



THE FOURTH "R"

George O. Smith

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BOOK ONE:

FUTURE IMPROMPTU

CHAPTER ONE

James Quincy Holden was five years old.

His fifth birthday was not celebrated by the usual horde of noisy, hungry kids running wild in the afternoon. It started at seven, with cocktails. They were served by his host, Paul Brennan, to the celebrants, the boy's father and mother. The guest of honor sipped ginger ale and nibbled at canapés while he was presented with his gifts: A volume of Kipling's *Jungle Tales*, a Spitz Junior Planetarium, and a build-it-yourself kit containing parts for a geiger counter and an assortment of radioactive minerals to identify. Dinner was served at eight, the menu selected by Jimmy Holden—with the exception of the birthday cake and its five proud little candles which came as an anticipated surprise from his "Uncle" Paul Brennan.

After dinner, they listened to some music chosen by the boy, and the evening wound up with three rubbers of bridge. The boy won.

They left Paul Brennan's apartment just after eleven o'clock. Jimmy Holden was tired and pleasantly stuffed with good food. But he was stimulated by the party. So, instead of dropping off to sleep, he sat comfortably wedged between his father and mother, quietly lost in his own thoughts until the car was well out of town.

Then he said, "Dad, why did you make that sacrifice bid on the last hand?" Father and son had been partners.

"You're not concerned about losing the rubber, are you?" It had been the only rubber Jimmy lost.

"No. It's only a game," said Jimmy. "I'm just trying to understand."

His father gave an amused groan. "It has to do with the laws of probability and the theory of games," he said.

The boy shook his head. "Bridge," he said thoughtfully, "consists of creating a logical process of play out of a random distribution of values, doesn't it?"

"Yes, if you admit that your definition is a gross oversimplification. It would hardly be a game if everything could be calculated beforehand."

"But what's missing?"

"In any game there is the element of a calculated risk."

Jimmy Holden was silent for a half-mile thinking that one over. "How," he asked slowly, "can a risk be calculated?"

His father laughed. "In fine, it can't. Too much depends upon the personality of the individual."

"Seems to me," said Jimmy, "that there's not much point in making a bid against a distribution of values known to be superior. You couldn't hope to make it; Mother and Uncle Paul had the cards."

His father laughed again. "After a few more courses in higher mathematics, James, you'll begin to realize that some of the highest mathematics is aimed at predicting the unpredictable, or trying to lower the entropy of random behavior—"

Jimmy Holden's mother chuckled. "Now explain entropy," she said. "James, what your father has been failing to explain is really not subject to simple analysis. Who knows why any man will hazard his hard-earned money on the orientation of a pair of dice? No amount of education nor academic study will explain what drives a man. Deep inside, I suppose it is the same force that drives everybody. One man with four spades will take a chance to see if he can make five, and another man with directorships in three corporations will strive to make it four."

Jimmy's father chuckled. "Some families with one infant will try to make it two—"

"Not on your life!"

"—And some others are satisfied with what they've got," finished Jimmy Holden's father. "James, some men will avoid seeing what has to be done;

some men will see it and do it and do no more; and a few men will see what has to be done, do it, and then look to the next inevitable problem created by their own act—"

A blinding flash of light cut a swath across the road, dazzling them. Around the curve ahead, a car careened wide over the white line. His mother reached for him, his father fought the wheel to avoid the crash. Jimmy Holden both heard and felt the sharp *Bang!* as the right front tire went. The steering wheel snapped through his father's hands by half a turn. There was a splintering crash as the car shattered its way through the retaining fence, then came a fleeting moment of breathless silence as if the entire universe had stopped still for a heartbeat.

Chaos! His mother's automatic scream, his father's oath, and the rending crash split the silence at once. The car bucked and flipped, the doors were slammed open and ripped off against a tree that went down. The car leaped in a skew turn and began to roll and roll, shedding metal and humans as it racketed down the ravine.

Jimmy felt himself thrown free in a tumbleturn that ended in a heavy thud.

When breath and awareness returned, he was lying in a depression filled with soft rotting leaves.

He was dazed beyond hurt. The initial shock and bewilderment oozed out of him, leaving him with a feeling of outrage, and a most peculiar sensation of being a spectator rather than an important part of the violent drama. It held an air of unreality, like a dream that the near-conscious sleeper recognizes as a dream and lives through it because he lacks the conscious will to direct it.

