

THRILLING WONDER STORIES

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A THRILLING
PUBLICATION

DEVILS FROM DARKONIA

A Fantastic Novel
By JERRY SHELTON

VENUS SKY-TRAP

An Interplanetary Novelet
By ROSS ROCKLYNNE



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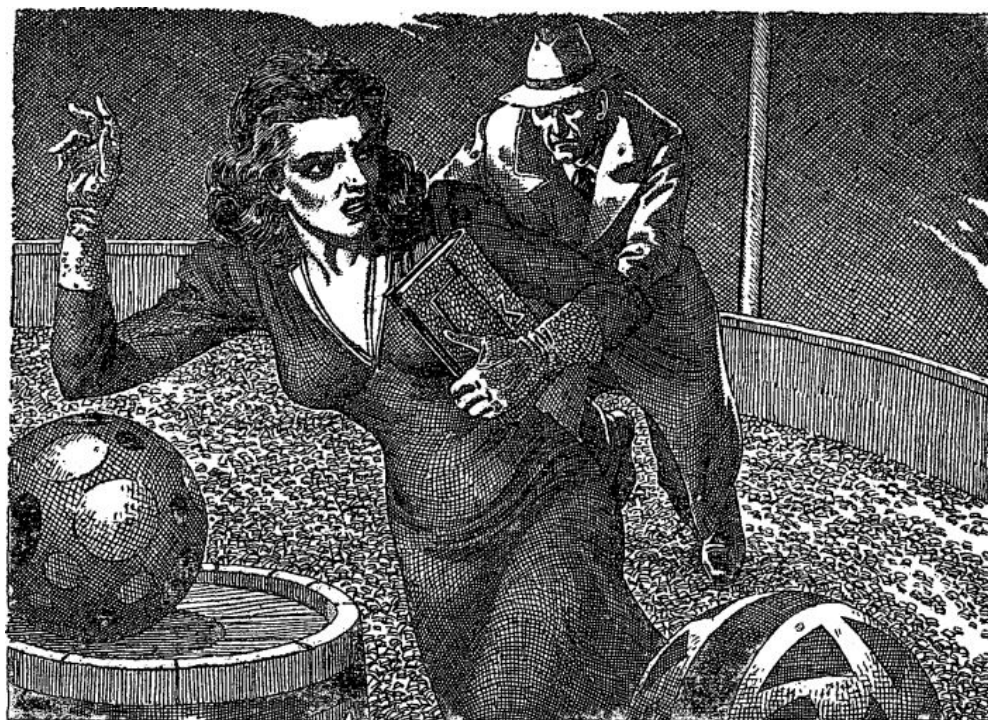
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As I wondered what to do with the helmet, Billie rushed into the arena



Baby Face

Henry Kuttner

Illustrations by Virgil Finlay.

First published *Thrilling Wonder Stories*, March 1945.

*When a Tough Sergeant Reverts to Infancy He Just Won't be Weaned
from Fighting Mankind's Foes!*

CHAPTER I

Jolt For Jerry

Any wise mutt calling me Baby Face is going to get a sock in the puss that'll land him in 4F.

The name's Jerry Cassidy, sergeant, U. S. Marines. I tip the scale at two hundred even, and I look a lot more like Wallace Beery than Baby Sandy. I do now, anyway. There was a time, though, when this didn't hold true.

But if any lug feels like bringing that up, he'd better have knuckle-dusters handy. If Doc McKenney wasn't such a nice old man, I'd break his neck for landing me in that jam. Transference of egos, bah!

The way it happened sounds mighty strange.

I am a big, good-natured looking feller, so I suppose the Captain's wife figured it'd be safe to leave "Stinky" Dawson with me. I ran into Mrs. Dawson on Park, as I was coming out of Grand Central. She's a cute little trick, blonde and sort of muzzy around the eyes—the look that starts your floating. Anyhow she was wheeling this baby carriage along when she saw me and said hello.

"Hi, Mrs. Dawson. Hope you're well."

"Well enough to go dancing with the Captain tonight," she told me, laughing under her breath. "It's wonderful to have him home again. You're on leave too, aren't you, Jerry?"

"I can prove it," I said. "I got my pass. And I'm sort of going dancing tonight too, down at the Rainbow. My—uh—girl friend says I'll learn how if I keep at it long enough."

Mrs. Dawson looked at my feet in a kind of dubious fashion.

"Uh-huh," she said. "How do you like New York?"

"I dunno. It isn't much like New Guinea. Billie's working till five, so I'm sort of killing time till then."

"There's not much to do on Park Avenue."

"Right," I said. "Only I know a sawbones who lives around here. Doc McKenney. He used to live in Keokuk where I come from, and I thought maybe I'd look him up."

Mrs. Dawson was biting her lip. "Jerry," she said, "I wonder if you'd do me an awfully big favor."

I said sure I would, and what was it.

"Mind Stinky for half an hour. Would you do that? I hate to ask you, but it's the maid's day out and I had nobody to leave him with, and I simply

must get another dress for tonight. I—I haven't seen the Captain for so long, and—well, you know.”

“You bet I'll mind the little—uh—the little fella,” I told her. “You run along and take your time, Mrs. Dawson.”

“Thanks so much! I won't be long. And—look! I know! I'll bring you something to take to Billie. There's some lovely lingerie I saw last week at the store.”

I got kind of red around the collar. “L-lingerie?”

“Don't be silly, Jerry! She'll love it. Now you wait here, and if you get tired, go in that drug-store and have a coke or something. Okay?”

“Yes'm,” I said, and she went off. My hands felt too big. I looked at them, and they were blushing too. Lingerie! I didn't think Billie would like it. Still, I could have been wrong. Women go for funny things.

I took a gander at the little squirt in the carriage. He was a fat, stupid-looking infant, slightly cock-eyed, and with great big cheeks that blobbed down on his shoulders. He had hands like starfish—stubby fingers sticking out in all directions—and he was trying to put his shoe in his mouth, doing a pretty good job of it. If he took after his old man, I figured he'd have a devil of a temper. So I didn't argue with him about the foot. I smoked a cigarette and looked at things.

Pretty soon Stinky started to bellow. He was lying flat on his back, waving his arms and legs around, with his eyes all squinched up. His face had turned red. His voice reminded me of the Captain's at certain times, like once when I'd got a little tight in Sydney and had a mild argument with some sailors.

Figuring he wanted his foot back, I shoved it into position, but he'd had enough of that. He turned purple and kept hollering. People were beginning to look at me. I got scared and had a mind to beat it. But I couldn't leave the kid alone.

