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THE INCALCULABLE ORGANIZATION OF HENRY MIDDLETON, AGE TWELVE BY GAVIN TIERNEY COPYRIGHT 2007

Henry Middleton had never lost anything before. He had always been exceptionally organized. As a young child, Henry had kept his toys properly lined up and his clothes perfectly folded. If organization were regarded in higher esteem, Henry would have been labeled a child prodigy, a Mozart or a Picasso, writing great manifestos on orderliness. Instead, friends and relatives thought the brown haired boy with freckles a bit peculiar, as Henry's parents, Meredith and Simon, showed off his well-kept picture books, his categorized toys, and even the cabinets of food Henry oh so liked to reorganize. In his many color-coordinated drawings, Henry never went over the lines.

Soon after Henry learned to read, he began organizing his crayons alphabetically. When he learned to write, he gave all of his stuffed bears name tags. Continuing his legacy of intense orderliness, Henry began kindergarten with a day planner, keeping all of his assignments well documented. Of course, Henry was the only child at Greenfield Elementary with a day planner.

Organization ran in the Middleton family. Henry's father was the head of a large accounting firm and his mother had done quite well by writing a variety of books of lists. Henry's father's firm had been in the Middleton family for three generations and, in those three generations, had never made one mistake. Simon Middleton was a tall and slender man with a well trimmed mustache. He was often said to wear outfits that were "well-put-together," as in: "Simon, you look well-put-together today" or "Mr. Middleton that is a very well-put-together ensemble you're wearing." To Simon Middleton, this was the highest form of a compliment.

Henry's mother, Meredith Middleton, wore equally well-put-together outfits. Her earrings always matched her shoes and her sweaters always matched her eye shadow. Mr. and Mrs. Middleton were well put together indeed. Henry's mother had begun writing books of lists the first day Henry went to school. Her first book of lists, *Is Your Child Ready For School?*, was wildly popular and was responsible for many children showing up at school with such things as matching ensembles and day planners. Henry's mother's second book, *Did You Forget Something?*, helped parents stay organized by providing outlined shopping lists for any occasion. When Henry was in fourth grade he asked his mother about her writing, unable to grasp why anyone would need organizational books. Mrs. Middleton explained to Henry that her books were for people like his Uncle Doug, one of "the sad, disorganized inhabitants of the world."

By the time Henry reached sixth grade, his mother had written books with lists for babysitters, fathers-to-be, preschool teachers, and even accountants. Sadly, Henry's mother had never written a book of lists on how to not lose things when you are in sixth grade. And why should she have? Her son Henry had never lost

anything. Henry had never misplaced his homework or left his bike out in the rain.

The final member of the Middleton family was Henry's Uncle Doug. It was to Simon's older brother, Doug, that Henry owed being an only child. Simon and Doug Middleton fought throughout their childhood. Doug was highly unorganized and, when Henry was born, Simon decided that life would be far more orderly for Henry if he was an only child. While Simon Middleton finished high school and went on immediately to college, Doug Middleton, at the age of sixteen, dropped out of school to travel to Europe. Before catching a bus to the airport, Doug told his younger brother his dreams of becoming a famous photographer, known for his intense panoramas of European monuments, loved by millions. Doug also told Simon that he was going to get tons of chicks. Doug never became a famous photographer, nor was he ever loved by millions. Instead he wandered around Europe for a year, before returning to his hometown, where he became a door-to-door knife salesman. Doug had blonde hair and a very poorly trimmed beard. All of this did not help Doug Middleton get chicks. Doug's approach to life and the selling of knives were very similar; he did as little as possible. Habitually, Doug would wait until the last few days of the month; he would then rush from house to house trying to sell enough knives to meet his quota.

The end of the month was the only time that Doug did not appear at the Middletons for dinner. Typically, Doug ate dinner at the Middletons three or four random days a week, arriving after the meal had already begun. While Henry enjoyed his Uncle Doug's company, it was always pointed out by his parents that Doug was the least organized person they knew.