Strangely, it was as if there were three or more of him all thinking different things at the same time. He wanted his mother badly enough to cry. Another part of him said that she would certainly be at his side if she were able. Then a third section of his confused mind pointed out that if she did not come to him, it was because she herself was hurt deeply and couldn't.

A more coldly logical portion of his mind was urging him to get up and *do* something about it. They had passed a telephone booth on the highway; lying there whimpering wasn't doing anybody any good. This logical part of his confused mind did not supply the dime for the telephone slot nor the means

of scaling the heights needed to insert the dime in the adult-altitude machine.

Whether the dazzle of mental activity was serial or simultaneous isn't important. The fact is that it was completely disorganized as to plan or program, it leaped from one subject to another until he heard the scrabble and scratch of someone climbing down the side of the ravine.

Any noise meant help. With relief, Jimmy tried to call out.

But with this arrival of help, afterfright claimed him. His mouth worked silently before a dead-dry throat and his muscles twitched in uncontrolled nervousness; he made neither sound nor motion. Again he watched with the unreal feeling of being a remote spectator. A cone of light from a flashlight darted about and it gradually seeped into Jimmy's shocked senses that this was a new arrival, picking his way through the tangle of brush, following the trail of ruin from the broken guard rail to the smashed car below.

The newcomer paused. The light darted forward to fall upon a crumpled mass of cloth.

With a toe, the stranger probed at crushed ribs. A pitifully feeble moan came from the broken rag doll that lay on the ground. The searcher knelt with his light close to peer into the bloody face, and, unbelieving, Jimmy Holden heard the voice of his mother straining to speak, "Paul—I—we—"

The voice died in a gurgle.

The man with the flashlight tested the flaccid neck by bending the head to one side and back sharply. He ended this inspection by letting the head fall back to the moist earth. It landed with a thud of finality.

The cold brutality of this stranger's treatment of his mother shocked Jimmy Holden into frantic outrage. The frozen cry for help changed into protesting anger; no one should be treated that—

"One!" muttered the stranger flatly.

Jimmy's burst of protest died in his throat and he watched, fascinated, as the stranger's light moved in a sweep forward to stop a second time. "And there's number two!" The callous horror was repeated. Hypnotically, Jimmy Holden watched the stranger test the temples and wrists and try a hand under his father's heart. He watched the stranger make a detailed inspection of the long

slash that laid open the entire left abdomen and he saw the red that seeped but did not flow.

"That's that!" said the stranger with an air of finality. "Now—" and he stood up to swing his flashlight in widening circles, searching the area carefully.

Jimmy Holden did not sicken. He went cold. He froze as the dancing flashlight passed over his head, and relaxed partially when it moved away in a series of little jumps pausing to give a steady light for close inspection. The light swung around and centered on the smashed automobile. It was upside down, a ruin with one wheel still turning idly.

The stranger went to it, and knelt to peer inside. He pried ripped metal away to get a clear sight into the crushed interior. He went flat on his stomach and tried to penetrate the area between the crumpled car-top and the bruised ground, and he wormed his way in a circle all around the car, examining the wreck minutely.

The sound of a distant automobile engine became audible, and the searching man mumbled a curse. With haste he scrambled to his feet and made a quick inspection of the one wobbly-turning wheel. He stripped a few shards of rubber away, picked at something in the bent metal rim, and put whatever he found in his pocket. When his hand came from the pocket it held a packet of paper matches. With an ear cocked at the road above and the sound of the approaching car growing louder, the stranger struck one match and touched it to the deck of matches. Then with a callous gesture he tossed the flaring pack into a pool of spilled gasoline. The fuel went up in a blunt *whoosh!*

The dancing flames revealed the face of Jimmy Holden's "Uncle" Paul Brennan, his features in a mask that Jimmy Holden had never seen before.

With the determined air of one who knows that still another piece lies hidden, Paul Brennan started to beat back and forth across the trail of ruin. His light swept the ground like the brush of a painter, missing no spot. Slowly and deliberately he went, paying no attention to the creeping tongues of flame that crept along damp trails of spilled gasoline.

Jimmy Holden felt helplessly alone.

