

Prime Justice

The Salem menthol hung precariously from her chapped lips like the last leaf of December as Madison barely made it through the yellow light. Fortunately, the truck ahead turned into a residential area where she would only have to deal with occasional stop signs.

She has this down to a science. Follow the truck, note the address where each package got delivered, kill a couple hours with Keystone Light, then go back and grab stuff that's still there. Madison grinned at her cunning, *who's the dumbshit now ma?* She reached out to keep the assortment of wigs, hats and jackets from sliding off the seat as she braked at an intersection. *Never hit two places close to each other at the same time, just come around for another pass later. Gonna be a good day.*

"Still goin' through the damn haul Billy," Madison grunted into the phone while she ripped tape from a sizable box. "Crank tonight? I got plenty to trade." She frowned and pulled a smaller box out of the larger box. "Yeah, sure I got enough, this is high dollar crap man." Madison opened the smaller box and removed a flier. "What the...?" She paused to read, prompting a tinny shout from the phone. "Okay, okay dammit...I'll BE there!"

Back to the flier she read:

"THANK YOU FOR BEING SUCH A GREAT CUSTOMER! The key in this box is your access to an exclusive Prime Party at our warehouse in Brookline on July 14. Keyholders will have two minutes to fill a provided shopping cart with unclaimed merchandise of their choice and KEEP it! Live entertainment and free refreshments. Show your non-transferable key at the door. Be there no later than 5pm!"

Madison clawed through the packing material and retrieved a gold key with an imprinted number. She gazed intently at the sparkling prize and muttered, "You ain't gettin' this Billy boy."

Madison's jittery. She inhaled deeply, then exhaled slowly sending twin wraiths of smoke adrift into the steamy air. She thought she was early, but by 4:30 there were still fifteen people ahead in line. Some she'd actually partied with before. Finally, the guy in front of her moved past two doormen and entered the warehouse. She brandished the key while she scrutinized the men's name tags. *Sam and Drew. Hmmm, long blond hair, blue eyes, Drew's a real stud.*

Sam snapped the fantasy with a drawl, "Sorry ma'am, no smoking."

Madison took an exaggerated drag then flipped the cigarette away. "Can I go in NOW...Sam?"

"The key?" She handed it over and Sam examined it carefully before giving it back. "There's a photographer inside who'll take a pic of you and your key."

"Whut for?"

"For your scrapbook darlin'," Drew chimed in. "You get a free eight by ten as part of the package. It'll be charming I'm sure."

Madison blessed him with a gap-toothed grin, *jeez, I think he's hot for me*, then strutted into the

warehouse where she was immediately greeted by loud music, flashing lights and dancing people. "This is too cool," she whispered over the din. "Maybe I can get Drew to two-step later."

"What a weird detail," Drew remarked after the last person disappeared into the warehouse. "You know I'm filling in for Jessie, never really got fully briefed. Why are we doin' the plainclothes bit?"

"Department's working with Amazon on this gig. They boxed up those keys and delivered them to customers in neighborhoods that have been hit hard by porch pirates. Customers got a gift for participating, but they were already pretty motivated 'cause they're sick of gettin' stuff ripped off. Every porch with a key package was wired with cameras shooting at almost every angle. Even with a disguise we should be able to match up faces and key numbers where packages were picked up."

"So the mountain is coming to Muhammad," Drew chuckled. "That's brilliant."

"Buncha mountains looks like to me."

"The prosecutor okay with this?"

"Her idea, maybe get 'em off the street for a while at least. My plan was a Bouncing Betty thing."

"Bouncing Betty?"

"You know, like those land mines. Touch the box, it jumps up and explodes a purple dye pack all over the perp."

"Bet the property owner would appreciate that," Drew laughs.

"Yeah, need to work out the collateral splats"

The muted thunder of music in the warehouse suddenly stopped.

Sam glanced at Drew then slid a badge onto his belt. "Looks like it's time we joined the party."