

This is Rat once again, aka Jun-Jun, and I tell the part where I was the leader. Where it gets bad, bloody and oh so dangerous!

It was soon after Gardo got back, with me and Raphael waiting for him by the canal, the sun going down. He got back, and the police came in. Almost before we had time to talk, we heard the siren, and oh my God, it was a river of blue! If they'd come slow and quiet, OK – maybe they'd have got us, but oh God, thank you again that they love to make a noise and have to show up like some carnival, sirens blasting out over the town. We just did the obvious thing: soon as we saw them, we made off, no time to say goodbye, just a half-minute to grab my money, and out we went. Behala's a mile wide, and there are so many ways, so I led them down to the docks, we got a garbage barge across the bay, and then walked.

Gardo has a friend of an uncle or someone who has a store selling dry goods, and we slunk in there and slept over, wondering what on earth we should do, now we were really on the run.

That's what it was for us: *on the run*, wanted men with no place to go! We had the letter still, and the map – and Gardo told us all about the Bible-code, or what he understood of it. We told him about the fridge of money and Zapanta's house, and we sat there thinking and thinking, wondering how we'd do what we needed to do – everyone sure we needed that Bible, and nobody knowing what the next step could be.

I had the idea right then, because it was clear to me we had to stay safe. I said we should lie low in one of the big tourist areas where so many street kids work and beg. There's a great gang of them there, and I'd spent some time in it after my station days. So that's what we did: we went up to the strip joints around Buendía and found a spot by a cheap hotel. We put ourselves on the edge of the crowd and tried not to draw attention. I cut off Raphael's hair, just in case anyone came looking – made him look like a little madman, though he's cute enough still – cute enough to beg from foreigners, though he wouldn't do it.

I said you got to, he said no. I said my money wouldn't last, and Gardo told me to shut up. So I sewed the cash into my shorts, and looked after us all with it, eating on the street and smoking to look rough as we could. We stuck together and stayed in the dark – stayed with the street boys for a night in the ruin of a place they used, but none of us felt safe. They weren't mean like the station boys, mainly because there's so many coming and going, but I think we were just so used to being a three. The crowd made Raphael nervous. We found a tiny room instead, high up in a stack of old shacks over a laundry. It wasn't much bigger than a coffin, but it was better than no doors, no windows, and the rent was low. We could just about sit up straight, so there we went and whispered our plans.

I made one little change, which Gardo laughed at me for – but wasn't I the hero in the end? I have never liked being nailed up inside a house, and I did it for Raphael too, who still wasn't sleeping good: I got an old tyre lever, and loosened part of the roof. Emergency exit, just in case – because we knew things were getting hotter and hotter. We knew this was real, scary heat, all around us – even in the weather there was a wind, and the freak typhoon hovering over the sea, and we all felt something big was coming. There was no way back from it now, and for the boys it meant they couldn't even see their people again – I heard them whispering and wondering, and Raphael cried at night for his auntie and his cousins.

They could never go back to the dumpsite: they had lost their homes, I guess.

We knew most of all that everything depended on that damn Bible, and the little bit of paper we had, with the lines of numbers. We had to get that Bible, and set those two things together.

So Gardo risked it, and one day borrowed my dirty clothes and walked all the way to Colva Prison.

He sat and sat, working out where the guards came out, and he spent another two days watching the different shifts, pretending to be deaf and dumb. When he spotted the guard he was looking for, he followed him.

He followed him away from the prison, then he let the guard see him and followed some more. The guard – Marco – he just kept going and going, then found some little tea-house in the Chinese quarter. Just the two of them. That was so brave of Gardo, because we'd all worked out how the guard must know there was a price on Gardo's head. We'd gone over it and over it: the prison must have got wise to his connection to the dump, and talked to the police. They would have given anything to know what the old man and he had talked about.

The big question, therefore, was if we could trust Marco.

When Gardo came back, he told us bad news.

'The man wants twenty,' he said.

He meant twenty thousand, of course. That was the price of the Bible.