For "Uncle" Paul Brennan was the laughing uncle, the golden uncle; his

godfather; the bringer of delightful gifts and the teller of fabulous stories. Classmate of his father and admirer of his mother, a friend to be trusted as he trusted his father and mother, as they trusted Paul Brennan. Jimmy Holden did not and could not understand, but he could feel the presence of menace. And so with the instinct of any trapped animal, he curled inward upon himself and cringed.

Education and information failed. Jimmy Holden had been told and told and instructed, and the words had been graven deep in his mind by the same fabulous machine that his father used to teach him his grammar and his vocabulary and his arithmetic and the horde of other things that made Jimmy Holden what he was: "If anything happens to us, you must turn to Paul Brennan!"

But nothing in his wealth of extraordinary knowledge covered the way to safety when the trusted friend turned fiend.

Shaken by the awful knowledge that all of his props had been kicked out from under him, now at last Jimmy Holden whimpered in helpless fright. Brennan turned towards the sound and began to beat his way through the underbrush.

Jimmy Holden saw him coming. It was like one of those dreams he'd had where he was unable to move, his muscles frozen, as some unknown horror stalked him. It could only end in a terrifying fall through cold space towards a tremendous lurch against the bedsprings that brought little comfort until his pounding heart came back to normal. But this was no dream; it was a known horror that stalked him, and it could not end as a dream ends. It was reality.

The horror was a close friend turned animal, and the end was more horrible because Jimmy Holden, like all other five-year-olds, had absolutely no understanding nor accurate grasp of the concept called *death*. He continued to whimper even though he realized that his fright was pointing him out to his enemy. And yet he had no real grasp of the concept *enemy*. He knew about pain; he had been hurt. But only by falls, simple misadventures, the needles of inoculation administered by his surgeon mother, a paddling for mischief by his engineer father.

But whatever unknown fate was coming was going to be worse than "hurt." It

was frightful.

Then fate, assisted by Brennan's own act of trying to obliterate any possible evidence by fire, attracted a savior. The approaching car stopped on the road above and a voice called out, "Hello, down there!"

Brennan could not refuse to answer; his own car was in plain sight by the shattered retaining fence. He growled under his breath, but he called back, "Hello, the road! Go get the police!"

"Can we help?"

"Beyond help!" cried Brennan. "I'm all right. Get the cops!"

The car door slammed before it took off. Then came the unmistakable sounds of another man climbing down the ravine. A second flashlight swung here and there until the newcomer faced Brennan in the little circle of light.

"What happened?" asked the uninvited volunteer.

Brennan, whatever his thoughts, said in a voice filled with standard concern: "Blowout. Then everything went blooey."

"Anyone—I mean how many—?"

"Two dead," said Brennan, and then added because he had to, "and a little boy lost."

The stranger eyed the flames and shuddered. "In there?"

"Parents were tossed out. Boy's missing."

"Bad," said the stranger. "God, what a mess. Know 'em?"

"Holdens. Folks that live in the big old house on the hill. My best friend and his wife. I was following them home," lied Brennan glibly. "C'mon let's see if we can find the kid. What about the police?"

"Sent my wife. Telephone down the road."

Paul Brennan's reply carried no sound of disappointment over being interrupted. "Okay. Let's take a look. You take it that way, and I'll cover this side."

The little-boy mind did not need its extensive education to understand that Paul Brennan needed no more than a few seconds of unobserved activity,

after which he could announce the discovery of the third death in a voice cracked with false grief.

Animal instinct took over where intelligence failed. The same force that caused Jimmy Holden to curl within himself now caused him to relax; help that could be trusted was now at hand. The muscles of his throat relaxed. He whimpered. The icy paralysis left his arms and legs; he kicked and flailed. And finally his nervous system succeeded in making their contact with his brain; the nerves carried the pain of his bumps and scratches, and Jimmy Holden began to hurt. His stifled whimper broke into a shuddering cry, which swiftly turned into sobbing hysteria.

He went out of control. Nothing, not even violence, would shake him back until his accumulation of shock upon shock had been washed away in tears.

The sound attracted both men. Side by side they beat through the underbrush. They reached for him and Jimmy turned toward the stranger. The man picked the lad out of the bed of soft rotting leaves, cradled him and stroked his head. Jimmy wrapped his small arms around the stranger's neck and held on for life.

