

This time they came quietly.

This is Jun-Jun, because I remember exactly how it was. I am the best hearer, the best jumper, the best runner – they think I brag, but they know it’s true!

Early morning they came, hoping to catch us asleep – plainclothes and uniforms, I believe, all pressing in around us. The boys had blown out the candles – we were just folding up the papers, and we heard a heavy step on the ladder below.

Why I stopped and noticed, I don’t know. José and Gabriel again, like Raphael says – on the Day of the Dead, the dead look after you. Anyway, I said how quiet it was – we usually heard the old lady at the bottom of the house shouting and banging about because she had about ten children, who were up before dawn making mischief. So we all stopped still, and wondered where the morning sounds had gone.

Maybe she was the one who sold us? I don’t know.

I could hear someone talking below, sounding worried. Then the feet coming up the ladder sounded too heavy, that’s all I can say – they sounded heavier than any man who lived up in our part of the building, where you had to be light.

I went straight to the roof-hatch, opened it up.

Raphael was almost too scared to move – I had to smack him one. Gardo and he picked up what they could carry and we went so slow, so silent – because we didn’t want to make a sound. If it was police, we wanted them to come right in and find an empty room. They might stick around, thinking we were close, and then bust up the next little room – the last thing we wanted was panic and for them to see us run. So even though my guts were aching and the voice inside was screaming, *Get yourself out of here!* we made ourselves go slow.

I went first and guided Raph, who guided Gardo. I was waiting for a shout, or a gunshot even – I thought they had to have the place surrounded, they wouldn’t be that dumb again – but there was nobody on the roof.

Then, just below, I heard someone call Gardo’s name.

‘Hey, Gardo! It’s your cousin!’

Lies.

‘Gardo? Hey! He’s sick.’

Crazy lies, telling us only that we had to get moving.

We stayed low, poised there for a while, like three scared little cats. I beckoned, and we all crossed to the next roof, a TV aerial helping us swing down silently. There were wires stretching across, but we all knew not to touch them in case they were bad electrics – once you’ve had a zap off a power line you go careful. So we just went on our

toes down into a dip in the roof-space where we definitely couldn't be seen.

Luck holding.

A man was sitting in his window, smoking a cigarette, just watching us. I saw some other people too – a woman flapping out some washing, and two children playing with a dog. Everyone stopped and stared at us, but no one said a word and the dog didn't bark.

Then down below we heard battering and hammering on doors, and we knew the police were moving. Right at once we heard feet running, we heard shouting – we could hear big dogs, and engines were revving. All of a sudden, over a ledge and level with us, there was a policeman coming up a ladder – and he was looking right at me.

He shouted something, and got a whistle in his mouth. Then I saw him go for his gun, but he was clinging to the ladder still, and we were gone before he could aim. Under us and all around us, though, the world was full of noise.

Raphael.

Running for your life two times in one day? We were so scared, both times, we thought our hearts would just blow apart. But the thing is, when we thought about it later, Rat had been chased so often, and grabbed at so often, that he must have had extra senses. When he was on the station, it was bad, but it could be bad at Behala too – someone thinks it's fun to grab the skinny kid with the crazy teeth and see what he's got. When Rat sees someone move, his feet get ready to jump.

The policeman with the gun was slow, but what was so dangerous was how many more there might be and how quick we had to be. Rat led, and got to the edge of our roof, and over a low wall. From that we hopped down onto a long warehouse roof, and we ran right along its guttering. We were clear for a moment, but then we saw a policeman in the grass below, bursting through a gate – and it's the same thing again: his gun's out and he's got a whistle to his lips. He had no chance to fire because we got straight round some chimneys and then up the slope – but he'd have a radio, and soon they'd be all around us, we all knew that. We had to think so quick – and let's just thank Rat again for being the one who'd got to know the area. He was the one who spent the time checking in with the street kids, so he was the one who saw the chance and went for it.

The next-door building was the very one where those children lived, where we'd all spent the one night. Rat saw at once we had to dive back in among them. How were the police going to take in a hundred kids? It was the smartest thing he ever did.

Now, the place they lived – the place we were opposite now – was a big old block of flats that had caught fire years ago – just a big, black, ugly cement thing, nobody knowing what to do with it. The gang lived there – a hundred or more, scavenging, begging, sweeping and doing things you don't want to know about. They'd get cleared out, and come back again, then a big clearout, and back they come – that's how it always was in these old places.