I went into the drug-store and asked the prescription clerk what to do. He didn't know. All babies yelled, according to him, and it was good for them.

Not this baby! All of a sudden I noticed that one of his shoes was missing.

“Oh, gosh,” I said, feeling sick. “The blamed little ostrich must have ate it!”

I picked him up by the feet and shook him tentative, without much result, except he roared louder than ever. A crowd was gathering, but not a WAAC, WAVE, or SPAR among them. I dithered. I kept wondering what would happen when Mrs. Dawson came back and found Stinky had

strangled to death on his shoe. Court martial, anyhow. I could stand that, but—I was worried about the poor little tyke.

Then I remembered Doc McKenney. His office was only a block away, so I sent the carriage scooting like a fast jeep up Park, leaving a trail of sweat from my forehead. All the while Stinky yelled, squalled, bawled, and tooted. He was sounding off, all right.

A sailor grinned at me.

“A walkie-talkie, huh?” he said, but I had no time to sock him. I yanked Stinky out of his carriage, ran up a flight of steps, and bounced through a door labeled Doc McKenney. A nurse looked up at me, startled.

“Quick!” I said. “Get the Doc. The small fry just ate his shoe!”

“But—but—”

A door across the room opened, and I saw the Doc’s familiar, wrinkled old face, with his gray hair sticking up like a cock’s comb. He was ushering somebody out, but fast.

“No!” Doc was yelling. “I’m not interested. I’m not satisfied with your credentials, and I’m getting in touch with the F.B.I. immediately. Get out!”

The man, a big husky with sleepy eyes and a bristling moustache, opened his mouth to say something, and then closed it like a trap snapping shut. He was mad, I could see that. But he didn’t do anything about it. He whirled and went out, with a furious glance in my direction.

“Doc!” I said.

“What? Who—well, for Pete’s sake! Jerry Cassidy. Who made you a sergeant?”

I passed the baby to him. “This is life and death. The kid ate a shoe or something. He’s strangling!”

“Eh? A shoe?”

I explained. Doc nodded at the nurse and took me into his office, a fairly big room with lots of equipment. He went to work on the baby, while I watched, scared stiff.

After a while Doc shrugged. “I can’t find anything wrong.”

“But he’s yelling. He ate a shoe, I tell you.”

The nurse came in, with the missing shoe. “I found this in the carriage downstairs,” she said. “Need help, Doctor?”

“No, thanks,” the Doc said. He put the shoe back on Stinky’s foot, but that didn’t solve the problem. The nurse went out. The kid kept on crying.

“He doesn’t look like you,” the Doc murmured absently. “Well, he’ll cry himself out pretty soon. What have you been doing?”

“’Course, he doesn’t look like me. He’s my Captain’s wife—I mean his baby’s Captain—oh, gosh, Doc! Do something!”

“What?”

“What’s he crying for?”

“That,” Doc McKenney said thoughtfully, “is one of the greatest mysteries of the ages. No one knows why babies cry. At least, why they cry when they haven’t got colic, aren’t being stuck by pins, or don’t require changing.”

“Is it—those?” I gulped.

“Well, it might be colic,” he said. “Not the others. I checked up.”

“I wish the little sprat could talk,” I moaned. “This is awful.”

The Doc perked up. “Well, I’ll be—I forgot. Here, Jerry, I’ll have this fixed up in a second or two. The first practical use for my Thought-Matrix Transfer. Here.” He unlocked a safe, dragged out a couple of soft helmets that looked like leather, and gave me one. It had wires woven into it, though it was flexible, and there was a tiny switch over one ear.

“You mean gag the kid?” I said. “We can’t do that. Besides, a handkerchief would work better.”

“Shut up,” the Doc growled. “I’m a humanitarian, or I wouldn’t have invented the Transfer helmets. It simply changes your mind.”

“I can do that by myself,” I pointed out.

Doc jammed one of the helmets over my head and donned the other himself. “I’ll show you,” he said. “Push the switch over.” I did. My head began to feel hot. There was a low humming.

Doc moved his own switch. Everything blurred for a second. Then I felt slightly giddy. The room had sort of swung around.

“Doc” I said. “You’ve changed!” My voice sounded peculiar. Cracked and squeaky.

Doc McKenney had changed, all right. He was a big, husky guy, with a map like a punch-drunk gorilla. . . .

I recognized that map. I saw it every morning when I shaved. Doc looked like me!

He grinned, flipped the switch, and came toward me to turn off the one on my helmet. “Take it easy,” he rumbled. “We’ve simply changed bodies, so to speak—though not actually. It’s in the nature of a remote control. The essential psych is not affected by the change, but the thought-matrix is, the basic pattern that makes up the conscious you.”

“Doc!” I said. “Help!”

I had a headache, and was scared. The Doc chuckled. “All right, we’ll change back. Flip your switch over again. That’s it. Now—”

The room swirled. I was looking at Doc McKenney. I was back in my own body. Automatically I flipped the switch, as the Doc did, and then collapsed in a chair.

“Wow!” I said. “Magic!”

“Nothing of the sort. I’ve simply invented a perfect method of diagnosis. All the physician has to do is change his mind with that of the patient, and he instantly feels all the aches, pains, and symptoms of the patient. The layman can’t describe with complete accuracy how he feels when he’s sick. But the doctor—putting himself completely in the place of the patient—can.”

“I got a headache.”

The Doc looked interested. “Have you?”

I thought. “No. Funny. It’s gone now.”

“Ah! I’ve had a headache all day. Naturally you experienced it while in my body.”

“It’s crazy,” I said.

“Not a bit. The human brain emits patterns of energy. Those patterns have a basic matrix. Ever heard of remote control?”

“Sure. What of it?” I was interested.

Doc McKenney scratched his high forehead thoughtfully.

“Transplantation of the actual brain is a surgical impossibility. But the mind itself, the key matrix, can be transferred. It has certain definite vibratory periods, and my helmets, working on the inductive principle of the diatherm, effect the necessary change. You see?”

“Yeah,” I said. “I don’t want to hear any more about it. Stinky’s still crying, and if you can’t help me what’ll I do?”

“I am helping you,” Doc said. “This is it. I hadn’t thought of this application, but it’s beautifully logical. Babies can’t explain what’s wrong with them, because they can’t talk, but you can. I’ll show you.” He took the helmet off his own head and slipped it gently on Stinky’s, moving the switch as he did so. Before I knew what was happening, Doc had whirled on me and reached out and—and—

“Globwobble!” I said.