"I'll take him," said Brennan, reaching out.

Jimmy's clutch on the stranger tightened.

"You won't pry him loose easily," chuckled the man. "I know. I've got a couple of these myself."

Brennan shrugged. "I thought perhaps—"

"Forget it," said the stranger. "Kid's had trouble. I'll carry him to the road, you take him from there."

"Okay."

Getting up the ravine was a job of work for the man who carried Jimmy Holden. Brennan gave a hand, aided with a lift, broke down brush, and offered to take Jimmy now and again. Jimmy only clung tighter, and the stranger waved Brennan away with a quick shake of his head.

By the time they reached the road, sirens were wailing on the road up the hill. Police, firemen, and an ambulance swarmed over the scene. The firemen went to work on the flaming car with practiced efficiency; the police

clustered around Paul Brennan and extracted from him a story that had enough truth in it to sound completely convincing. The doctors from the ambulance took charge of Jimmy Holden. Lacking any other accident victim, they went to work on him with everything they could do.

They gave him mild sedation, wrapped him in a warm blanket, and put him to bed on the cot in the ambulance with two of them watching over him. In the presence of so many solicitous strangers, Jimmy's shock and fright diminished. The sedation took hold. He dropped off in a light doze that grew less fitful as time went on. By the time the official accident report program was over, Jimmy Holden was fast asleep and resting comfortably.

He did not hear Paul Brennan's suggestion that Jimmy go home with him, to Paul Brennan's personal physician, nor did Jimmy hear the ambulance attendants turn away Brennan's suggestion with hard-headed medical opinion. Brennan could hardly argue with the fact that an accident victim would be better off in a hospital under close observation. Shock demanded it, and there was the hidden possibility of internal injury or concussion to consider.

So Jimmy Holden awoke with his accident ten hours behind him, and the good sleep had completed the standard recuperative powers of the healthy child. He looked around, collecting himself, and then remembered the accident. He cringed a bit and took another look and identified his surroundings as some sort of a children's ward or dormitory.

He was in a crib.

He sat up angrily and rattled the gate of the crib. Putting James Quincy Holden in a baby's crib was an insult.

He stopped, because the noise echoed through the room and one of the younger patients stirred in sleep and moaned. Jimmy Holden sat back and remembered. The vacuum that was to follow the loss of his parents was not yet in evidence. They were gone and the knowledge made him unhappy, but he was not cognizant of the real meaning or emotion of grief. With almost the same feeling of loss he thought of the *Jungle Book* he would never read and the Spitz Planetarium he would never see casting its little star images on his bedroom ceiling. Burned and ruined, with the atomic energy kit—and he had hoped that he could use the kit to tease his father into giving him some education in radioactivity. He was old enough to learn—

Learn—?

No more, now that his father and mother were dead.

Some of the real meaning of his loss came to him then, and the growing knowledge that this first shocking loss meant the ultimate loss of everything was beginning to sink in.

He broke down and cried in the misery of his loss and his helplessness; ultimately his emotion began to cry itself out, and he began to feel resentment against his position. The animal desire to bite back at anything that moved did not last long, it focused properly upon the person of his tormentor. Then for a time, Jimmy Holden's imagination indulged in a series of little vignettes in which he scored his victory over Paul Brennan. These little playlets went through their own evolution, starting with physical victory reminiscent of his Jack-and-the-Beanstalk days to a more advanced triumph of watching Paul Brennan led away in handcuffs whilst the District Attorney scanned the sheaf of indisputable evidence provided by James Quincy Holden.

Somewhere along about this point in his fantasy, a breath of the practical entered, and Jimmy began to consider the more sensible problem of what sort of information this sheaf of evidence would contain.

Still identifying himself with the books he knew, Jimmy Holden had progressed from the fairy story—where the villain was evil for no more motive than to provide menace to the hero—to his more advanced books, where the villain did his evil deeds for the logical motive of personal gain.

Well, what had Paul Brennan to gain?

Money, for one thing—he would be executor of the Holden Estate. But there wasn't enough to justify killing. Revenge? For what? Jealousy? For whom? Hate? Envy? Jimmy Holden glossed the words quickly, for they were no more than words that carried definitions that did not really explain them. He could read with the facility of an adult, but a book written for a sophisticated audience went over his head.