The roof we were on ran right up to it, and one jump would get us in the window. As we got to the edge, we could see some of the kids sorting out their breakfasts. A little one looked right up and waved.

It was a long jump to get to it, and I know Gardo and I just looked for a moment, too scared to try. But we did it, Rat first, and Gardo next, and me ... I just threw myself, and they caught me somehow, dragged me up so I was bloody again. We ran then, through the kids that had come to see us, to help us, and they clustered around – they knew we were running because there's not many kids that haven't had to do the same thing – and they were wild for us. We all ran together. We found stairs down, and everyone was screaming and laughing, shouting to their friends, so suddenly we were a mighty crowd,

pouring into the hallway.

It saved us, I swear.

When we reached the street, we just streamed out, wild as birds, screaming over the street in all directions. There were two police cars, another one roaring in. There were men with radios, guns out and arms wide to catch us, staring around wildly as this mass of little boys and girls rolled out over them. One grabbed a kid, and everyone flew away from him, howling out and laughing like it was a game, straight into the street, where a truck had to slam on its brakes and a bus swerved round up over the kerb, straight into the police car.

Then, just like birds, we were all gone, spreading out and ducking through the alleys and store-fronts, policemen running but hopeless. It was all three of us and about five or six other boys, but then they flew off on their own, and the three of us were safe, still running till we reached a road.

Then, an amazing thing.

Gardo did something so smart I think Rat kissed him, but he says he didn't! Cool as anything, he held up the money we had left to a slow-moving taxi cab. I think the driver was so stunned he just pulled over, and we piled in before he could smell us. A few minutes later we were off again, on the South Superhighway, and he had twice the fare in his hand and he was smiling too.

'Where you going?' he kept saying. 'Where you going?'

'Naravo Cemetery,' we said.

Where else would we go? The square on the map.

And on this particular day, you know – another funny thing – probably half the city was heading that way too – we were just running with the flow. The Day of the Dead, and the Naravo's the biggest graveyard in our city: everyone goes there, rich and poor alike. So we got down low in our seats, and soon our happy driver was up the ramp and driving fast, overtaking buses and trucks. He put his radio on, and we sang.

We wound down the windows and we sang louder as the sun came up higher, right in our eyes. OK, it wasn't over, not at all. But we were alive another day, and that was worth singing for!

My name is Frederico Gonz, and I make grave memorials.

One small detail from me, for Father Juilliard. You ask, sir, so I will tell you.

I met José Angelico the way I meet many of my customers. I have a workshop on the cemetery road, just past the coffin makers. I specialize in the small, simple stone. I am very aware that my clients have next to nothing, and renting the grave has often taken most of their money. So I modify and modify and get down to the very lowest cost. The dead, however, must have that stone: the reminder, the eternal reminder, that this man, this woman, this child – existed.

On some of the graves the name is marked in paint, or even pen, and everyone knows how sad that is. Make something out of stone, I say, and no one touches the grave. The poor are not buried, you see. There is not enough ground here any more, so in the Naravo they build upwards. The graves of the poor are concrete boxes, each just big enough for the coffin. They go up and up – in some parts twenty boxes high. A funeral here is to slide the coffin in and watch the sealing of the compartment. Part of my service is that I cement the stone that I've made into place, and thus seal the chamber.

José Angelico used me when his son died. I was sad to see him again with news that his daughter had died also. It meant he had no one in the world now.

He was a thin, lean, gentle man who always spoke quietly. I knew that he was a houseboy for a rich man, but that was all I knew. He found me early in the morning, and he looked as if he hadn't slept for a long, long time. He gave me just a morning to make the stone, which is unusual, but he said he had run out of money for the funeral home, and the coffin had to be moved that day. It would be a simple ceremony, he said, because there were no relatives.

I offered him all my sympathies, and he paid me two hundred as a deposit, and I set to work.

Pia Dante Angelico: seeds to harvest, my child were the words he chose. *It is accomplished.*

I did not chisel it myself. My son is ten years old, and is a fine cutter now. He used to rough out and I would finish. Now, he finishes, and he's developing his own style of turning letters – small flourishes that add elegance to elegant words. He completed the stone in four hours, and we set it by for pick-up.

