

The Buccaneer's Binnacle

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Abstract

This short story is about a boy's first experience with stealing something despite potentially serious consequences from his actions. He finds himself in a psychological wilderness; suddenly introduced to the disconnected and precarious nature of epoche: Socrates said that nobody knowingly commits an evil action: evil is turned into good in the mind. Here, the catalyst for the crime is a recognition of extraordinary economic value (in the mind of a 13 year old) that must be kept intact. He felt it was his moral duty, even an act of virtue to commit the theft; whether or not anyone would approve was not his concern.

Snow drifted down from the silver afternoon sky as the school bus approached the gated entrance to Century Maple Estates. Stone curtain walls circled the executive park, leaving only the slate rooftops of the large homes visible from outside. The oaks and maples that grew alongside the roadway welcomed the boys home with skinny, waving branches that changed their leafy uniforms with the seasons for as long as Dauphin could remember.

Mr. Knight was inside his guard house and waved to the elderly driver of the school's luxury coach as it came to a gentle stop at the entrance gate.

“Good afternoon, Enzo. How are the roads this afternoon?” Mr. Knight inquired with his usual friendly smile.

“Not bad yet. Just these two wee ones to drop off and then it's back to the garage. I should be home before the storm,” replied the old man. He signed the visitors log and waited contentedly in the hot gusts of warm air from the vents while the guard raised the barrier so the coach could enter the private community.

The Mercedes minibus steered around the fountain and stopped in front of the clubhouse where Victorian-style streetlamps cast circles of warm yellow light onto the snow. A soft chime announced to the boys that the seatbelt sign had been turned off and they were now free to egress. Enzo opened the folding door to the snowy sidewalk that would take them the rest of the way home.

“Have a good weekend, boys,” he said as they climbed down the stairs to the curb.

“You too! Bye!” they said in unison before he shut the doors. They watched him drive around the courtyard circle to the open gate, where he turned left onto the rural road that went back to town. The accelerating clatter of the motor receded into the early dusk while diesel lingered in the frigid air. Mr. Knight closed the iron gates as he watched the coach disappear up the road then returned to his crossword puzzle and late afternoon tea.

The boys turned toward home and walked slowly as if each step brought them closer to sleep. The snow on the ground was light and loose and the wind picked it up from their shuffled footsteps and carried it away. They walked without speaking; each reflecting on the day and anticipating their evening routines.

Dauphin Boission and Luc Shermaine were in the eighth grade at the exclusive Saint Erasmus school and lived on the same cul-de-sac of Harvest Court. They met a year earlier at the swimming pool complex and became best friends. Dauphin's father was a partner at the prestigious law firm of Marquis Chevalier & Boission where he practiced REIT law and his mother was a professor of international trade law at McGill University. Luc's parents, Aimee and Ariel Shermaine, owned a boutique law firm in downtown Montreal that specialized in patents and intellectual property. The two families often got together to socialize with other couples who lived in the park.

In June, Dauphin's parents would separate and he would move to Maui: His mother was raised in the islands and returning to her family was far more appealing than staying in Montreal, enduring the harsh winters, and starting over as a single mom. An outdoor lifestyle would be much

more fun, and he would have lots of cousins to play with, she had explained to him. He looked forward to the change.

The boys reached the cul-de-sac and waved good-bye.

“See ya later, alligator,” said Luc.

“In a while, crocodile,” replied Dauphin.

Dauphin surveyed the real estate agent's Subaru parked in front of the red brick mansion. Her cheerful bird logo and slogan were on the side windows. A few inches of snow had accumulated in a perfectly smooth layer except on the hood where the heat of the engine had melted it. Dauphin scooped up a handful of powdery snow from the roof and formed it into a loose ball as he walked to the door then threw it at the car, where it shattered soundlessly on a tire.

Stepping into the foyer, he shook off his boots and hung his puffy down coat on the rack over the heater. His heart was beating heavily in his chest and his mouth was dry as he walked into the kitchen: he wasn't sure if Mr. Dove had called his mother to discuss the missing toy. He could hear the adults in the den and decided to take an after-school snack to his room rather than make himself readily available for a cross examination.