Something was wrong with my eyes. Things swam mistily. There was a big round blob above me—

And somebody was roaring like an organ gone crazy. With a frantic effort I uncrossed my eyes. It was Doc McKenney’s face hanging over me. I felt his fingers fumbling at my head. There was a click.

The bellowing in the background kept up. My throat and palate felt soft, blobby, and peculiar. My tongue kept crawling back into my gullet. I reached out, and a fat, starfish like pink object shot up. My hand!

My stars!

“Blogobble wog wog Doc whabble gob quop!” I said, in a remarkably infantile voice.

“Okay, Jerry,” the Doc said. “You’re in Stinky’s body, that’s all. He’s in yours. I’ll switch you back as soon as you tell me how you feel.”

This time I made more sense. I lisped a lot, though.

“Gemme ouda this! Quick!”

“Anything sticking you? After all, you want to know why the baby was crying.”

I hauled myself erect somehow. To a squatted position, that is. My legs were curled up and seemed helpless.

“I feel all right,” I managed to say. “Except I want back.”

“No pains?”

“No. No!”

“Then it was merely temper,” Doc said. “The emotions are transferred with the mind, but the sensory equipment stays with the body. The baby was just irritable. He’s still crying.”

I looked. My body, the body of Sergeant Jerry Cassidy, was lying on its back on the floor, arms and legs curled up, its eyes were tight shut, and its mouth, open as it bawled. Great tears splashed down its—my—cheeks.

My mouth felt like I was eating mush, but I managed to tell him I wanted my own body back. My feeling was strengthened by the fact that Stinky was sucking my thumb, lying there on his back and drowsily staring up at the ceiling. At any rate, he’d stopped bawling. As I looked, his eyes closed, and he started to snore.

“Well,” Doc said. “He’s gone to sleep. Maybe the mental transference has a soothing effect.”

“Not on me it hasn’t,” I snarled feebly, in a quavering soprano. “I don’t like this. Get me out!”

CHAPTER II

Baby Has a Thirst

Before the Doc could transfer me back into my own body, there was a scuffling in the outer office, and the nurse squeaked briefly. I heard a thump. The door slammed open, and three tough mugs came in, holding guns in their fists—a Webley and two small, flat automatics. The man with the Webley was the same lug Doc McKenney had been throwing out when I arrived. The lug’s moustache was still bristling over the rat-trap mouth, and his eyes looked sleepier than ever. The other two were just gorillas.

“Smith!” Doc said. “Why, you filthy Nazi!” He dived for a scalpel, but Smith was too fast. The Webley’s barrel thunked against Doc’s temple, and the old man went down, cussing a blue streak till Smith hit him again.

“Gut!” one of the other thugs said. I hopped up from the operating table where I’d been squatting and lunged toward Smith, throwing a fast haymaker at his jaw. Unfortunately my legs crumpled up, and I fell flat on my face, giving myself a nasty wallop on the nose.

“Who’s that?” somebody said. I rolled over. The gunman with the squint was pointing—with his gun—toward my own body, curled up on the carpet and snoring.

Smith held up a warning hand. “Patient, I guess. Under ether, by the way he snores.”

“He’s got that helmet on.”

“Ja, ja.” Smith jerked it off. “The herrenvolken need this. And—” He removed my helmet. “—this, too. Number Three will be pleased. This way, we have to pay nothing for the device.”

“Would we have paid anyway, Herr Schmidt?”

“Nein,” said Herr Schmidt. “Do not be more stupid than you can help. By posing as a government official—ha! We waste time. Raus! I will meet you tonight—you know where.”

“Ja, the circus,” said the man with the squint.

“Sh-h!”

“Who is there to hear? The baby? Unsinn.”

“No precaution is nonsense,” Smith said. He was stuffing the two helmets in a small black satchel Doc had there on a glass case of instruments. “Hurry!”

They went out. I sat blankly on the operating table, sort of stunned. “Doc,” I yelled.

No answer.

The floor looked a dickens of a ways down. But I knew I had to get off the table, somehow. I crawled around, cursing squeakily, till I discovered that I had a plenty strong grip for my size. My legs were pretty feeble, but my arms were okay.

I let myself down over the edge, hung on, dangling, and then dropped. It didn't hurt. I was so fat I bounced. When I picked myself up, the room seemed to have got bigger. Table, chairs—everything loomed way above me. Doc was lying motionless in a corner. I crawled over to him.

He was breathing. That was something, anyway. But I couldn't revive him. Concussion, I guessed. Hm-m.

My own body was still asleep. I shook its head till it woke up.

"Listen, kid," I said thickly. "Try to understand. We gotta get help. Can you hear me?"

I'd forgotten how young the baby was. He grabbed me by the seat of the diapers and started to drag me around like a puppy, going goo-goo in a sickening bass voice. I called him dirty names, and he finally let go and tried to eat his foot again. My foot!

I thought of the nurse, but when I crawled into the outer office, she was flattened over her desk, colder than a codfish. The sight of the phone gave me an idea. I couldn't reach it till I yanked on the cord. Then it thumped down, missing me by an inch.

I had trouble dialing; my fingers kept folding up. Finally I got a good grip on a pencil that had fallen off with the phone, and that helped. The operator asked me what I wanted.

"Goblobble—uh—police! Police headquarters." It was an awful strain to force the soft tissues of my throat and tongue into talking-position. I kept relapsing into mushy gargles.

"Desk sergeant. Yes?"

I told him what I wanted—not much, just that there'd been a hi-jacking at the Doc's. He interrupted.

"Who is this talking?"

"Sergeant Cassidy, U. S. Marines."

"The devil you say!" He gave an offensive imitation of my voice, which was naturally squeaky. "Thargeant Catthidy, U. Eeth. Marinth. What is this, a gag?"

"No!" I squealed. "Blast it! Send up a squad."

"A thquad?"

I started to tell him about the Nazi lugs who'd stolen Doc's invention, but I had sense enough to shut up before I put my foot in it completely. I

could feel the officer freezing. But he finally said he'd send a man around, and I had to be satisfied with that.

So I hung up and looked at my toes. I was thinking hard. I doubted if even Doc could convince anybody he'd invented a Transfer helmet. They'd classify him as a screwpot and toss him in the observation ward. And he was a scientist. I wasn't even a Marine, technically speaking. They don't have baby Marines.

Those helmets were valuable. I didn't know what Smith wanted with them, but I gathered that Germany might find 'em handy, somehow.

Then I had it. Spies! Holy jumping catfish!

A German mind inside the skull of an Allied brass hat—what a sweet method for espionage. Even fingerprinting wouldn't show the truth. The Nazis could filter in trained spies to key positions, and—and—win the war!

