw the limo pull into the intersection and it didn’t work.” His partner shrugged. “They stopped to help, said it was the right thing to do. Which it would have been if they hadn’t been on their way to rob a bank.”

“They…” He looked over at the pair of young, visibly upset twenty-somethings; the boy was holding the girl while she sniffled into his shoulder. They looked like a couple of broke college kids, clean-cut but not preppy enough to have come from money. “You’re shitting me. Are they drunk?”

“Nope. They were on their way to rob a bank – Little Miss Girlfriend closed out her account, but her paycheck from work went in after the fact and got trapped. Bank hasn’t wanted to make good, says it’s not their problem, boss said the same thing. So she and the boyfriend made some fake guns out of shit they had laying around their apartment, planned to hit the bank right before closing and hold the place up to get her money back. They were speeding because they were running late, didn’t want the bank to close before they got there.”

“Jesus. And they just *told* you that?”

“Yeah. They’re pretty broken up about not being able to save The B – and they didn’t even know who he was, I had to explain it to them. The girl thought he had all that jewelry on because he was gay and going out to party. Think they may have killed him the rest of the way when they pulled him out to try to save him, actually, but the Good Sam law will cover that. Not sure what a judge will make out of the bank robbery they were speeding to get to, though.”

“If he hears about it, you mean.” The two officers looked at each other. The B had always been bad news – in and out of trouble with the law, had an actual rap sheet that hadn’t just been made up to impress his fans, was a known drug user and sometimes a dealer, too. And lately he’d been racking up a reputation for liking to rough up unwilling women before he ‘stung’ them with his unprotected, disease-ridden dick. The B’s record label, Tri-Citi, had supposedly paid the women off to keep them quiet, but that didn’t make The B shut up about it or make the police reports go away – and the police weren’t too inclined to look kindly on The B anyway since one of his most popular songs was about all the ways he could think of to ‘stick a pig’ who dared to get into his business.

The police hadn't been able to get around the record label's money and lawyers to get The B for anything, though. And then along comes this young, stupid couple, speeding along on a wet road in their shitty little college-kid car, planning on robbing a bank with fake guns to get the girl's paycheck back. They'd even had a pay stub from her job with them so they'd ask for the exact right amount. A stub. With her name and address on it. They were idiots, plain and simple.

But they'd still stopped when they'd gotten into an accident, even though their car would have kept going and it wasn't a camera intersection and they knew it. They'd stopped because they thought it was the right thing to do. They'd tried to get The B out of his mangled back seat to help him, which had probably only helped him die faster but neither one of them were bright enough to figure that out. They were criminally stupid, yeah, but they were a million miles from being in the same badness league as the mediocre piece-of-shit rapper they'd killed. "Vehicular manslaughter," the first officer said in a low voice. "We take them in and question them, let them go home after, the boy stands up in court and says he was speeding and couldn't stop in time and he's sorry. And if we get the limo driver to piss in a cup tonight in exchange for forgetting to make him empty his pockets..."

"Time served, although they'll probably pull the boy's license," his partner agreed. "These two really aren't bright enough to get things straight on their own, though. Maybe with a little coaching?"

"Yeah, we can do that – and that one lawyer who's always waltzing scum out of our jail, he'll love to get his hands on this. I'll go talk to the limo driver, he's probably had enough time to fence some of The B's bling by now – or to find himself a new dealer, or maybe an agent. You go hustle the other two into our car, we'll take them in and get them lawyered-up and then take them home. The morgue will take care of The B."

"Works for me."

Standing by the wrecked limo, the young man who had caused the accident pretended to watch the EMTs lift the sheet-covered body of The B off the pavement, although he was actually watching the police move around the area out of the corner of his eye. His arm was around his girlfriend, who was doing morose and sniffing really well. He was proud of her for playing it so perfectly, she wasn't overdoing it at all. They'd go home tonight, once the cops were done helping them tell their story straight, and then they could relax. Within a few months, six at the outside, they'd be home free and probably wouldn't even be meme-worthy anymore. The payoff would come later, much later, through hands that wouldn't be connected with Tri-Citi Records or any of its affiliates. For the time being, though, there was just the satisfaction of a job well done. The label was free of the PR disaster their rapidly sinking but contract-protected star had become, and The B would never 'sting' another bloodied, unwilling woman ever again.

He hid a smile in his girlfriend's hair, knowing it would look to the cops like he was upset. Crime actually paid really, really well...and not just in money.