

He Who Dares...Wins

Julie Day

I never shoplifted before but I suppose there was a first time for everything. I wouldn't be here now if it wasn't for the dare. And I did really want to be part of Tony gang.

"Keep a look out, won't you?" I told Tony Carruso, looking around me as I walked towards the shop. I didn't want anyone that I knew to see me, especially knowing that this was where my mum shopped. Tony had said it made the dare even riskier.

The question was what should I get as I entered the shop. Something small? Something big? Tony had said that it'd got to be unusual.

I could hear my heart thumping like a drum as I stepped nearer and nearer to a shelf with make-up on.

Something small was the answer; easily pocketed and less noticeable.

I tried not to look too obvious, so I walked up the aisle, occasionally glancing at the items on display. I came to the combs and brushes, and picking a comb up, looked at it as though I was inspecting it. Was this going to be the item? No, I decided. Too awkward, could easily stick out of a pocket. I put it back, then moved on up the aisle.

I just couldn't decide which one to take, not realising that there was so many makes.

It was then, I sensed that I was being watched, and turning round I saw the assistant behind the counter looking my way.

I smiled at her and turned back to the task in hand.

But as I turned back to the shelves, I happened to glance in the shop mirror and saw a movement out of the corner of my eye. For a moment, my heart beat even louder, thinking that there was another member of staff walking around the shop but then I glimpsed the toe of a black leather boot that sparkled, which appeared familiar.

Come on man, choose, I told myself, and out of desperation, wanting to get this dare over and done with, I picked out the first one that came to hand.

It was then that I heard a cough and spinning round, saw the assistant from before move out from behind her counter and towards me. Now what, I thought. Should I make a run for it?

But the decision was taken out of my hands when as the assistant started approaching me, a voice suddenly said, "It's OK, Jake's with me."

The voice coming out of the blue like that, and not seeing a face, came as such a surprise that I dropped what I was holding.

I breathed a sigh of relief when the assistant decided to take the voice's word for it and head back to her counter.

I remembered that I'd dropped what I'd taken, and bent down to pick it up, only then seeing it was a lipstick, and a bright red one at that.

As I straightened up, the owner of the voice appeared in front of me, for I was looking at a pair of black sparkling boots, then a long flowing black skirt, followed by a black leather jacket. And as I finally stood up, I came face to face with the bemused face of Melissa Gilbert.

As if my heart wasn't beating loud enough already, it beat twice as loud now at the sight of Melissa. Melissa is the School's basketball captain and all the boys in my year fancy her like mad, including me. So you can imagine how I was feeling trying to steal something and being practically caught by her. Mortification isn't the word. Well, I hope I looked suitably mortified as I eventually managed to face her.

I said the first thing that came into my head. "Where did you come from? You scared me, speaking out of nowhere like that."

"Sorry, didn't mean to scare you," Melissa said.

She then saw what I was holding and seeing the bright red lipstick with the label 'Scarlet Lips' she said, "I didn't think you were into bright make-up, Jake."

"I'm not," I retorted, "it's for my sister."

"I didn't know you had a sister."

"Er-well," I stammered. I didn't have a sister. I was also not a good liar and Melissa saw through this straight away and said, "You haven't got a sister, have you?"

I coughed.

"Jake, this isn't like you. What's going on?"

It was then I remembered the reason I was here in the first place, and knowing that Tony would be getting impatient for me to get away, I looked towards the exit.

Melissa followed my gaze and immediately guessed what I'd been doing or trying to do. "Oh, Jake. Don't tell me that you want to be part of Tony Carruso's gang, and this is your dare?"

“So what if I do, and what if it is,” I said.

“They’re not worth it. They’re bullies and cowards who pick on kids younger than them. You’re not like that.”

“How do you know what I’m like?”

“I just do.”

Feeling brave, I gripped the lipstick harder and went to walk past Melissa.

As I passed her, my heart skipped and I nearly bottled out of it, knowing she was looking on.

I was in two minds what to do; I so much wanted to make friends and be cool but on the other hand, there I was being a thief in front of the coolest girl at school, which was so uncool. Melissa or Tony – who was the best person to please?

A step away from her, Melissa called out to me, “Are they really worth it? Do you really want to get in to trouble just to be with the in-crowd?”