By the time Henry entered the sixth grade, he was quite aware of the importance of organization in the life of a Middleton. So, it was quite disturbing to Henry the day that he lost his glasses. During an especially wild game of dodgeball, Henry placed his glasses on the sideline. However, when the game ended, Henry's glasses were missing. In addition to being highly organized, the Middletons were quite nearsighted. For years, Henry's mother had warned him of such an instance and how glasses did not grow on trees, or any sort of shrubbery for that matter. Henry fumbled his way through the remainder of the day, wondering what he would tell his parents. Because Henry had never lost anything before, he had never needed to tell a lie. Henry constantly knew where all of his things were, he always had his homework done, and he had never gotten into trouble. This made Henry an easy target at school. At the beginning of each school-year, bullies would pick on Henry, knocking his belongings onto the floor and standing around laughing as Henry picked them up and put them back in order. However, Henry gained pleasure from reorganizing his belongings and typically by the third week of school the bullying had stopped. Henry's teachers were thrilled to have a student like Henry, a student who was dependable, always ready for class with his homework typed and containing no spelling errors. So, when Henry was asked by his mother where his glasses were, Henry told a horrible and disorganized lie.

"Well, Mom, you see," Henry began, squinting in order to properly see if she was believing his lie, "today at school we had a fun game called 'Pass the glasses,' where each of us had to pass our glasses around the circle to other students. The game was going just fine, and I was about to get my glasses back, when a bird, a really large bird, flew into the room and grabbed my glasses in his beak. We all chased him for four or five miles when a flock of birds, all the same color as the bird that stole my glasses, showed up. The bird we were chasing joined them, and, after another four or five miles of chasing they all split up. We couldn't tell which bird had my glasses and it was also time for math, so we returned to the school."

Mothers, on the whole, are amazing and clever people, able to detect lies, even if, as was the case for Mrs. Middleton, they have never heard their son tell one before. How they do this is a mystery to children worldwide. Henry's mother saw through Henry's lie immediately. Henry's dishonesty, Ms. Middleton decided,

could wait, positive that her son would eventually tell the truth. The situation and the strategy was later explained to Simon Middleton. During dinner, Simon and Meredith Middleton told Henry that they would buy him a new pair of glasses that weekend.

All seemed well. Henry was going to get a new pair of glasses, allowing him to live the remainder of his days in a highly organized and systematic way. However, at the end of the following day, Henry, wearing a pair of old glasses that were slightly out-of-focus, found his backpack missing. Oddly, the contents of his backpack had been left behind, piled neatly underneath his desk. Henry remembered having carried the backpack to class that morning. He remembered placing it underneath his desk, which was in the middle of the front row. He even remembered making sure it was there after returning from lunch. Still, as Henry reached to grab it at the end of the day, it was gone. He could not find it anywhere. Henry did, however, find his glasses. Henry's glasses sat precisely where his backpack had been. The glasses looked exactly the same as when he had lost them the day before, perfectly clean and scratch free, the type of glasses only a Middleton would own.

Henry's parents were happy when Henry told them about finding his glasses, telling the truth as Mrs. Middleton knew he would.

"I knew you of all people wouldn't have lost anything for good," Henry's father told him. "I myself have only lost three things in my life: a pair of sunglasses, a birthday present, and a hamster I had when I was young. I bet that you, son, will lose even less than that." Henry remembered the birthday present. For Henry's ninth birthday, his father had hidden a present so well that he didn't find it until two years later, when Henry turned eleven.

"Middletons simply don't lose things," Henry's mom added, reaching to fix Henry's hair, which, of course, needed no fixing. That night Henry went to bed without telling his parents about the missing backpack.

The following day Henry carried his books under his arm and his pens and pencils neatly in his pocket. Henry did not let any of his belongings leave his sight. Henry was doing quite well at not losing any of his possessions, until gym began. Gym was Henry's least favorite class, but not because of the athletics involved. Henry actually enjoyed most professional sports, finding the rules of the game especially appealing. Henry hated gym because of the chaos of a sixth grade gym class. It struck Henry that in sixth grade the rules of a sport mattered very little. What did matter was picking the right people for your team. Henry was always chosen last.

Yet, after a disorganized and noisy game of Four Square, Henry gained a new reason for hating gym class. When he went to change, Henry found that while all his clothes, books, and writing implements were still waiting in a locker, his shoes were not. Underneath his clothing was Henry's blue backpack. That afternoon, Henry walked in the front door and announced to his mother that his shoes had been stolen.

