

Foolish Antics - A short story

By Sara Jane Potter

Jimmy Trench prided himself on his ability to notice *everything*.

No one could have slipped past, under or around his hugely sensitive and far-reaching beams of vision and got away with it. Nothing human anyway. Jimmy's eyes were like helicopter searchlights - gliding around the desks, glancing off the exits and circling the many gangways as people idled into the room.

He wasn't slow in teasing out the black sheep from his particular flock. No one on *this* team enjoyed an easy ride. He would have none of it. Discipline was all. He was a bizarre, modern version of a pompous Sergeant Major at the ripe old age of thirty-two. He'd slipped out of (or into) the wrong generation, wrong setting, totally wrong job. Whichever way he'd slipped, he just hadn't landed right.

Today, the hot hard end of Jimmy's laser-beam lights jabbed into the back of Saul Smyth's neck.

'*Shit,*' muttered Saul, without even turning around. He just knew he'd been had. The tangible glare of Jimmy's gaze probed the nape of Saul's neck and the sickly scent of chargrilled flesh wafted around the section. Saul dropped into his chair as if he'd been shot, instantly pounding his grubby keyboard with cold finger-ends.

'No point in pretending to work, mate, the old tosser clocked you coming in. I saw his face fidgeting and twitching as he reached for his logbook.' Saul's colleague Ben was watching Jimmy like a charmer does his deadly asp.

'*I know. I'm not pretending, I'm logging in.*'

'That's another nice red tick against your name, matey. Any more and you'll be out. O-U-T, boy!' Ben Ryder growled, in a gargling imitation of Jimmy. He consolidated the mockery with a violent, Jimmy-Trench-style facial spasm.

'*Fuck off and get me a coffee. Here's 20p,*' was Ben's reward.

Jimmy Trench rolled his HB pencil between sausage-fat digits. Menace-coloured eyes gazed calmly out of his still-life skull, out across the roofs of electrical equipment and computer monitors. They bounced over the office furniture like a perfectly handled aircraft. Jimmy flicked on his landing lights when he levelled with the spiky fronds on Saul Smyth's head.

Pesky little weasel, Jimmy thought, unable to contain his private disliking and mounting hostility. *Sneaking in again...*

In Jimmy's world it was another morning, another crime, and Saul Smyth was the *late* king of the roguish underworld. Jimmy had spotted him furtively disrobing behind the biggest cheese-plant in the office, surreptitiously shaking off his wet bomber jacket whilst slipping on that blasé mask of innocence. When Saul was late, Jimmy had only to glance around the rubber plants at around nine-fifteen and watch for skulking shadows. Invisible he wasn't but - *by God* - replaceable he was.

You've been fucking rumbled, boy! Jimmy yearned to shout. Instead, he scrawled a few words in the applicable sub-section of his slab-thick notebook.

“Smyth. Late again. Poor use of camouflage. I saw this one coming.”

Though generally hidden, his notebook had still been emblazoned with the bold words: *Stupid old twat. Get a life.* But Jimmy wouldn't get a life; he would get the bastard who'd written it.

His red lips were pursed as he scanned the hefty section on Saul. The time was drawing closer. Jimmy could feel the tension swarming in his neck muscles like an unruly audience surging towards a stage.

What began as an imperceptible nodding of his head was suddenly augmented into a wholehearted body-spasm that brutally pulled his arms and shoulders into the tic. The more limbs the merrier, it seemed. As Jimmy's upper body violently convulsed, his elbow collided with the hard edge of the desk, sending peculiar shockwaves up through his funny bone.

For Jimmy Trench this was far from funny, and a strangulated moan slipped up his windpipe. He didn't realise he was laughing aloud until he realised he couldn't stop. With a face like thunder, he giggled uncontrollably before slamming a hand over his mouth and yanking his notebook closer to him.

“Smyth. The bastard’s going to get it.”

Too long in the TA, that was Jimmy's problem. And although his endearing detection abilities might have been invaluable to a bewildered group of fake militants, Jimmy's actual role in life was a million miles away from being even nearly that grand. His military-style antics were therefore redundant, and thereby inappropriately exercised.