Raphael cursed and said: 'You sure he's got it? You sure he'll give it?'

Gardo thought he had, but what was dangerous was whether he'd really hand it over. He could so easily take a bit of money, say half – and then hand us in. How big a reward would they be offering for news of Gardo? The one thing none of us talked about was what would happen to us if we got arrested. We all knew that if we got taken again, we'd never get out, we'd be dead. I was getting nightmares too by this stage, waking up crying, all three of us like little boys.

But we stuck together like a gang.

'You think he'll give it?' said Raphael for the hundredth time. 'Even if we get that kind of money – you think it's safe?'

Gardo shrugged. ‘We either forget it,’ he said, ‘and live here for ever. Or we give it a go.’

Twenty thousand pesos, though, and I had a little under two. My going-home money, squandering it on sitting around. Like I said, we all knew we were near something huge, but the thing we were near had fences all around it. Raphael read papers to me, and every day there was an update on the Zapanta robbery, with more little hints about how it happened. *Police following leads and hoping to arrest someone soon.* The fat man saying nothing, but the old scandal of what he did or didn’t steal himself was being raked over again, and his big face looking dirty and not smiling any more. The stories would finish the same way every time: *Nothing ever proved against him.* Gardo told us again and again what the old man in prison had said, and we all knew who we believed.

I wanted that fat pig’s money so bad I was aching, and all I could think about was fridges, and that brave houseboy on a truck, stopping at a graveyard. How he got the key and his wallet into the trash: we always wondered whether he slung it when they were chasing him, or put it there for someone special to find. We talked it through, but never found an answer – I think it must have been some last-minute desperate thing, and then they must have beaten it out of him at the police station, just before they killed him. If I get to heaven, it’s the first thing I’m going to ask him. I have no doubt he’s up there. None.

Anyway, to return to the story. After a week of this and getting nowhere, I decided to make my move, and get the twenty for Marco. I’d been turning it over in my head, not sharing it – but the more I thought about it, the more it seemed the only way.

I told Raphael and Gardo I was going back to Behala dumpsite, ‘just to fetch something’, and I thought they weren’t going to let me. They said I was crazy and it was way too dangerous. They told me if anyone saw me I could be grabbed and handed over – there was bound to be a reward offered now for any one of us.

They couldn’t imagine what it was I wanted to get, of course, and I didn’t want to tell them for fear of bad luck. I’m just so used to keeping what I do private, I could not share what I was going to do – nor the fact I had to do it before the end of the month, which was coming up fast. All Souls’ Night on its way – that’s the Day of the Dead. I had to get it done before that.

I just said, ‘I’m going,’ again and again. Midnight came, and I slipped out through the roof while the boys were sleeping.

I did say, I think, when you look like the devil’s child you can’t even ride a bus?

You can hold out your money, but you still get swatted off like a fly – that time I rode with Raphael was luck, and the fact that he has a nice smile and I hid behind him. So I walked some of the way, and jumped trucks some of the way. My luck held, and got better: I found a garbage truck by the city zoo, and guess where it was going? It was going to Behala, so I got inside it. Closer to my old home, I had to be on the lookout. Other kids might jump up too, and if I was seen, the boys were right – I had no family, so I might have been sold like a dog.

We got inside the gates all right. There was a police car parked up, doors open, and that gave me a turn. But the police were just chatting to the guards, all scratching their arses, and the dogs didn't notice anything.

The truck took me past the Mission School, slowing down like it was my personal taxi. I was out fast, dropping and rolling, and I dived in under the building. The school is a big set of metal boxes, all bolted up together. The lower ones stand on legs, so there's a little bit of space beneath. I curled up here and waited for my heart to slow down. Nobody was out, it seemed, so I uncurled and moved to the back.

There's a guard at the front, but he dozes away, because who's going to break in? Who's going to steal storybooks? It would be robbing from your own people, which is why I felt so low. I was about to thief not just from the Behala people, where I'd lived, but from Father Juilliard, who had been about the closest thing to a father I'd had so far, never knowing my real father. He was a bit slow and a bit too trusting, of course – everyone knew that. But he was a good old boy and I loved him.