It was not the first time that theft had entered into Henry's overly organized world. Once, when Henry was in first grade, another child named Harold Meyer noticed Henry's nice leather day planner and, while Henry was using the bathroom, took it. However, immediately after returning from the bathroom, Henry knew his things were out of place. Within a minute, Henry's first grade teacher had retrieved the day planner and given it back to Henry.

The day after Henry told his parents that his shoes had been stolen was a Friday. That morning, Henry was joined by Meredith and Simon Middleton as they all sat patiently, waiting to enter the principal's office at Greenfield Elementary.

"I am very sorry to hear that things are being stolen from Henry," the principal said, after the Middletons entered his office. The principal, Mr. Fortman, was a large bald man with a beak-like nose who had been a huge fan of turtles when he had started his career in education. The summer before his first year as a teacher, Mr. Fortman had saved a baby turtle on a beach in Mexico. For a few years his students had given him small turtle figurines and a number of posters. All of these he had placed in his classroom and, later, his office. Yet, over time, the children of Greenfield Elementary had stopped giving Mr. Fortman turtles. Mr. Fortman's wife, though, had not. Every Christmas and birthday for fourteen years, the lovely Mrs. Fortman, who was also the second grade teacher at the school, gave her husband gift after gift of turtle paraphernalia. Sadly, Mr. Fortman had grown tired of turtles thirteen years earlier.

Mr. Fortman's office was overrun with turtles so the older children of the school had taken to calling Mr. Fortman's office "The Aquarium" and Mr. Fortman "The Turtle."

Henry's mother did not know about the nickname for the office and so commented, as she sat down, what a nice little aquarium he had.

"Oh, well you see it's the children, the children like buying me turtles, well not turtles, but turtle merchandise. Though I don't really know why, especially after all these years..." Mr. Fortman said from his desk, turtle figurines lining the edge.

"Well, it looks very nice," Henry's mother added, thinking to herself that in no way did it look very nice and how she, Meredith Middleton, needed to write an organizational book of lists for principals, with everything from how to run a pep rally to how many #2 pencils to order each year.

"So, like I said, I am very sorry to hear that things have been stolen from Henry. We all know Henry is a very smart and organized boy and I don't know why anyone would want to steal from him."

"Well, yes," said Henry's father, "But the question is how are we going to stop this from continuing?"

"And how are we going to get back Henry's shoes?" added Henry's mother. "This is all very unsettling for Henry. He simply does not lose things. We just know it is that Harold Meyer boy. He tried to steal from Henry in first grade and I bet he is doing it again."

"Now, Mrs. Middleton, I don't want us jumping to conclusions and accusing anyone without proper proof," said Mr. Fortman, who had already jumped to his own conclusions and, after meeting with the Middletons, was going to accuse without the least bit of proof.

Jesse Bivvins was, at that moment, waiting outside of "The Aquarium" knowing that he was about to get in trouble. Because of spotty attendance, Jesse had been held back two times in the 6th grade. In that time he had taken up stealing and picking on students smaller than him, which was all of them. Jesse had already stolen over 700 dollars from the school and other students. Though Jesse was often in Mr. Fortman's office, he had never actually been caught stealing. Still, it was Mr. Fortman's personal mission to get Jesse expelled from Greenfield Elementary.

Jesse Bivvins had not taken Henry's shoes, nor his glasses or backpack. However, Mr. Fortman did not know that Jesse had not stolen from Henry, nor did he care. Jesse Bivvins was given five days of detention and told that with one more incident he would be kicked out of school.

Sadly, Mr. Fortman's actions did little except to compel Jesse to threaten Henry that afternoon after school.

Henry was waiting on the school bus while the other students socialized outside. As usual, Henry sat alone in the same seat he always chose, near the middle on the passenger's side. Henry was reorganizing the books in his backpack when Jesse Bivvins walked onto the bus and sat next to Henry. Jesse had not been on a school bus for over three years. Everyone knew he drove an old green Buick even though he was only fourteen. Despite being the school thief, Jesse was always dressed very nicely, wearing clothes that were more expensive than those the teachers at Greenfield Elementary wore. Similar to Mr. and Mrs. Middleton, Jesse was well-put-together. Jesse's favorite item of clothing was a brown leather jacket that fell below his knees.

"So I hear you told Fortman I stole from you," said Jesse after sitting in silence for half a minute next to a frightened Henry Middleton.

"No, I never..." replied Henry, unable to turn and look at Jesse, so choosing to look at his hands instead.