No, there was only one possible thing of appreciable value; the one thing that Paul Brennan hoped to gain was the device over which they had worked through all the long years to perfect: The Holden Electromechanical Educator! Brennan wanted it badly enough to murder for its possession!

And with a mind and ingenuity far beyond his years, Jimmy Holden knew that he alone was the most active operator in this vicious drama. It was not without shock that he realized that he himself could still be killed to gain possession of his fabulous machine. For only with all *three* Holdens dead could Paul Brennan take full and unquestioned possession.

With daylight clarity he knew what he had to do. In a single act of destruction he could simultaneously foil Paul Brennan's plan and ensure his own life.

Permanently installed in Jimmy Holden's brain by the machine itself were the full details of how to recreate it. Indelibly he knew each wire and link, lever and coil, section by section and piece by piece. It was incomprehensible information, about in the same way that the printing press "knows" the context of its metal plate. Step by step he could rebuild it once he had the means of procuring the parts, and it would work even though he had not the foggiest notion (now) of what the various parts did.

So if the delicate heart of his father's machine were utterly destroyed, Paul Brennan would be extremely careful about preserving the life of James Quincy Holden.

He considered his position and what he knew:

Physically, he was a five-year-old. He stood forty-one inches tall and weighed thirty-nine pounds. A machinist's hammer was a two-handed tool and a five-pound sack of sugar was a burden. Doorknobs and latches were a problem in manipulation. The negotiation of a swinging door was a feat of muscular engineering. Electric light switches were placed at a tiptoe reach because, naturally, everything in the adult world is designed by the adults for the convenience of adults. This makes it difficult for the child who has no adult to do his bidding.

Intellectually, Jimmy Holden was something else.

Reverting to a curriculum considered sound prior to Mr. Dewey's often-questionable and more often misused programs of schooling, Jimmy's parents had trained and educated their young man quite well in the primary informations of fact. He read with facility and spoke with a fine vocabulary—although no amount of intellectual training could make his voice change until

his glands did. His knowledge of history, geography and literature were good, because he'd used them to study reading. He was well into plane geometry and had a smattering of algebra, and there had been a pause due to a parental argument as to the advisability of his memorizing a table of six-place logarithms via the Holden machine.

Extra-curricularly, Jimmy Holden had acquired snippets, bits, and wholesale chunks of a number of the arts and sciences and other aggregations of information both pertinent and trivial for one reason or another. As an instance, he had absorbed an entire bridge book by Charles Goren just to provide a fourth to sit in with his parents and Paul Brennan.

Consequently, James Holden had in data the education of a boy of about sixteen, and in other respects, much more.

He escaped from the hospital simply because no one ever thought that a five-year-old boy would have enough get-up-and-go to climb out of his crib, rummage a nearby closet, dress himself, and then calmly walk out. The clothing of a cocky teen-ager would have been impounded and his behavior watched.

They did not miss him for hours. He went, taking the little identification card from its frame at the foot of his bed—and that ruined the correlation between tag and patient.

By the time an overworked nurse stopped to think and finally asked, "Kitty, are you taking care of the little boy in Bed 6 over in 219?" and received the answer, "No, aren't you?" Jimmy Holden was trudging up the hill towards his home. Another hour went by with the two worried nurses surreptitiously searching the rest of the hospital in the simple hope that he had wandered away and could be restored before it came to the attention of the officials. By the time they gave up and called in other nurses (who helped them in their anxiety to conceal) Jimmy was entering his home.

Each succeeding level of authority was loath to report the truth to the next higher up.

By the time the general manager of the hospital forced himself to call Paul Brennan, Jimmy Holden was demolishing the last broken bits of disassembled subassemblies he had smashed from the heart-circuit of the

Holden Electromechanical Educator. He was most thorough. Broken glass went into the refuse buckets, bent metal was buried in the garden, inflammables were incinerated, and meltables and fusibles slagged down in ashes that held glass, bottle, and empty tin-can in an unrecognizable mass. He left a gaping hole in the machine that Brennan could not fill—nor could any living man fill it now but James Quincy Holden.

And only when this destruction was complete did Jimmy Holden first begin to understand his father's statement about the few men who see what has to be done, do it, *and then* look to the next inevitable problem created by their own act.