Whew!

But—hang it!—nobody would believe me. Doc might be able to convince 'em, with facts and figures, only I didn't know when he'd wake up. Meantime, Smith was going to turn the helmets over to Number Three, whoever that was. At the—yeah—at the circus.

I had my own troubles to worry about, too. Here I was, in Stinky's body. What would happen if I couldn't get the helmets back? I'd have to spend the rest of my life as a baby—until I grew up anyway. Somehow, I didn't like the idea of telling Captain Dawson what had happened.

Stinky, in my body, was gurgling and cooing in the other office, and I decided I'd better move, but fast. I tried my legs. They had a tendency to buckle, but I managed pretty well. I knew the trick of walking, I guess, and Stinky didn't. The muscles weren't too weak. They hadn't been trained, that was all.

But the outer door was shut, and I couldn't reach the knob.

It didn't take long to push a light chair where I needed it, and then I climbed up like a monkey till I could turn the knob. That was enough. Outside, the stairs gave me some trouble, though I got down by crawling backwards, feeling awfully unprotected from the rear. Finally I was in the vestibule, looking up at the big door there, and knowing I couldn't make it. There weren't any chairs down here.

I saw a shadow cross the pane and the door swung open. It was a cop. He headed up the stairs without seeing me—he was looking up, not down—and I scrambled to get outside before the door shut. I was lucky. It was one of those pneumatic things. But I almost lost my diaper as I squeezed through.

So there I was on Park, not liking it at all. The people were too big. A few of them glanced at me as they passed, and I figured I'd better start

moving. I fell down a couple of times, but that was nothing, except when a hatchet-faced dame with a voice like vinegar started to pick me up, saying something about a poor lost baby. What I told that lady made her drop me like a hot brick.

“Oh, my gracious!” she yelped. “Such language!”

She kept following me, though, and I knew I had to lose her somehow. It was the first time I’d ever been trailed by a cookie, even if she was overbaked. I saw a bar coming up, and realized I was thirsty. Anyway, I needed a drink. After what I’d been through, anybody would.

If I could sit down with a beer or something and think things over, it might help.

Turning into the place, I managed the swinging door okay and went in, leaving beagle-puss outside, clucking like she’d gone crazy. It was a darkish, quiet sort of bar, with not many customers, and I climbed up a bar-stool without attracting attention. My eyes just came over the level of the mahogany.

“Rye,” I said.

The bartender, a fat old guy in a white apron, looked around. He didn’t see me.

“Rye!” I said again. “Beer chaser.”

This time he saw me. His eyes bugged out. He came and leaned on the bar, staring at me. Finally he grinned.

“Well, look at the sprout,” he chuckled. “Did I hear you ask for rye?”

“Listen, you big lug,” I snarled. “You want me to pin yours ears back?”

“What with?” he asked. “Safety pins? Haw-haw!” He thought it was funny.

“Shut up and gimme a shot,” I growled squeakily, and he found a bottle and a glass. I licked my lips. Then, just before he poured, he drew back and looked at me solemnly.

“I gotta see your draft card, old man,” he said. “Haw-haw-haw!”

If I could have managed the words that came to my lips, he’d have known for certain I wasn’t an innocent babe. But my palate, as usual, turned into mush.

“Glab-bab-da-da,” I said, or words to the effect.

A dignified old buzzard with a gleaming watch-chain strung across his vest came over and picked me up.

“A fine thing,” he boomed. “Mothers bringing their children into bars—and children this young!” He looked around searchingly, but nobody claimed me. A honey in a blue dress, sipping a cuba libre in a booth, said I

wasn't hers, the darling, and could she hold me? All of a sudden an idea hit me. Billie! If I could get in touch with her.

Uh-uh. But I didn't like to have her see me like this?

I felt sick. Still it looked like the only way. The trouble was, I had no way of reaching her.

The old buzzard was getting ready to hand me over to the honey. It went against the grain, but I squalled and clung to the watch-chain, keeping it up till I put the idea across. "I guess he likes you," the honey said. "Well, you keep him. His mother ought to show up pretty soon."

"Yes. Yes. Another scotch, Tony. There." He sat down in a booth, keeping me in his lap. I toyed thoughtfully with the watch-chain. He tickled me under the chin, and I managed to keep from calling him a dirty name.

"Poor baby, then. Is it a poor baby?"

Well, I was. Broke as the devil. Stoney. I needed dough!

After I'd finished with the watch-chain, I delved into the buzzard's vest pockets. As I'd hoped, there was a coin or two loose there. I dug out some change, but the lug tried to take it away from me. We had a sort of tussle, and the dough spilled out of my hand, tinkling over the floor.

"Ah, ah, naughty!" said Moneybags, and set me down carefully on the seat. He and the bartender started to pick up the coins.

I swung myself down, snaffled a nickel, and waddled unsteadily toward the back, where I'd seen a phone booth. Moneybags started after me, but I saw him coming. I headed for the honey in the blue dress, holding out my arms.

She picked me up. It wasn't hard to take. I kept pointing back toward the booth.

"What is it, baby? What a nice little fellow! Kiss, then?"

I complied, and she jumped and looked sort of startled. Oh, well. I kept pointing, and after a while she got the idea. Moneybags came along and stood grinning, obviously on the make, but she wasn't having any of the old goat.

"He seems to like you, Miss."

"Yes," she said vaguely. "He wants something."

"Phone," I said, not daring to make it clearer.

"Oh, he can talk! He knows a few words, doesn't he?" she smiled at me. "You darling! But you can't use the phone. You're not old enough."

"Mm-m," I said. "Kiss."

At this the honey blinked. She got up rather fast and took me to the phone booth, holding me up to the mouthpiece. I tried to wriggle free, and

managed to get my feet on the seat. Then I waved my arms at her and yelled, “Go ’way.”

She stepped back, startled, letting me go, and I tried to close the folding door. Moneybags was hovering in the background, only too anxious to help, and he shut it for me.

“Oh, but—he’ll hurt himself, in there.”

She was too late. I’d got the receiver down, slipped a nickel in the slot, and was frantically dialing, having a dickens of a time with my folding fingers. I could see Moneybags and the honey staring at me, so I kept my voice as low as possible when I finally got through to Billie.

“Look, Billie, this is Jerry—”

“Jerry who?”

“Cassidy!” I said. “You know me—we got a date tonight.”

“I have with Jerry Cassidy. But I know Jerry’s voice. Sorry, but I’m busy right now.”