"Cause you know I don't appreciate being ratted on," interrupted Jesse, making a fist with his right hand and clutching it with his left.

"But really I."

"It really makes me feel unwanted and angry. And really the only thing that calms me down is an apology."

Henry had given up trying to speak and simply sat back, awaiting the consequences of having a conversation with Jesse Bivvins, who fairly regularly felt unwanted and angry.

"But not just any apology. No, I kind of like something special. Like maybe a gift. A present. Kind of saying: 'Sorry Jesse, I know I shouldn't have told Mr. Fortman that you stole from me.' You know something like that." Henry nodded.

"So, how about you get me a new, oh, how about a nice new expensive camera, and I might be able to forgive you. I bet you could come up with an apology like that in a week. If not, then I might hold a grudge, and that would suck since we're such good friends and all."

Jesse Bivvins then stood up and got off the bus, leaving only the lingering smell of cologne. Even though Jesse had not stolen Henry's things, his demand of a camera left Henry assuming that Jesse was to blame for his missing items. Two minutes after the bus, finally, left the school, Henry kicked something that was underneath the seat in front of him. Bending down, Henry found his shoes, confirming in his mind that Jesse was the thief.

When Henry got home he placed his shoes on the shoe rack in his closet, fitting perfectly back where they belonged. He then sat down at the wooden desk in his room and opened his backpack to pull out his day planner. It was not until then, unpacking his backpack, that Henry noticed that his calculator was missing. Henry's calculator was distinct from the other calculators in his sixth grade class because it was in pristine condition and was labeled with Henry's name. Henry realized that he needed to put a stop to the stealing. He needed to get that camera for Jesse Bivvins. Opening his day planner, Henry circled the date one week from then, the day he needed to apologize to Jesse Bivvins in the form of a camera. Henry then tried, in a very systematic and logical way, to find a solution to his problem. Henry realized that it would be unreasonable to try anything except to find a camera to give to Jesse. Henry could not tell his parents. They

would only go to Mr. Fortman, causing more trouble for Henry. Henry couldn't reason with Jesse. Diplomacy would only anger Jesse more. Henry then began to deduce how he, Henry Middleton, was going to find a camera. Hours later, when Henry was called down to dinner, his notes read as follows:

Ways to Acquire a Camera

By Henry Middleton

Grade 6

- A) Ask Mom and Dad for an early birthday present
- B) Earn the money to buy one
- C) Borrow money from family and neighbors
- D) Steal a camera from a store
- E) Take Mom and Dad's (they never use it anyway).

Following the list were eight pages describing the positives and negatives of each of these endeavors. Henry even organized the list by estimated success ratios. On page two of the report, Henry had written out how asking his parents for an early birthday present held the highest success ratio based on previous experiences where he had been allowed to open two Christmas presents on Christmas eve and once had gotten his monthly allowance a week early.

Henry, never one to procrastinate, asked his parents that very evening if he could get his birthday present early.

"But, dear, your birthday is not for another eight months," Henry's mother said. Henry nodded.

"246 days," Henry added.

"I like that you are thinking ahead, Son. What, exactly, is it that you want?" Henry's father asked, wiping his well-trimmed mustache.

"Well, I was thinking that I wouldn't mind taking up photography," Henry responded as planned.

"A camera? Well that seems a useful thing to ask for." Simon Middleton always tried to give the most practical presents, from compasses to packs of pens. It was a bunch of sticky notes with Henry's name on them that Mr. Middleton had misplaced for two years.

"Dear," Meredith Middleton interrupted, gently putting down her fork, "I think that a camera would make a lovely present, but it is just too early for you to get a birthday present. It would simply ruin all of the surprise and fun." Mrs. Middleton directed the end of her comment to her husband.

"Well Henry, of course your mother is right, but we will most certainly keep a camera in mind in, oh, 230 days or so."

That night Henry went to bed glad that he did not have to give up his birthday present, but still unsure of how he was going to get a camera. Henry decided that it was time to move to Plan B.

The next morning Henry turned to the page in his notes entitled: "Plan B: Earn Money." On the page was a list of talents that could, possibly, help Henry earn money. The talents included: intelligence, height, punctuality, cleanliness, and good at addition. 'Do not lose things' had been crossed out and 'seldom lose things' had been written below it. These items Henry wrote down on a Henry Middleton sticky note which he slipped into his pocket before going downstairs and asking his parents for a ride to the mall.