It was late afternoon by the time Jimmy had his next moves figured out. He left the home he'd grown up in, the home of his parents, of his own babyhood. He'd wandered through it for the last time, touching this and saying goodbye to that. He was certain that he would never see his things again, nor the house itself, but the real vacuum of his loss hadn't yet started to form. The concepts of "never" and "forever" were merely words that had no real impact.

So was the word "Farewell."

But once his words were said, Jimmy Holden made his small but confident way to the window of a railroad ticket agent.

CHAPTER TWO

You are a ticket agent, settled in the routine of your job. From nine to five-thirty, five days a week, you see one face after another. There are cheerful faces, sullen faces, faces that breathe garlic, whiskey, chewing gum, toothpaste and tobacco fumes. Old faces, young faces, dull faces, scarred faces, clear faces, plain faces and faces so plastered with makeup that their nature can't be seen at all. They bark place-names at you, or ask pleasantly about the cost of round-trip versus one-way tickets to Chicago or East Burlap. You deal with them and then you wait for the next.

Then one afternoon, about four o'clock, a face barely visible over the edge of the marble counter looks up at you with a boy's cheerful freckled smile. You have to stand up in order to see him. You smile, and he grins at you. Among his belongings is a little leather suitcase, kid's size, but not a toy. He is standing on it. Under his arm is a collection of comic books, in one small fist is the remains of a candy bar and in the other the string of a floating balloon.

"Well, young man, where to? Paris? London? Maybe Mars?"

"No, sir," comes the piping voice, "Roun-tree."

"Roundtree? Yes, I've heard of that metropolis," you reply. You look over his head, there aren't any other customers in line behind him so you don't mind passing the time of day. "Round-trip or one-way?"

"One-way," comes the quick reply.

This brings you to a slow stop. He does not giggle nor prattle, nor launch into a long and involved explanation with halting, dependent clauses. This one knows what he wants and how to ask for it. Quite a little man!

"How old are you, young fellow?"

"I was five years old yesterday."

"What's your name?"

"I'm James Holden."

The name does not ring any bells—because the morning newspaper is purchased for its comic strips, the bridge column, the crossword puzzle, and the latest dope on love-nest slayings, peccadilloes of the famous, the cheesecake photo of the inevitable actress-leaving-for-somewhere, and the full page photograph of the latest death-on-the-highway debacle. You look at the picture but you don't read the names in the caption, so you don't recognize the name, and you haven't been out of your little cage since lunchtime and Jimmy Holden was not missing then. So you go on:

"So you're going to go to Roundtree."

"Yessir."

"That costs a lot of money, young Mister Holden."

"Yessir." Then this young man hands you an envelope; the cover says, typewritten: *Ticket Clerk, Midland Railroad*.

A bit puzzled, you open the envelope and find a five-dollar bill folded in a sheet of manuscript paper. The note says:

/P Ticket Clerk Midland Railroad Dear Sir: P/

This will introduce my son, James Holden. As a birthday present, I am sending him for a visit to his grandparents in Roundtree, and to make the adventure complete, he will travel alone. Pass the word along to keep an eye on him but don't step in unless he gets into trouble. Ask the dining car steward to see that he eats dinner on something better than candy bars.

Otherwise, he is to believe that he is making this trip completely on his own.

Sincerely, Louis Holden.

PS: Divide the change from this five dollars among you as tips. L.H.

And so you look down at young Mister Holden and get a feeling of vicarious pleasure. You stamp his ticket and hand it to him with a gesture. You point out the train-gate he is to go through, and you tell him that he is to sit in the third railroad car. As he leaves, you pick up the telephone and call the station-master, the conductor, and since you can't get the dining-car steward directly, you charge the conductor with passing the word along.

Then you divide the change. Of the two-fifty, you extract a dollar, feeling that

the Senior Holden is a cheapskate. You slip the other buck and a half into an envelope, ready for the conductor's hand. He'll think Holden Senior is more of a cheapskate, and by the time he extracts his cut, the dining car steward will *know* that Holden Senior is a cheapskate. But—

Then a face appears at your window and barks, "Holyoke, Mass.," and your normal day falls back into shape.