“Wait! I—uh—got some throat trouble. This is me, honest. I’m in a jam.”

“As usual. I—you’re not hurt, are you?”

“Not exactly, but I need help, plenty bad. It’s life and death, hon!”

“Oh, Jerry! Of course I’ll help. Where are you?”

I gave her the address of the bar. “Get down here as fast as you can. You’ll find me—I mean you’ll find a baby here. Pick him up and call a taxi. And don’t be surprised by anything you hear.”

“But where are you? What’s this about a baby?”

“Tell you later. Rush right down.”

Moneybags opened the door. I hung up and slammed a right hook on his jaw. The lug thought I was playing or something.

“Isn’t he clever? Pretending to use the phone like that. I think this calls for a drink, Miss.”

“Well, all right.” She picked me up, and I let her, not knowing what else to do. So I sat in her lap while Moneybags fed her drinks, and every time the old boy tried to make a date, I yelled. After a while he took a dislike to me. Do you wonder?

CHAPTER III

Infant Sleight-of-Hand

Yes, I think Moneybags was getting ready to strangle me when Billie arrived, at last. She's a trim, pert little trick with long, glossy dark curls and an oval face and everything that goes with it. The minute I saw her come in, I bounced like mad, waved my arms, and yelled.

Billie looked surprised, but she didn't ask any questions. Moneybags watched her come toward us.

"Is this your child, Madame?" he asked.

"Maa-maa!" I bawled, when Billie hesitated. I could see she was wondering what this was all about. My throat got dry. I couldn't swallow till Billie finally nodded and grabbed me. She stared around, searching, I knew, for me, but Sergeant Cassidy was wearing mufti just then—if you can call knitted wraps and stuff mufti.

I didn't dare say anything, but I hoped Billie would remember what I'd told her on the phone. She did. She took me out and called a taxi.

"Where to, Miss?"

"The Garden!" I piped.

He didn't notice who was talking. Billie did, though, and she stared at me with her eyes getting bigger and bigger.

"Relax, hon," I said. "Keep a grip on yourself. Something awful's happened."

"Uh-huh," she said, whispering. "It sure has. I'm crazy. Oo-oh!"

She got white and shut her eyes. I had a nasty moment when I thought she was fainting. How the devil could a baby administer first aid in a taxi?

"Billie!" I squeaked. "Blog-wob-blob. . . . Wake up! It's me! Jerry! Don't pass out on me."

"B-but—" She started to giggle hysterically, and I knew she was okay. "Oh, my goodness! You're a midget, of course, pretending to be Jerry."

I tilted back my head and stared up at her face, way up there. My eyes kept slipping out of focus, as usual. I felt mad, sick, hopeless. Shucks, you've been a baby yourself. You know how it feels. With me it was worse.

"Billie, I want you to listen and try to understand," I said. "I'll lay it flat on the line. It's daffy, but you gotta believe me."

Billie sighed. She was pale around the ears.

"Shoot," she said, "I'll try, anyhow."

So I told her what had happened. All the while I kept wondering how to get out of this mess. If Billie couldn't help—well, I didn't know anybody else who could, except the Doc, and he was a non-combatant just at present. I'd already tried the cops. I knew how the desk sergeant must have felt. If a stupid-looking baby had slung such a spiel at me a few days ago, I'd have laughed it off—if that. But in my spot, what else was there to do?

It was awful. Jerry Cassidy had always been able to take care of himself. A man who weighs two hundred stripped, and no fat, is apt to get pretty cocky. Besides, I knew a few little tricks—some Jap wrestling angles, and some Apache footwork. A lot of good that did me now. I couldn't even pull the trigger on a light automatic, probably.

What good is a baby, anyway?

That got me started thinking of Mrs. Dawson and the Captain. Stinky was a lot of good to them, anyhow. By this time Mrs. Dawson must have come back from her shopping and found me gone. Oh-oh!

Also I was dead tired, for some reason. My muscles felt like watery egg-yolk. I never felt so sleepy, that I could remember.

I managed to finish telling Billie what had happened, but then I must have fallen asleep in her lap. When I woke up, we were in a drug-store booth, and she was shaking me.

“Wake up, Jerry! Wake up!”

“Da da da,” I mumbled. “Waaa . . . oh. Wh-wha—”

“You dozed off,” Billie told me. “Babies need a lot of sleep.”

“Lay off that baby stuff! I—say, you called me Jerry! So you do believe me, huh?”

Billie frowned. “Yes. How do you feel now?”

“Okay. Well, thirsty. I want a drink.”

“What?”

“Beer,” I said.

“What you'll get is milk.”

I made strangling noises. “Milk! Billie, for Pete's sake! I may look like a sprat, but I'm still Jerry Cassidy.”

“Milk,” she said firmly. “I'll get you a nursing bottle.”

But I drew the line at that; Billie compromised by getting me a glass of milk, and I had some trouble managing it, slurping the blasted stuff all over my front. Finally we figured out the best way for me to drink—I used straws.

It wasn't beer, but it helped. I was plenty thirsty. I sucked away, and Billie told me what had happened.

“I phoned headquarters, Jerry. I told 'em I was looking for you.”

“Uh? Oh. Bwob—I mean, what happened?”

“Doctor McKenney’s still unconscious. So’s his nurse. They’re in emergency. It’s nothing serious, though. And—” She hesitated.

“Go on.”

Billie gulped. “They said they had a Sergeant Cassidy there, all right, but he was either drunk or nuts. All he would do was crawl around on the floor, play with his toes, and cry. They—they said it was an open and shut case. He—you—Jerry, must have gone out of his head and slugged the doctor and his nurse.”

“Out of his head is right,” I said weakly. “Right into this, dopey little noggin.” I slammed a fat fist against my skull.

“Gee,” Billie said. “I wonder if you looked like this when you were a baby. You must have been awfully cute.”

“Lay off that,” I howled. “We got work to do.”

“I don’t know what we can do, Jerry. When the doctor wakes up, maybe he’ll think of something.”

“What about those Nazis?” I asked. “Smith and Number Three and the others?”

“I don’t see what we can do.”

“Look,” I said. “They’re going to the circus, at the Garden. It’s a swell place to meet, in a crowd. Smith’s got the Transfer helmets in that satchel, and I bet he’ll try to slip it to Number Three.”

Billie nodded. I went on.

“You take me to the circus, see? We’ll wander around. I can spot Smith and the two lugs he had with him. When I do that, you call a cop. Make up some yarn—anything. Get the cop to arrest Smith, or—well, the trick is to get that satchel. After that, it’s in the bag.”