Henry was just entering the age where the mall was becoming a place of

importance, a Mecca for the social elites of 5th and 6th grade. The endless shoe stores and the food court set the ambiance for adolescence. However, the social stratosphere of the mall held little interest for Henry; all he wished was to find a job. Most of the store managers either laughed at him and told him to come back in a few years, or robotically handed him an application, saying they would keep it on file. Each application was fairly quick to fill out, as Henry had no previous experience and, after writing his name and his address, wrote down his mom and dad as references. Henry was frustrated that most of the applications did not have a place where he could write down his talents, and often wrote them at the bottom of the application. After leaving the mall with his mom, Henry regretted not taking the applications home to properly type them out.

The next day was Sunday, a good day to borrow money Henry thought. However, Henry had just as little success borrowing money as he did making it. Both his mother and father told Henry that he would get his allowance the following week and all of Henry's neighbors were confused and told Henry to come back the next day with a signed note from his teacher explaining the fundraiser.

That night Uncle Doug joined the Middletons for dinner. After the meal, Henry and his Uncle offered to clean up.

"So, your mom tells me you are looking for a job," Doug said, carrying plates into the kitchen. Henry said that yes, he had been looking for a job, but it wasn't going well.

"When you're older you can start selling knives with me if you'd like," Doug said, handing Henry the plates to wash.

"Yeah, when I'm older, I know," Henry said somberly.

"Why are you so eager to grow up, hunh? You don't need a job yet. Go to school, be a kid." Henry knew that momentarily Doug would begin the story of his wild days in Europe. Doug could seldom resist telling stories of being young and carefree.

"It's just that I really need to get a camera, Uncle Doug," Henry said hoping to sidetrack the conversation from stories of Europe.

"Ah, yes, photography. I see we share the same passion," realizing he had played right into Doug's hands, Henry turned his focus to the dishes.

"You know it was photographs of Europe that started me down the path I've taken." As Doug told of how he had photographed all the great French monuments and how Henry should always follow his dreams, Henry began to think about what he would do next.

On Monday morning, Henry went to school aware that the next phase of his plan required him to steal a camera. Having never stolen anything before, Henry was unsure whether he could actually bring himself to steal. Henry feared that by stealing a camera his life would spiral downward, leading to more horrific crimes and eventually a life in prison. Perhaps Jesse Bivvins would forget, Henry thought. Perhaps he would have found someone else to threaten, someone else to extort.

It wasn't until school let out for the day and Henry walked out to the bus in front of the school, that Henry saw Jesse Bivvins and knew that nothing had been forgotten.

"Hey, hey Middleton." Henry turned to see Jesse standing in the faculty parking

lot, by his car.

“Hey Middleton, I’ll see you Friday, okay? Friday.” Henry nodded quickly and turned to get on the bus, all the while watching Jesse Bivvins who stood there staring at Henry. After leaving the school, Henry realized that there was no way that he, Henry Middleton, could steal anything from a store, especially a camera.

No one was around when Henry got home. Henry’s mom had left a note, listing the places she had gone. After reading the note and eating an apple, Henry decided that, while he could not steal from a store, stealing from his own parents, somehow, did not seem as frightening. Checking again to make sure the driveway was empty, Henry snuck into his parents’ room.

Henry’s parents abided by, what Henry’s father called, decorative diplomacy. Their bedroom was divided, the left half decorated by Henry’s father and the right half by his mother. Henry’s father believed in placing objects in their intended place. When given gifts, Henry’s father immediately found a place for the item. The result was a jigsaw puzzle of framed items on the walls, including diplomas and inspirational posters, and hundreds of trinkets on his dresser.

Henry’s mother, on the other hand, was content with posters and trinkets being properly labeled and stored. Meredith Middleton, instead, went through decorative phases, based on themes such as sunflowers or seashells. Currently, the right half of Henry’s parents’ room was covered with paintings of hot air balloons, something that none of the Middleton family had ever experienced firsthand. In the top drawer of Simon Middleton’s dresser, in between a pile of the family’s unused passports and rows of well folded black socks, lay the Middleton family camera. Two years earlier, Henry’s Uncle Doug had given it to the family for Christmas along with a set of knives, which had helped Mrs. Middleton cut thin, perfect slices of whatever she desired. Since receiving the knives, Mrs. Middleton began a tradition where every Monday and Friday night the Middleton family enjoyed thematic dinners where every item was cut into infinitely thin slices.

