

The Swindler

by Erin Zulkoski

John Davies paces nervously around an empty parking lot. The halogen street lights cast a soft orange glow on the pavement and his shadow appears drawn out before him.

He reaches into his leather coat pocket and pulls out a pack of smokes and his Zippo. He flips the top of the lighter, the flame devouring the end of the cigarette in fire. He inhales deeply and harshly blows a stream of grey smoke between his pursed lips.

"Jesus Christ..." he mutters under his breath and takes another drag.

He was told to be at this specific location at 9:00 p.m. on the dot. The phone call from the unknown man was very adamant about this. Not a minute too soon or too late: 9:00 p.m. or the deal is off. John takes his cell phone out of his front pants pocket and looks at the time--9:14 p.m. He's been walking this parking lot for nearly fifteen minutes. Why did he have to be on time and this guy late? The nerve of some people...

John huffs furiously on his smoke, burning it halfway down with one drag. He started doubting his decision to be here. This was stupid, and not to mention probably very illegal, but the offer was too good to pass up, so that's why he stood impatiently waiting in an empty parking lot.

John then reached into his coat again and patted a thick manilla envelope that was pressed against his chest. Five thousand dollars was in there; a huge amount of money to John and he couldn't believe he was parting with it so easily, but it was going to be worth it.

At twenty after nine, John saw headlights at the entrance to the lot and he tensed up. A black sedan slowly turned in and approached John and stopped a few feet in front of him. The drivers side window went down and inside sat a tiny man with fiery orange hair and a cigar jammed into the corner of his mouth which he was gnawing on like a stick of beef jerky. So this was Jimmy "The Fart" Consella,

huh? John expected a much more menacing-looking man, not this Keebler Elf.

"You Davies?" Jimmy growled in a deep voice. He didn't look at John, but stared straight ahead, his face illuminated by the pale blue glow of his dashboard lights.

"Yeah," John had to stifle a laugh and covered it by coughing.

"You got the money, Davies?"

John patted the front of his coat in response.

Jimmy leaned over to the passenger side and grabbed a brown paper bag and shoved it out the window at John. He reached into his jacket and grabbed the envelope, hesitating a second and then placed it in Jimmy's outstretched hand.

"It's all there," John said. Jimmy snorted and put the envelope under the visor, not bothering to count it.

"Pleasure doing business with you, Davies," Jimmy said as he started to roll up the window.

"Hey, Jimmy? Why do they call you 'The Fart'?" asked John. The window stopped and Jimmy turned to look at John, only his eyes and top of his head visible through the crack.

"Because I shouldn't be trusted, Davies," he croaked. He rolled up the window and sped out of the parking lot, the tires of the sedan squealing in protest as Jimmy rounded the corner.

John stood frozen in the same spot, all of a sudden very afraid to look in the bag. He reluctantly opened it and peered inside. His heart stopped in his chest and he could feel all the blood draining from his face and his knees started shaking. He dropped the bag on the ground and as it landed on its side, the contents spilled out.

John just paid five large ones for a half-eaten turkey sandwich and an apple core.

Jimmy was right: never trust a fart.

