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His First Steps

Robert A. Howard

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ROBERT A. HOWARD

*It had started as just another Saturday afternoon,
like the countless others that have passed lazily by
without anything the least bit exciting happening.*

My son, a little fellow barely a knee high, kept himself entertained by spinning the recliner in circles while babbling something completely incomprehensible to us over-two folk at least. This was one of his favorite pastimes, actually. It was as if the extended foot of the recliner taunted him, demanding to be pushed. So, for hours, he'd walk, round and around, holding on to the foot of the recliner, circling on and on in true Conan-style. Needless to say, this was quite an amusing sight, since a feather could probably give the boy a run for his money in the weight department.

To be honest, I half expected that by the time he learned to walk on his own that he'd be built like a little baby-Schwarzenegger. We'd been trying for months to coax him to walk or even stand on his own. He was more than capable, but he just hadn't yet realized that he could walk unassisted. Today, he decided to surprise us though.

Looking over from the recliner to the couch, the boy examined his options. The gap between the two was just a bit too far for him to hand-walk across. You could see the indecision in his eyes. He could plop down and crawl the two feet, but then he'd have to get up again—what a chore! Or, he could take the risk. Timidly, he determined to take the Nestea-plunge and took his first few steps into a brave new world. We were nothing less than ecstatic. If that had been all that had happened, we still would have been talking about it for weeks, but it wasn't.

Seeing the delight in our eyes, Jason grinned and walked back across the great divide the whole two feet to the recliner. This time though, he walked with confidence. Deciding that this was a far more efficient way to move about, he started walking all over the house—walking, then running.

Oh, but what had we unleashed? He was quicker than quick, running from room to room and getting into all kinds of things as we tried to chase him down. When at last he decided to slow down, he turned to me and said, "Da Da?" This wasn't anything new, he'd been babbling "da, da, da, da, da," for months, but nonetheless, I'd always answer, "Yes, boy?"

"Can I go show my girlfriend how I can walk now," he asked.

In the first place, I was shocked—he had a girlfriend at his age? I must have misunderstood what my wife meant by "play date." And, since when could he talk? Shocked, I looked to my wife, who just shrugged unknowingly.

"Uh... I don't think now is a good time, boy," I replied when words would finally come to me.

"But, da-da!"

It had started already. Here he was, at fifteen months old already arguing with his father. I'd have nothing of that.

"Jason! No. Not today," I said, interrupting his protest. Put off, he ran to his room and slammed the door behind him.

Completely mystified, I turned to my wife. It was all too much for her though, and at that moment her eyes rolled back into her head and she fell to the ground like a sack of potatoes. Fortunately, I was able to catch her mid-fall and then carry her to the bedroom so she could lie down. From the boy's room, I could hear much cussing and spitting. He was quite worked up.

After getting my wife situated, I returned to the boy's room and found the door open. Peering in, there was no sign of my son. In fact, there was no sign of him anywhere in the house. Frantically, I looked everywhere I could think of that a tiny tike could possibly hide, but he was nowhere to be found. At last, I checked the front door and found it unlocked and my car keys gone. This did not bode well. Running out to the driveway, I was just in time to see Jason peeling-rubber down the street in my brand new car.

Now, this is where the story gets a little strange. Apparently, while he was out cruising the town he spotted a cat stuck way up on the top of a telephone pole. He had neglected to also steal my cell phone, so he had no way to call for help, and who would take *him* seriously anyway? So, he parked the car in the only way he knew how, head-on into the pole. He and I would have words about responsible driving later on when I saw the damage, but at least, having such a limber little body kept him from hurting himself.

Whatever imbecile had constructed this telephone pole had neglected to take into account someone one-foot-eleven when spacing the climbing rungs, so there was only one thing to be done. Leaping from the car, he ran straight up that pole—had he a firmer understanding of the laws of gravity, this would have been nigh impossible, but if Wile E. Coyote could do it, well so could he.

The cat, who had seen many things out on the streets of Dallas, didn't know quite what to make of this scene. But like any smart cat, he knew that babies and kitties just don't mix, and the sight of my boy charging up the pole was incentive enough for him to overcome his fear of coming back down. And down the cat went, falling more than climbing, but landing squarely on his feet, which were pumping even as he fell, so that when he hit the ground, he was already running.

The boy, having done his good deed, came back down to survey the damage. The grill of the car was concaved and one of the tires had been gashed. He correctly surmised that dad was going to be a little upset about this. Grabbing the tire iron and jack out of the trunk, he then set to work replacing the flat with a spare. Once done, he headed home, because by this point he was hungry and he was pretty sure he needed a diaper-change.

And that was the day my son took his first steps. We, of course, had a long talk when he returned from his joy ride, but I have to admit, I was proud of my son. After taking those first few steps, everything had really clicked for him. In a single day, he was walking, talking, spitting, cussing; he stole my car, took a drive, saved a cat, changed a flat, and he told me all about it when he got back, while smoking a cigar.