Henry picked up the camera, moving the passports and the socks closer together, eliminating the void the camera had left. Henry dared not shift anything more than he had to, certain that his father would notice if anything else was moved. Simply by entering into their room, Henry was putting himself in jeopardy. So, after taking the camera, Henry made sure that the room was identical to the way he had found it. And, indeed, when Henry had left the room, it was as if no one had been there at all.

“So, your mother and I have been talking,” Henry’s father said that night as they were all finishing up a thinly sliced dinner of pork and gratin potatoes. “We think that if getting a camera is so important to you, perhaps you could borrow ours until your birthday.” Henry sat straight up, his eyes wide.

“Wha-what made you think of that?” Henry said, laying his silverware down and trying to act cool.

“Oh, we were just trying to think of ways we could all be happy,” said Henry’s mother, looking at Henry’s plate of food and imagining that the pork could have been sliced even thinner.

“Well, I really don’t need your camera, not really at all, you really shouldn’t get it for me. You see, I’ll just wait until my birthday.” Henry pictured the camera that was right then hiding in his t-shirt drawer.

“Well, okay, honey,” said Mrs. Middleton, her motherly intuition sensing a disturbance.

After dinner, as Henry went upstairs to finish his homework, he didn't know what he was going to do about Jesse Bivvins, but he did know that he needed to return the camera to his father's dresser drawer as quickly as possible. Henry waited until he heard his dad walk downstairs. Then, following a pattern that Henry had already mapped out in his head, he entered his parents' bedroom, opened the drawer, parted the socks and passports, and replaced the camera.

The following three days were a disaster for Henry Middleton. Having seen all of his plans fail, his life fell into disarray. Throughout the remainder of Monday night, Henry felt quite noble, proud that he had returned the camera to his father's sock drawer. However, early Tuesday morning, Henry once again contemplated stealing his parent's camera. For two days, Henry waffled back and forth, his nobility ultimately winning out. Henry considered acting sick that Friday, but knew that on the following Monday, Jesse Bivvins would still be waiting.

Henry became distracted at school, always looking to see if Jesse Bivvins was around. Henry stopped doing his homework, instead spending his afternoons and evenings surfing the internet in the hopes of somehow finding a free camera. He began to let his appearance go, looking not at all well-put-together. Henry's room became very disorganized, clothes scattered about as if reflecting the torrid state of Henry's mind. Perhaps the worst was when Henry actually started losing things himself. At first he lost a pencil, then his homework, then a few socks, and, the day before his deadline with Jesse Bivvins, Henry left his day planner in the Middleton's backyard by mistake. Henry found it the following morning after it had rained all night. Henry was not cheap when it came to his day planner, saving up his allowance for months in order to buy the sturdy black leather day planner that notified you when it was time to purchase pages for next year. Still, despite the excellent quality of Henry's day planner, the evening of rain eventually infiltrated its leather binding, soaking the many notes and reminders that Henry had written on its pages and staining the leather exterior.

Placing his soggy day planner in his backpack, Henry went to school without a camera, fearful of what would happen that day after school let out.

Throughout the morning, Henry imagined the horrors of his meeting with Jesse Bivvins. At lunch, Henry discussed his predicament with Stuart Downey and Walter Nibbs, the two people with whom Henry always ate lunch. Stuart and Walter empathized with Henry, each of them had been extorted by Jesse Bivvins before. Henry was in the middle of asking Stuart and Walter for advice when Peter Knowles rushed up to their table.

"Jesse Bivvins has been expelled!" he said, looking over his shoulder as if to be certain Jesse was not standing behind him. "He skipped detention all week and Mr. Fortman kicked him out of school today! I heard his car screech out of the parking lot around nine this morning!" Henry couldn't help smiling. Could it be that his problem had gone away that easily? But, after getting high fives from his three friends, Henry began to wonder. As the end of lunch neared, Henry decided that indeed this was not good news at all, if anything it would create more trouble for him. If Mr. Fortman had expelled him, then, in part, Jesse would think it was Henry's fault and, now being expelled, he would feel even more angry and unwanted. Still, there was little that Henry could do. There was no way he could make a camera appear, such miracles simply didn't happen in a proper and organized world.