The response of the people you tell about it varies all the way from outrage that anybody would let a kid of five go alone on such a dangerous mission to loud bragging that he, too, once went on such a journey, at four and a half, and didn't need a note.

But Jimmy Holden is gone from your window, and you won't know for at least another day that you've been suckered by a note painstakingly typewritten, letter by letter, by a five-year-old boy who has a most remarkable vocabulary.

Jimmy's trip to Roundtree was without incident. Actually, it was easy once he had hurdled the ticket-seller with his forged note and the five-dollar bill from the cashbox in his father's desk. His error in not making it a ten was minor; a larger tip would not have provided him with better service, because the train crew were happy to keep an eye on the adventurous youngster for his own small sake. Their mild resentment against the small tip was directed against the boy's father, not the young passenger himself.

He had one problem. The train was hardly out of the station before everybody on it knew that there was a five-year-old making a trip all by himself. Of course, he was not to be bothered, but everybody wanted to talk to him, to ask him how he was, to chatter endlessly at him. Jimmy did not want to talk. His experience in addressing adults was exasperating. That he spoke lucid English instead of babygab did not compel a rational response. Those who heard him speak made over him with the same effusive superiority that they used in applauding a golden-haired tot in high heels and a strapless evening gown sitting on a piano and singing, *Why Was I Born?* in a piping, uncertain-toned voice. It infuriated him.

So he immersed himself in his comic books. He gave his name politely every five minutes for the first fifty miles. He turned down offers of candy with, "Mommy says I mustn't before supper." And when dinnertime came he

allowed himself to be escorted through the train by the conductor, because Jimmy knew that he couldn't handle the doors without help.

The steward placed a menu in front of him, and then asked carefully, "How much money do you want to spend, young man?"

Jimmy had the contents of his father's cashbox pinned to the inside of his shirt, and a five-dollar bill folded in a snap-top purse with some change in his shirt pocket. He could add with the best of them, but he did not want any more attention than he was absolutely forced to attract. So he fished out the snap-top purse and opened it to show the steward his five-dollar bill. The steward relaxed; he'd had a moment of apprehension that Holden Senior might have slipped the kid a half-dollar for dinner. (The steward had received a quarter for his share of the original two-fifty.)

Jimmy looked at the "Child's Dinner" menu and pointed out a plate: lamb chop and mashed potatoes. After that, dinner progressed without incident. Jimmy topped it off with a dish of ice cream.

The steward made change. Jimmy watched him carefully, and then said, "Daddy says I'm supposed to give you a tip. How much?"

The steward looked down, wondering how he could explain the standard dining car tip of fifteen or twenty percent of the bill. He took a swallow of air and picked out a quarter. "This will do nicely," he said and went off thankful that all people do not ask waiters how much they think they deserve for the service rendered.

Thus Jimmy Holden arrived in Roundtree and was observed and convoyed—but not bothered—off the train.

It is deplorable that adults are not as friendly and helpful to one another as they are to children; it might make for a more pleasant world. As Jimmy walked along the station platform at Roundtree, one of his former fellow-passengers walked beside him. "Where are you going, young man? Someone going to meet you, of course?"

"No, sir," said Jimmy. "I'm supposed to take a cab—"

"I'm going your way, why not ride along with me?"

"Sure it's all right?"

"Sure thing. Come along." Jimmy never knew that this man felt good for a week after he'd done his good turn for the year.

His grandfather opened the door and looked down at him in complete surprise. "Why, Jimmy! What are you doing here? Who brought—"

His grandmother interrupted, "Come in! Come in! Don't just stand there with the door open!"

Grandfather closed the door firmly, grandmother knelt and folded Jimmy in her arms and crooned over him, "You poor darling. You brave little fellow. Donald," she said firmly to her husband, "go get a glass of warm milk and some cookies." She led Jimmy to the old-fashioned parlor and seated him on the sofa. "Now, Jimmy, you relax a moment and then you can tell me what happened."

Jimmy sighed and looked around. The house was old, and comfortably sturdy. It gave him a sense of refuge, of having reached a safe haven at last. The house was over-warm, and there was a musty smell of over-aged furniture, old leather, and the pungence of mothballs. It seemed to generate a feeling of firm stability. Even the slightly stale air—there probably hadn't been a wide open window since the storm sashes were installed last autumn—provided a locked-in feeling that conversely meant that the world was locked out.