“Maybe I could grab it.”

“Uh-uh. Those Nazis have guns. I don’t want you to take chances. You do what I tell you, and play safe. Blast it!” I said. “I wish I could get my hands on an automatic, or a Mills.” I thought that over and chuckled. “They don’t hang babies in this state, do they?”

“Don’t talk like that, Jerry!”

“Well, where are we?”

“On Eighth.”

“Avenue? Near the Garden? Swell! Let’s go.”

“Without tickets?”

“Oh-oh. Got any dough?”

Billie nodded. “Yesterday was pay-day. Anyway, I won’t have to pay for you.”

“It’s a loan,” I said firmly. “I’m no gigolo.”

“Not at your age,” she agreed. “You’d look funny doing the samba with those muffin-like feet of yours.”

I swallowed that, though I didn’t like it. “Let’s go,” I said with dignity, and Billie picked me up, paid the check and carried me out. She didn’t know much about holding babies, I could tell. I sort of dangled. The sidewalk looked to be a mile down.

Billie had to get a ticket from a scalper, but, anyway, we got in. After that, it wasn’t easy to know what to do. The Garden’s a big place.

“Any idea where Smith was to meet Number Three?”

“Nope,” I said helplessly. “We better just wander around. I’m bound to spot the lug sometime—I hope.”

We wandered. Anywhere there were crowds. But I didn’t catch a glimpse of the Nazi with the mustache and the sleepy eyes, or his two sidekicks either. Naturally I didn’t even know what Number Three looked like.

We went in the freak show and looked at fire-eaters and sword-swallowers, midgets, skeletons, and fat ladies. We watched lions, elephants, a couple of hippos, and a giraffe or two. We saw a big crowd at one cage and we went over there. It was a gorilla, almost as big as Gargantua or Tony Galento, squatting behind bars and glass and jamming a food-basin on his head and yanking it off again. The keeper, standing by the door, kept up a long spiel that drew the crowd like flies, but I still couldn’t find Smith. Or the Doc’s satchel, with the Transfer helmets in it.

I was beginning to feel sleepy again. I also felt awful. If Smith got away with this gag, it would mean—whew! Spies scattered all through our lines—up at the top, too! They’d be completely undetectable spies!

I had my own troubles, also. Suppose Doc died? Suppose he got amnesia? Suppose he couldn’t make more of the helmets? I’d have to spend the rest of my life with Captain Dawson as my old man! Unless he murdered me, for—for—what was it? Kidnaping? What if he broke me and put me on permanent K.P.? I could see myself, a fat, blobby-looking squirt in diapers, peeling spuds day and night—or maybe in the guardhouse, loaded down with chains—uh!

One thing I knew—I couldn’t be Sergeant Jerry Cassidy like this. How could I handle a machine gun? As for a rifle, I wouldn’t even be able to lift it.

Maybe they’d send Stinky, in my body, back on active service. Yeah! With a Jap coming at him, bayonet ready, he’d fall over on his back and start playing with his toes. Oh-oh!

Billie shook me. I was getting sleepy again, and showed it. I managed to prop my eyes open, though it was still hard to focus them.

“It’s okay,” I whispered. And yawned.

“Jerry, you can’t take a nap now.”

“I—uh—won’t.” But I did. I couldn’t help it. Babies need lots of sleep, and I felt dead beat.

However, Billie pinched me. I woke up with a squeal, and noticed a battleship of a dame bearing down on us, a steely glint in her eye. Billie didn’t see her coming till it was too late.

“What are you doing with that child?” the battleship demanded.

“Nothing,” Billie said, looking confused. “I just pinched him. He keeps wanting to go to sleep.”

“Pinched him! Good heavens! What sort of mother are you?”

“I’m not,” Billie snapped, trying to keep me from falling out of her arms. She had me by one foot and one hand and was sort of wrapping me up in myself, like I was an octopus. “I’m not even married.”

The old girl froze. “What are you doing with that baby, then?” she asked, as if it was any of her business.

Billie was getting confused. “I’m going to marry him,” she said wildly. “I’m just waiting for him to grow up. Oh, go away. We’re busy.”

“Hmph! This seems very suspicious to me. Have you been drinking, young lady?”

“No. I’ve been trying to keep this—this—” She waved me in the battleship’s face “—trying to keep it from drinking, if you must know. It—he—keeps yelling for beer.”

“What? You mean you give that infant beer?”

“I don’t have to, usually,” Billie gasped, as I nearly flipped out of her grip. “He orders it himself, when he isn’t gargling rye. This lug has drunk his way around the world.”

“My gracious! That poor little innocent child! I’m going to take steps to have you punished.”

Just then the poor little innocent child made a few well-chosen remarks.

“You blathering old buzzard,” I howled. “Beat it and stop upsetting Billie. You’ll have her dropping me in a minute. If you want to help, drag yourself off and come back with a bottle of beer. I’m thirsty, drat it!”

“Ook!” said the battleship, turning green under her camouflage paint. She made a few vague gestures, clawed at the air, turned, and toddled off as fast as she could.

“See what you’ve done?” Billie said. “The poor woman thinks she’s crazy.”

“Serve her right,” I growled squeakily. “Hurry up and let’s find Smith before I go to sleep again. Try that show over there, where the acrobats are.”

There were seats here, and Billie stood at the entrance, while I looked around. Suddenly I let out a muffled yipe.

“There he is! See, up by that column? The guy with the mustache?”

“Where? Oh—I see him. What—what’ll I do now?”

Smith wasn’t sitting with anybody. He was humped up on his seat, intently watching some gymnasts on a trapeze, and I noticed the black satchel was between his feet.

“Maybe we’d better hunt up a cop,” I whispered. “Don’t take any chances, Billie.”

But she didn’t seem to hear. Still toting me, she went up the aisle, edged across, and sat down right next to Smith. I felt my stomach go cold. The sleepy-eyed Nazi gave us a quick, sidewise look, and then turned back to staring at the show. He didn’t recognize me, I figured. All babies look pretty much alike, fat and droopy.

There, not three feet away from me, was the satchel, with the Transfer helmets in it—I hoped. They were there unless Smith had already turned them over to Number Three. I guessed he hadn’t done so. He’d have given Number Three the satchel, without risking attracting attention by digging out the helmets.

I looked around for Smith’s two pet thugs, but I couldn’t find them in the crowd. Billie didn’t dare say anything to me, nor would I have dared answer her, with our enemy right beside us. I sat in Billie’s lap and wondered what she was planning, and tried to make a plan or two myself. If I could sneak off with the bag.

