



Humor

Little Trouble in Tall Tree: A Baby Noir Mystery

Michael Fertik

Jamie Stroud, illustrator

Tall Tree Enterprises, llc

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New parents, especially new fathers, should be as smitten with their toddlers as author Michael Fertik freely admits to being when he explains that this tale was inspired by the antics of his own little boy. The adventure of Squeezy the Cheeks and his band of baby mobsters is silly but charming, and should make a fine bedtime story for young parents to read to little children.

Older children are more likely to cringe or groan as “Soggy the Load” and others battle “Harry the Rash” and his “Poopypants Gang” over the contents of the mini-fridge, wherein is stored “fresh white,” the prize produced by the new mothers attending the Zero-Day Breastfeeding Master Class. The illustrations by Jamie Stroud are cute and clever, and parents who read this story to their small ones can point to the full-color cartoon-like drawings as they do so, which should incite some giggles from children too young to read.

There are a few inside jokes meant just for the parents, some taking jabs at the popular children’s series in which sheep ride in jeeps and caterpillars are always hungry, as well as a number of puns beyond the naming of characters. Most of those, as well as references to D-Day, Caesar crossing the Rubicon, and the smashing of the Ostrogoths (who historically did most of the smashing), will sail over the heads of young children but should offer some welcome amusement to the adults.

The events in this baby gangster novel take place in areas very familiar to young parents and their wee ones, such as a children's zoo, the Story Time center, and a local park with a sandbox. Instead of getaway cars, these mobsters have strollers, and the traditional gun moll is reportedly "a knockout" even if she is only twenty-six inches tall and wears "a monkey patterned onesie that showed off exactly the right amount of décolletage." The narrator of the story, Mr. Cheeks, or Squeezy to his friends, finds her especially fetching, noting admiringly that "she had a beautiful tooth."

The author knows his audience, notably parents and the young children such as those who populate his own household, and has drawn from the popular entertainments they endure daily. The babies speak like adults, as they do in the *Look Who's Talking* movies or the *Rugrats* cartoons, and while they can barely toddle about unaided, they do manage to plan and carry out their bank robber-like milk heist in a manner that should entice laughter from the daycare crowd.

Fortunately for Mr. Fertik, his intended audience is one whose membership is being constantly refreshed, as there will always be a new crowd of young parents and very young children who will find amusement in his silly, humorous tales.

Mark McLaughlin