Grandfather brought in the glass of warmed milk and a plate of cookies. He sat down and asked, "What happened, Jimmy?"

"My mother and father are—"

"You eat your cookies and drink your milk," ordered his grandmother. "We know. That Mr. Brennan sent us a telegram."

It was slightly more than twenty-four hours since Jimmy Holden had blown out the five proud candles on his birthday cake and begun to open his fine presents. Now it all came back with a rush, and when it came back, nothing could stop it.

Jimmy never knew how very like a little boy of five he sounded that night. His speech was clear enough, but his troubled mind was too full to take the time to form his headlong thoughts into proper sentences. He could not pause

to collect his thoughts into any chronology, so it came out going back and forth all in a single line, punctuated only by necessary pauses for the intake of breath. He was close to tears before he was halfway through, and by the time he came to the end he stopped in a sob and broke out crying.

His grandfather said, "Jimmy, aren't you exaggerating? Mr. Brennan isn't that sort of a man."

"He is too!" exploded Jimmy through his tears. "I saw him!"

"But—"

"Donald, this is no time to start cross-examining a child." She crossed the room and lifted him onto her lap; she stroked his head and held his cheek against her shoulder. His open crying subsided into deep sobs; from somewhere she found a handkerchief and made him blow his nose—once, twice, and then a deep thrice. "Get me a warm washcloth," she told her husband, and with it she wiped away his tears. The warmth soothed Jimmy more.

"Now," she said firmly, "before we go into this any more we'll have a good night's sleep."

The featherbed was soft and cozy. Like protecting mother-wings, it folded Jimmy into its bosom, and the warm softness drew out of Jimmy whatever remained of his stamina. Tonight he slept of weariness and exhaustion, not of the sedation given last night. Here he felt at home, and it was good.

And as tomorrows always had, tomorrow would take care of itself.

Jimmy Holden's father and mother first met over an operating table, dressed in the white sterility that leaves only the eyes visible. She wielded the trephine that laid the patient's brain bare, he kept track of the patient's life by observing the squiggles on the roll of graph paper that emerged from his encephalograph. She knew nothing of the craft of the delicate instrument-creator, and he knew even less of the craft of surgery. There had been a near-argument during the cleaning-up session after the operation; the near-argument ended when they both realized that neither of them understood a word of what the other was saying. So the near-argument became an animated discussion, the general meaning of which became clear: Brain surgeons should know more about the intricacies of electromechanics, and

the designers of delicate, precision instrumentation should know more about the mass of human gray matter they were trying to measure.

They pooled their intellects and plunged into the problem of creating an encephalograph that would record the infinitesimal irregularities that were superimposed upon the great waves. Their operation became large; they bought the old structure on top of the hill and moved in, bag and baggage. They cohabited but did not live together for almost a year; Paul Brennan finally pointed out that Organized Society might permit a couple of geniuses to become research hermits, but Organized Society still took a dim view of cohabitation without a license. Besides, such messy arrangements always cluttered up the legal clarity of chattels, titles, and estates.

They married in a quiet ceremony about two years prior to the date that Louis Holden first identified the fine-line wave-shapes that went with determined ideas. When he recorded them and played them back, his brain re-traced its original line of thought, and he could not even make a mental revision of the way his thoughts were arranged. For two years Louis and Laura Holden picked their way slowly through this field; stumped at one point for several months because the machine was strictly a personal proposition. Recorded by one of them, the playback was clear to that one, but to the other it was wild gibberish—an inexplicable tangle of noise and colored shapes, odors and tastes both pleasant and nasty, and mingled sensations. It was five years after their marriage before they found success by engraving information in the brain by sitting, connected to the machine, and reading aloud, word for word, the information that they wanted.

It went by rote, as they had learned in childhood. It was the tiresome repetition of going over and over and over the lines of a poem or the numbers of the multiplication table until the pathway was a deeply trodden furrow in the brain. Forever imprinted, it was retained until death. Knowledge is stored by rote.

To accomplish this end, Louis Holden succeeded in violating all of the theories of instrumentation by developing a circuit that acted as a sort of reverberation chamber which returned the wave-shape played into it back to the same terminals without interference, and this single circuit became the very heart of the Holden Electromechanical Educator.