Henry returned to his sixth grade classroom five minutes early, his last opportunity to think of a way to face Jesse Bivvins and survive.

Entering the classroom, Henry saw Harold Meyer crouching down by Henry's desk.

“Hey,” yelled Henry. Harold Meyer stood up, a look of shock on his face.

From his hands, Harold dropped Henry’s day planner. Harold Meyer attempted to escape out the door but was stopped by Mr. Dawson, Henry’s sixth grade teacher. Moments later Harold was in “The Aquarium.” Mr. Fortman found Henry’s calculator in Harold’s backpack. Harold then admitted to stealing all of the items from Henry, enacting a revenge he had begun planning in first grade when he had been caught attempting to steal Henry’s day planner. Mr. Fortman called Henry’s mom, who was quite happy to inform Mr. Fortman that she had told him so. Harold Meyer was suspended for two days and was made to write Henry a letter promising to never steal from him again.

Henry accepted the letter, pleased to receive documentation and to get his calculator back. Still, his victory over Harold seemed insignificant. Despite new information, Mr. Fortman had no intention of reinstating Jesse at Greenfield Elementary. Henry still needed to face an expelled and unwanted Jesse Bivvins after school.

To Henry’s surprise, Jesse was not waiting for him as the last bell rang and school let out for the day. Jesse’s car was not in the parking lot or on the street and, even though it seemed to take exceptionally long for the bus to leave the school that day, at no point did Jesse board and sit down next to Henry. Again, Henry’s hopes grew. Perhaps his friends had been right and Jesse had forgotten about the whole ordeal. But then, as the bus pulled up to Henry’s house, he realized how wrong he was.

There, parked across the street, was Jesse’s green Buick and leaning against it was Jesse Bivvins. Henry didn’t get up from his seat until the bus driver started yelling at him. Henry looked to see if his mom was home but didn’t see her car in the driveway. Quickly, Henry contemplated how far it was from the bus to his front door and if he could make it before Jesse caught him. While there was great simplicity in such a plan, Henry recalculated as he saw Jesse walk in front of the bus, waiting for Henry to get off. The bus started moving the moment both of Henry’s feet stood on the asphalt, the doors closing as it moved away.

“Hey, pal,” Jesse said, grabbing the back of Henry’s neck with his right hand. “So, I guess you probably heard the bad news.” Henry nodded with the help of Jesse’s hand.

“Man, I tell you, after something like that I sure could use an apology.” Again, Jesse moved Henry’s head in a nodding motion.

“So, what do you say? How about you hand over that camera I asked for. Boy, I sure do hope that you have that camera.” Jesse released Henry’s neck in order to allow him to either open his backpack and take out the camera or face what he liked to call “Jesse Bivvins’ Natural Consequences.”

Henry stood in front of Jesse Bivvins, holding his backpack to his chest, unsure of what to do or say, hoping that his mom would come home at that moment. Henry had never really believed in luck, thinking that everything could be figured out in a logical and organized manner, that everything made sense if you looked close enough. But up until recently Henry had also never lost anything and so he was willing to modify his world view slightly, as long as it meant Jesse Bivvins would leave him alone. And maybe it wasn’t luck. Later, after some time had passed and Henry’s life had gone back to being well planned and organized, Henry traced back the instances that led up to that moment and decided that, in fact, there was order to it. For at that moment, though Henry’s mother didn’t show up, a man carrying a briefcase full of knives did.

After introducing himself to Jesse Bivvins as Henry’s Uncle, Doug Middleton

opened up his briefcase full of knives and began doing exactly what he was trained to do, he tried to sell knives. He explained to Jesse how well the knives slice and dice and how they really can cut through anything. He then asked Jesse Bivvins if he wanted a demonstration. Jesse Bivvins grew quite scared and fled to his car, telling Doug and Henry to stay away from him.

Two weeks later, Henry's parents bought him a new day planner as an early birthday present.

Gavin Tierney has been published in *WordRiot*, *Cross Currents*, *Icetongue*, *The Circle*, *Toasted Cheese*, and *The Boston Phoenix* and has been nominated for The Pushcart Prize. He currently lives in Seattle, Washington, teaches at an alternative high school, and talks on the phone every week with fellow writers Margot Landau and Amy Norton.

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