It was an idea. I caught Billie’s eye and winked, pointing down. After a minute she put me beside her, on the seat, and when Smith wasn’t looking, lowered me to the floor. I ducked in under the seats, where I couldn’t be seen, and felt dust choking me. I was thirsty again.

There wasn’t any beer on draught where I was, so I crawled behind Billie’s legs and kept going till I was behind a pair of blue serge pants. Between Smith’s feet was the black bag, partly under the seat, where he’d pushed it to keep it hidden, I guess. I didn’t dare touch the satchel. He’d have felt me trying to slide it away.

If I could open it, I could sneak out the helmets.

I tried that. I had an idea that Smith would look down any minute and then step on me. But I had to get those helmets. That was the first and most important angle. After that, even if Smith managed to escape, he’d have to do it without the helmets.

The snap lock on the bag gave me a lot of trouble. My fingers were filled with mush. They kept bending back. When finally I did click the lock open, it snapped like a pistol shot. I froze, knowing that I'd be stepped on in another second or two.

But the band had been playing plenty loud, and the sound hadn't been as explosive as I'd thought. Anyway, Smith didn't glance down. After my heart came back where it belonged, I started to open the satchel inch by inch. Not far, just enough so I could slip my arm in and feel around. When I did that, I touched the smooth fabric of one of the helmets right away.

I sneaked it out and went after the other one. As I got it, there was a thump, and another pair of pants-legs appeared. Somebody had sat down beside Smith. I saw the new guy's foot reach over and press Smith's shoe, tapping out what looked like a code.

Number Three!

CHAPTER IV

Heavy on the Muscles

W hew! I looked at those brown-tweed legs and those brown oxfords, with a long scratch across one toe, and started sweating. If Smith discovered what had happened now, it'd be curtains for Cassidy, or Stinky, or whoever I was!

But nobody made a move. Apparently neither Nazi wanted to take chances, with Billie sitting right beside them. That gave me a breather, anyhow. What next?

The problem was settled right away. I heard a squalling, familiar voice squawking. "That's the girl!" the voice said. "That's her! I'm sure she's kidnaped the baby." It was the hatchet-faced battlewagon!

She'd come back with cops. The minute I heard a deep brogue telling Billie to come along quietly, I knew the lid was off. Wow! If Billie went off, leaving me here with those two lugs, it'd be all up with Jerry Cassidy!

Billie knew it too. I couldn't see much, but I heard a scuffling, heard the battlewagon cry out in pain, and heard Billie's voice raised in argument. She was talking about Nazi spies.

"Those men, officer," she insisted. "Right beside me, here. They're enemy agents. They're stealing an important invention."

"Now, now," said the cop. "Take it easy, lady."

But Smith made a mistake. He reached down for the bag, and his fumbling fingers discovered that it was open.

"*Donner und*—officer! This girl is a thief. She has my helmets stolen."

Number Three's foot kicked Smith's leg, and the dope shut up, but it was too late. He'd made a fatal break. New York cops are quick on the uptake.

I heard a shout, a banging noise, and the blue serge pants flipped apart. I looked right into Smith's face as he bent down and peered under the seat. He saw me, crouching there gripping the Transfer helmets. His hand shot out to grab me. I scrambled back just in time.

"Hold it, mister," the cop said. "Hey! Drop that gun, you!" I guessed he meant Number Three, for Smith was busy trying to crawl over the back of his seat and get at me. This time the banging noise wasn't feet clumping. A gun had gone off.

The cop didn't fire in that crowd. He just went for Number Three. The two of them got tangled up with Smith, and that gave me a chance to duck out into the aisle. People were getting up, startled, a whistle was shrilling,

and Billie and the battlegwagon were rolling down the incline, fighting like wildcats. Somebody who looked familiar was ducking out into the animal show next door. It was the thug with the squint, Smith's side-kick.

I only got a glimpse. Smith had freed himself from the tangle and was coming at me again. I dived under the seats again. I had a slight advantage in being so small, but I was weak, too, and I had to keep hold of the helmets. Smith had his Webley out.

I dodged toward the other aisle. Just in time I looked up and saw Smith's other pal coming to meet me, with a nasty grin on his pan. I scooted away like a tadpole. A baby can crawl pretty fast, especially when he doesn't have to bother about broken-field running. Those rows of seats were slowing down my pursuers a little, and that helped.

Then the lid blew off completely. There'd been quite a rumpus anyhow, but I heard a tumult of sound that nearly deafened me. People were shouting and screaming and stamping all around.

"Gott!" the Nazi on my left yelled. "Erik has let the gorilla loose. Shoot the brat."

"Nein," Smith snapped. "This will give us a chance to get away in the excitement. But first the helmets, quick."

They came after me again. This time I reversed my route—I'd been scuttling up the ramp—and went down. It was faster. I wasn't being shot at, luckily. The Germans were afraid of putting a bullet through the helmets, I guess.

I ducked a hand that swooped down at me, slipped, and went rolling down like a ball. I couldn't stop myself. But I still kept a tight grip on the Transfer helmets. When I stopped, I was a little ways out in the arena, and it was empty. The exits were jammed with people fighting their way out.

Twenty feet away, coming toward me with his mouth wide open, was the gorilla!

I beat a retreat faster than Rommel ever did. Of course the seat under which I crouched wouldn't protect me at all if that big monkey took a notion to grab me, but there weren't any bomb shelters handy. I didn't know what had happened to Smith and his pal, though I could hear the cop and Number Three still fighting above me somewhere. Billie had vanished, too.

The gorilla was hesitating, getting ready to wander off somewhere. When he did that, I knew, Smith would close in, and I'd be trapped.

Then I remembered something—seeing the gorilla, in his cage, fitting his food-basin on his bullet head. Maybe—maybe there was an out.

I clicked the switches on both the helmets, leaving them turned that way, and threw one of the gadgets at the monkey. My pitching arm wasn't so hot

just then. But the gorilla saw the helmet, and it aroused his curiosity. He picked it up, blinked, and wandered away. I yelled at him. Smith was beginning to pluck up courage. I couldn't see him, but I could hear him starting to move nearer.

The gorilla turned and looked at me. I scuttled out into the arena. A glance behind me showed that Smith's pet thug had ganged up with Number Three on the cop. The officer was still fighting, but he was being pistol-whipped.

Also, circling around toward me, through the seats, was not only Smith, but the squint-eyed lug who'd let the gorilla out.

My legs were too wobbly to be useful. I was pooped out. For a baby, I'd been having a devil of a lot of exercise. If Smith rushed me now, I knew I wouldn't be able to crawl away fast enough to elude him. So I sat there, with the gorilla staring at me, and put the helmet on my head.