From his backpack, he carefully lifted out the teak box with dovetail joints. He opened it and looked at the lacquered mahogany and brass of the model yacht. It was exquisitely hand-crafted. The instant Dauphin saw it, he felt the power it held over him. He had never seen anything so perfect, so miniaturized.

Emile had turned the cabin lights on and off and sounded the horn with an app. All the boys had gathered around and peered into the detailed salon then discussed sailing one just like it to islands visited on family vacations. Afterward, Emile put it carefully back into the wooden box before placing it under the bleacher steps so it wouldn't get stepped on while they kicked a ball around.

When the recess bell rang, Dauphin watched Emile run inside without his model and he tried to call out to him but couldn't because his throat was suddenly very tight. Alone on the

playground, he picked it up and started toward the schoolhouse with every intention of giving it to Emile. Then, as he walked toward Frontenac Hall, he passed through the playground gym and without a second thought, hid the small chest in the tractor tire swing.

At lunch bell, he was the only one outside and had swept the dusting of snow off the swing in order to sit. He pushed the frozen tire in lazy ellipses and surveyed the area to see if anyone was watching. When he was confident that he was alone, he lifted the chest out of the tire and put it in his backpack. With his tablet and some notebooks on top, it would be fine there, he thought.

After school, Emile was stuffing his belongings into his own backpack when he realized that the model was missing. His toothy smile turned to anguish, and tears filled his eyes so suddenly that they almost spilled over and down his cheeks. Mr. Dove rushed over and tried to help him remember where he left it. He assured Emile that he would stay to look for it. On the way out the door, one of the other boys volunteered that he thought he had seen Dauphin holding the teak chest at the end of recess, but he shrugged when the teacher looked at him for a response. Within minutes the classroom was empty except for Mr. Dove who tried to comfort Emile. Dauphin didn't look back as he walked to the breezeway to meet the bus that would take him home and away from the guilt pains in his stomach.

Now, in the snug warmth of his room, he was eager to have a thorough look and opened the teak box. The bulb of the desk lamp reflected off the fair lines of the sleek blue hull. Even with a magnifying glass, the details seemed so perfect and complete that his exam felt dreamlike. He downloaded the maker's app then connected to the model's Wi-Fi and began to experiment with the controls. He played with the virtual throttles, revving the engines to maximum power. The little brass propellers spun eagerly in the air. The sound of its powerful engines through the speakers excited him.

Dauphin sat back in his chair, took a deep breath, and exhaled. He sat for a moment looking at the model, admiring its beauty. It occurred to him that his little caper would be watertight if there had been time for some basic planning but dismissed the idea as sociopathic. He understood that he had stolen from another student and would be expelled if discovered. His parents would go

berserk if he were kicked out of his father's alma mater with only a few months left in the term. There was nothing that could be done now. Admitting to the theft would carry the same punishment. He swung his legs back and forth and tried to find a bolt-hole.

He looked at the snow through the dormer window then tilted his head back and stared at the ceiling. Kids from very wealthy families didn't appreciate expensive gifts in the same way as regular kids, he thought: To Emile, it was just a toy that would be played with for awhile, until it broke or got lost, and then there would be two more to take its place. His parents were probably consoling him with promises at that very moment. He decided that Emile wasn't going to miss it very much.

To Dauphin, the boat had a magical aura and a strange energy awakened in him that felt familiar yet new, like his swimming lessons: He took to the water like a fish, his father told everyone at the office; swam like an Olympian almost from the moment his face touched the water. Dauphin said it was almost like he *remembered* how to swim. He tilted his head back and forth slowly so the light from the lamp touched the different parts of the model and considered the mysterious feeling.

He couldn't help but be overwhelmed by perfection in miniature. It was almost unbearable. It was a masterpiece that he appreciated far, far more than he thought Emile could ever understand. He was preserving art, he thought; safeguarding a treasure from someone who thought it was a mere toy. Which is why he thought it was okay to steal it.