How was I to know it was lies? He looked to me so meek and so mild – there wasn't a lie in his face. He took the stone and paid me from a small leather bag. He had the coffin behind him, carried by two young men – street sweepers, they looked like. No priest. I went along and saw the coffin placed inside, and we said prayers for the child. I sealed it and fixed our little stone. All I could see was the worry and grief, like he was a man worn down to nothing. There wasn't a lie in his face.

When I read about him dying in a police station, I just thought, *Poor man*. I read the story to my son, and we said a prayer for him also.

Police Closing in

A spokesman for the city police said last night that important leads are being followed up ‘professionally, vigorously and relentlessly’, and that the undisclosed sum stolen from the vice-president’s house would undoubtedly be recovered. ‘You cannot keep this kind of money hidden. Experience tells us that somebody, somewhere, will blow the whistle soon. That is when we swoop.’

Requests for further details were firmly declined. ‘We are at a sensitive stage. We are talking to people who have to stay anonymous. All we can say is that we are confident that a breakthrough is imminent.’

Vice-President Zapanta is no stranger to controversy and has been constantly dogged by accusations and scandal. Trained as a lawyer, he has been notoriously quick to challenge and in many cases prosecute critics of his policies and personal conduct – to date, successfully. A spokesman for the senator reported that he was in ‘considerable distress but remains hopeful’.

Sources suggest the criminal was a member of the senator’s domestic staff. The president herself, who visited Zapanta last Thursday, said, ‘Our thoughts are with any colleague who experiences loss. Theft is theft: one feels violated, always.’

Vice-President Zapanta remains a key witness in the ongoing prosecution of his subsidiary company, Feed Us!, which collapsed with debts of two million dollars and was subsequently implicated in the hiking of rice import duties during the economic downturn last year.

The trial is now in its fourth year and the Star wishes to reaffirm that the vice-president denies all charges.

ZAPANTA MOURNS HIS LOSS!

Vice-President Senator ‘We are the people’ Regis Zapanta is said to be ‘extremely concerned’ at the loss – that is, the theft – of an undisclosed sum of money from his property last week. Sources close to the great man say that you can hear a pin drop – a banknote fall – and even the occasional groan of despair. Sources even closer say our much-loved vice-president is ‘enraged’ – and we all know what the senator’s rage has accomplished in the past.

Senator Zapanta achieved notoriety just three years ago when he ordered police to clear squatter camps to make way for his ground-breaking cinema/shopping complex. He was also made famous by a dramatic poster campaign aimed at the illiterate, featuring laughing orphans holding placards that spelled out his name – the children received no fee for their services.

The vice-president has always campaigned for wider education, whilst presiding over an education budget that has dwindled by 18% over two years.

He was not available for comment.



“WHAT THE HELL.....?”

Mohun's diary

Check out the face of super-smiling Regis Zapanta, who's now wearing a frown – just as the wind appears to be changing! Could the rumours be true? Is our man, who's spent a lifetime swearing he's clean, as oily as a back-axle?

If he really has lost ten million dollars, someone's going to ask the question: 'What was ten million dollars doing in your house, sir?' We all need ready cash. We all keep a stash of change ... But ten mill in dollars, just in case the ATMs are down?

Ten mill under the bed suggests someone's either not paying their taxes, or stealing other people's.

I didn't say that, sir – don't close my paper, don't shoot my family!

ENOUGH

is enough, say students

The very fact that Vice-President Senator Regis Zapanta keeps millions of dollars of cash in his home suggests that he is part of a corrupt other world – and should not be re-elected. This country could still move forward, but it won't until we've said goodbye to bad, greedy old men.

It's time for someone young and new!

Charuvi Adarme, president of the students' union, made her feelings plain in an impassioned address yesterday to those on the diploma programme.

'Five years ago,' she said, 'Zapanta campaigned on the slogan, *The brightest smile, the sharpest mind*. I'd add to that, *The most questionable conscience and the blackest heart*. He's spent more than three decades lining his pockets, and his main achievement is that he's made the country's poor feel worthless and powerless.'

What does the country need right now?

THREE THINGS:

A revolution.

Then a revolution.

Then – when the dust has settled – a revolution.

PART FIVE