Then I took it off. Monkey-face opened his mouth stupidly. He'd forgotten about the helmet he was holding. Lame-brain!

I kept jamming the helmet over my head and yanking it off again, and finally the gorilla got so interested he took a step toward me, dropping his own helmet as he did so. I saw him look down, pick up the thing, and finger it inquisitively.

"Hey!" I squealed. "Over here! Like this!"

He stared at me. I put the helmet on and, just then, a big hand clamped down on my arm. I tried to jerk free, but I just wasn't strong enough. I had a brief glimpse of Smith's sleepy-eyed face, with its hard, rat-trap mouth, and then—

Then I wasn't there any more. I was standing in the arena looking across to where Smith was picking up a baby. My arms were lifted, fitting something on to my head.

The helmet! It wasn't my head, either. The helmet hardly came over the top of the furry crown. I took one look down, and that was enough.

I wasn't a baby any more. I was a gorilla. Wow!

The helmet almost fell off my head, and I caught it awkwardly, not yet used to my new body. As I wondered what to do with the thing, I saw Billie across the arena, rising from the prostrate body of the battlewagon. I yelled at her, and it came out a deep, booming roar. But she looked at me.

I tossed her the helmet. Then I went for Smith!

Guns were popping off somewhere, which didn't mean anything. The bullets went wild. Did you ever try to fire a snap shot at a bellowing gorilla charging straight at you? Okay, then.

Smith dropped the baby as I got there, and hurdled a row of seats. I caught the kid, set him down gently, and kept going. I didn't bother to jump

over the seats. I just tore 'em up. I ploughed ahead toward Smith, stopping only to gather in the squint-eyed thug and pick him up in one mighty hand. He wasn't so heavy. I threw him at Smith.

They went down, hard. I landed on top of them, with a crash of splintered wood. They didn't bother to get up.

Somebody fired a shot at me. It was the squint-eyed Nazi. He and Number Three had finally managed to knock out the cop, though it took two of them, clubbing their guns. I couldn't see Number Three.

The gunman thought he was out of my reach, but he'd forgotten how long a gorilla's arms are. I didn't realize that myself till I swung hard, heard a klunk, and saw the guy go spinning off like a pinwheel. He didn't get up, either.

Billie screamed. That whirled me around in a hurry. She was halfway across the arena, running to pick up Stinky and the other helmet, running as fast as she could, and Number Three was racing after her, his gun ready. The crowds around the exits were making so much rumpus that hardly anybody noticed what was happening. But I did.

Gorillas can't go fast, except for short distances. Number Three had too good a lead. He'd catch Billie before I could catch him—unless I did something quick.

I charged down the swathe of destruction I'd made, and leaped up with all my strength. The gymnasts had fled, but their equipment was still here. One trapeze was hooked back right where I wanted it. I caught the bar, and my weight ripped it free from its hook. It carried me sailing across the arena, straight for Number Three.

He'd stopped. He was standing motionless, taking steady aim at Billie's back as she stooped to scoop up Stinky.

Then I saw I was going to miss him. The trapeze was arcking me off to the left. I let go, twisting frantically in midair, and went swooshing down. If I missed—Number Three wouldn't!

I gave a last desperate writhe. A gun went off, but a fraction before that, I hit. I hit with all the impact of a gorilla's tremendous bulk. Luckily, my fall was cushioned.

It was tough on Number Three, though. They couldn't even scrape him up afterward. They had to use blotting paper.

I got up and brushed myself off. Billie wasn't hurt, I saw. Anyhow, she was running again. I yelled her name. It came out in an unintelligible roar.

But she must have heard something familiar in it, for she stopped and looked over her shoulder. I couldn't talk, of course, but I made gestures. But Billie got the idea.

She knew what I wanted—one of the helmets. So she tossed it to me, though she didn't get too close. After making sure the switch was on, I fitted it on my head as well as I could. People were closing in now, keepers and so forth. There wasn't much time. I pointed insistently.

Billie put the other helmet over Stinky's head. The switch had been flipped off, but she moved it when I made pointing motions. That did it.

I wasn't a gorilla any more. I was in Billie's arms, panting with exhaustion, and, feeling thirsty and sleepy as the dickens.

"Jerry!" she gasped. "Are you all right? Is this you now?"

"Yeah," I said. "Get the other helmet back after they catch the gorilla. We'll need it to—to—bwob-wob—uh—"

It was no use. I'd turned into mush. I went to sleep, right then and there. . . .

When I woke up, I started to crawl automatically, but it didn't feel right, somehow. Then I knew why. I was me again.

I was lying on a couch, and Billie was sitting beside me, watching. She looked tired.

"Oh, gosh," I said. "What happened, hon?"

"Jerry!"

"Uh-huh. All of me, for a change. How come?"

"Doctor McKenney recovered—he didn't have a concussion, after all. He verified the whole business, and used the helmets while you were asleep. Stinky's a baby all through now, and you're—you're a hero. It'll be in all the papers. And the government sent somebody to arrange about the helmets with the doctor."

She had it all mixed up, but I got the idea.

"Stinky's okay?"

"He's fine. He wasn't hurt a bit. And it wasn't your fault, Jerry, after all. You couldn't help what happened. So don't feel badly."

I looked at her. "About what?"

"Well, you did capture those enemy agents, and everything. He can't be too hard on you!"

"Who?"

"Captain Dawson," Billie said. "He's waiting outside to see you. Mrs. Dawson went home with Stinky."

I gulped. "Oh. How does he look?"

"Kind of mad," Billie admitted. "Where are you going?"

"Look, there's another door, see?" I said. "And there's a fire escape outside that window. My pass is good for another two days, and by that time Captain Dawson may decide not to court martial me. Somehow I don't think I better see him now."

“Maybe you’re right. But I’m coming with you.”

“Swell,” I said. “What I need is a beer. Let’s go!”

We went.

I didn’t see the Captain till my pass was up. I guess he’d cooled off a little. But—uh—not much. Besides, he couldn’t have meant all the things he said. I don’t know where he ever picked up such language. Oh, well. I got one consolation. I’m a hero, even if I am on extra duty, bossing a fatigue detail.

I’m warning you lugs—if anybody calls me Baby Face again—well, I’m warning you, that’s all!

TRANSCRIBER NOTES

Mis-spelled words and printer errors have been fixed.

Illustrations by Virgil Finlay (1914-1971) have been omitted.

[The end of *Baby Face* by Henry Kuttner]