For this was only an office. He was only a lowly team leader on the first rung of his (let's-be-right-about-it) pretty stunted ladder. And this was only the finance department of Vartronomix electronics, not the SAS.

'What's that twat laughing at? He never laughs. Gimme that stack of invoices, will you?' groaned Saul, dipping his head a little lower for fear of getting it blown off.

'Jesus, Saul. Coffee, envelopes, now *invoices*? Who am I, your fucking secretary?'

'Look, I don't wanna attract any more attention from Epileptic-mad-hyena-Trench-foot-man. I'm gonna get clubbed as it is. Just gimme some work. Pretty please with frilly bits?'

'That's better. You only had to ask nicely.'

Ben's slice of mock piety inspired a breaking wave of masculine giggles over lad's corner - carefully volume-tempered to be just outside of Trench's hearing range.

Jimmy was clearly obsessive in his hunt for wrongdoing. His compulsion to exhaustively monitor his 'Squad of Imbeciles' weighed heavily on him. But he just couldn't stop. He was raving mad of course, making his lack of popularity the least of his worries. But his main gripe was that his sole

weaponry amounted to a notepad, a pencil and a red pen, and in the absence of a pump-action shotgun he regularly wielded his stationery.

'He wasn't foxy enough to catch me though, was he?' Saul proudly boasted to Ben, having got away with his dangerous graffiti the day before.

'Careful. He's watching the top of your head. He may be rumble-reading.'

'You *what?*'

'Reading the vibrations in your hair as you speak. Of course.'

'Ah, that old trick.'

Jimmy perused his group of masquerading workaholics. He saw it all. Creeping anarchy. And he knew who the ringleader was. And there he was now, turning around to face him. Jimmy could see him groaning and moaning, *scheming* with other inmates already. Jimmy knew full well that malpractice swept through office environments like imaginary cases of flu. He stood up erectly, massaging his wounded elbow. And with a cranky flick of his twitching head he gestured for Saul to *join him for a chat*.

Saul limped over like an injured rabbit to a fox's den, as Ben slipped into his all-but-dead colleague's still-warm seat. He'd been waiting for an opportunity to get the little shit back since Saul had moved in on his favourite post-room-girl. And this was it.

He clicked onto Saul's email and located Jimmy Trench's name. Then, with a nefarious grin of self-indulgence, he began to make his mischief.

Rocking back and forth on his pal's chair, Ben perused his handiwork:

From: Saul.Smyth/PAF_VartronomixElectronics/Inc

To: Jim.Trench/PAF_VartronomixElectronics/Inc

Subject: Our little secret.

Darling Jim,

I think you've been hiding behind an aggressive façade. Do you want to come out? Can I coax you? I too would enjoy a good airing. Perhaps we can do it together.

To be frank, I really would enjoy a good, hard bang in the ****. And I think you are the man to do it.

How about it?

S. xx

Re-reading the impish email, Ben's golden face crumpled into muted fits of laughter. Imagining the reality. Horrendous as it would be. But he just wanted Saul to see it on his screen, dangerously hanging in electronic space. Words that could kill him. Ben read it over and over, chuckling like a sinister demon child, and awaiting the coughing-up of Saul. Impatiently, he then decided to print off the email to showcase his brilliant talents around the office. But in one habitual reflex motion, he clicked on the send button instead. Even whilst actively thinking about not sending it, his right index finger made the ritual movement. A moment of blank distraction was all it took.

And it was gone. Sent. Wending its merry way to Jimmy (I'm-going-to-fucking-fill-you-in-now) Trench. Ben's vibrancy was sucked inwards like his neck was a Hoover, the blood sinking from his face and sluicing away like rusty water down a drain. He was left with a face like a bleached shell, with every last trace of laughter washed out of the dark, round hollow of his mouth.

He moved out of Saul's seat. Sliding quietly to the floor like a jelly from a mould. He couldn't catch his thoughts that were flung and spun by the centrifugal force of his spinning brain. He was dumbstruck and paralysed. And all he could do was to sit.

And wait.

And wait.

Wedged between the temporary shelter of Saul's desk and a large sprawling cheese-plant, Ben didn't know what else to do but wait.