I halted. Deep inside I knew that what she’d just said was what had been going through my head all along but didn’t want to admit it, especially to Melissa. It would mean losing face and being uncool, which wasn’t what I was here for.

In that moment of silence, Melissa then said to me, “Come on, you know you’re better than them.”

Yes, I was, I knew that but I’d always found it hard to make friends and this was a way to do it, or so I thought. “It’s hard making friends when you’re as shy as I am,” I replied.

“I know it is, but this isn’t the best way and especially not with Tony Carruso. Do you really want to be friends with him?”

“What’s wrong with him?”

“Well, as I’ve said, he bullies little kids. And he thinks he’s cool and tough even though everyone knows he adores his kid brother.”

At that, I couldn’t help giggling and said, “I wouldn’t let him hear you say that, if I were you.”

“Why not?” she asked.

“You do know that he fancies you like mad?”

I saw Melissa shudder. “I gather that you don’t feel the same way about him then?”

“No, oh no,” she cringed.

I smiled and thought, thank goodness for that.

“If you really want that lipstick, I’ll buy it from you,” she said, and taking it out of my hand, she strolled up to the counter and paid for it.

She returned to me and gave it back saying, “There you are.”

“Thanks,” I mumbled, not sure now if I actually wanted it. I dropped it into my jacket pocket out of sight. But it felt as though it was burning a hole there, and it made itself known to me all the time it was there. I was so sure that everyone else around could tell it was there, and was looking at me, knowing how it came to be there in the first place.

“Now that’s sorted out, what next?” she asked.

“Well, I certainly don’t want to stay around here. The lady behind the counter has been giving me funny looks all the time we’ve been here.”

“Not surprising, the amount of time we’ve been standing here, and in a make-up section. What about Tony and his gang?”

“What about them?” I asked.

“Won’t they be waiting still outside for you, waiting to see what you’ve nicked for them?”

“Ye..es.”

“You’ve got to face them sooner or later, so how do you feel about walking out of here past them together?”

Feeling more brave than I actually felt, I said, “Oh them. Who cares about them?”

“You sure?”

I nodded.

As we made our way towards the exit, a thought suddenly came to me. “By the way, how did you know that I was in this shop,” I asked her.

It was his turn to go red. “Well...” she stammered.

“Yes,” I prompted.

I noticed her go even redder and knew the reason why then. “You’ve been spying on me, haven’t you?”

“Not spying as such.”

“Well, if it wasn’t spying. What was it then?”

“Watching,” she replied, “I saw you enter the shop and was curious to see what you were up to.”

I stopped by the exit. I glimpsed Tony and his gang waiting outside for me but wanted to know the answer before we came across them.

“Watching? You’ve been watching me? Why?”

Poor Mel, she went beetroot then.

I recognised embarrassment and guessed the reason why. I couldn’t believe what I thought I knew but wanted to hear it from her. I waited.

Mel turned to face me and saw the look on my face and asked, “You know why, don’t you?”

“Know what?” I grinned.

“Know that I like you too,” she mumbled.

“Sorry, what was that you said? I didn’t quite catch it.”

“You know that I really like you too,” she repeated.

“Thank you. Me, too.”

Wanting to get away from the subject, she then said, “Look, can we go now. I see Tony and his gang are outside. Let’s show them who’re the losers and who’re the winners.”

“Oh yes,” I agreed.

So taking my hand, we walked out the shop and right past the others. You should’ve seen their faces when they saw me come out with Mel. I thought I heard Tony’s jaw drop to the floor, he was that flabbergasted at seeing me walk out with Mel by my side. I had to stop myself from laughing out loud there and then.

As we went past, we passed a bin and on instinct I took the lipstick out my pocket and dropped it in there. As it hit the bottom, a sigh of relief went with it. So relieved I was that I had got rid of it.

Mel raised his eyebrows at me and said, “And after me paying for it for you.”

I said, “It’s where it belongs. Just like Tony and his gang.”

Mel laughed, then took me by surprise when she turned round and kissed me on my lips, and right in front of Tony and the others.

“What was that for?” I asked, still trying to calm my beating heart and burning face.

“For you, being brave to show them what you’re really made of.”

“Oh,” I replied.

Who says that crime doesn’t pay, eh? He who dares wins – the girl.