I started to climb the corner.

The windows downstairs all had shutters, which were locked up at night. The upstairs windows had bars and no shutters, and I'd always made sure of an entry point. The truth was that just now and then it was nice to sleep in a big room, but I didn't make a habit of it. The other bit of truth is that I was in the bad, very bad habit of lifting money from the school safe – I did it once a month, just a little. So there were two bars I'd managed to bend so nobody would notice but my head would fit through. I was through now like a shadow, and down on the old man's bit of carpet.

How did I steal from the safe?

OK. The safe is on a table, fastened to the wall. It's not big, and it doesn't need to be because it doesn't hold much. I guess all the big money goes through banks, and they just keep a bit of cash for day-to-day stuff – a bit of cash for emergencies, I suppose – but we're still talking twenty or twenty-five thousand, so I hoped. I would never take much, just a hundred or so, hoping Father Juilliard would never miss it, and if he did, he'd think he'd miscounted. Once, twice a month at most – and that was how my little stash got to grow, which is what I didn't tell Raphael, who's more honest than me. But it's coming out now.

You're thinking, *How does a boy like a dumb rat get into a safe?* And the answer is so simple you could laugh. Father Juilliard, my friend, you must have a bad memory, because you write the lock combination in your diary. You change it every month, sir – at the end of the month – and write the new code down. I would always see it, open on your desk. I'd remember it. This month it was 20861 – I saw it when we were on the computer and you brought us that lemonade ... but it wouldn't be the same after All Souls' Night – and that was why I'd had to make my mind up to come.

I put in that code, and the door clicked open. Inside I found twenty-three thousand and a bit more. So that was our Bible money for Mr Marco.

It went into my shorts, and I got ready to leave.

On a thought, because – please don't think the worse of me – the shame was making me ache, I stopped again. The old man's desk was full of paper, and there was a pen in the drawer. I hadn't meant to, and I knew it was a risk, but I hated the thought of you never knowing, and wondering who had so betrayed you, so I drew you a picture. I could spell Jun-Jun, so I put the words over me and a big arrow. I tried to draw me like I was hugging Father Juilliard, who I gave a big crucifix to in case the likeness was no good. I put lots of 'x's, because I knew people used them as kisses – and I put it in the safe. I had tears in my eyes. This was a goodbye, and though Behala dump could go up in flames and I'd just dance – the Mission School had been a good, safe, warm, friendly, happy, fun place. Sister Olivia had been one of the best, and the volunteers before her. Father Juilliard had told me stories, given me food, given me money. He'd even kissed me once, which nobody before or since ever has done.

When I thought of this, climbing down the wall was hard, but I thought about Raphael and Gardo and what we had to do. I thought about José Angelico too, smashed apart by police, and I carried on.

I waited for a garbage truck to come by. I waited for it to slow. I was up on the back and inside, and we sailed out of the gates onto the street. I reached our little house well before dawn, and slunk in next to the boys so they didn't hear me. One of the nice things about Raphael is – because he slept with his little cousins, I guess – he's in the habit of sleeping up close. I crawled in under the blanket, and at once felt an arm go round me, holding me tight – and I felt less like a mean, sly, traitorous, ungrateful thief.

And he had no nightmares that night – he slept easy till sunrise, breathing soft, right on my neck.



Gardo again.

Rat wouldn't tell us where he got the money for two days, and when he finally did, it didn't seem like such a big deal to me, but I could see he was feeling bad so we said that if we got the Bible, and if the Bible gave away the great José Angelico mystery – and if we got to that pile of money – we would put the twenty thou back in the Mission School, with some added as a gift.

Rat was happy again, and we made some careful treks out over the city to find the guard – which we did, and we fixed up for the handover, and I knew this was the most dangerous thing yet, because he knew I was desperate for that book, which meant first it was valuable, and second – he must know something very strange was going on.

I kept thinking of being in that prison with Sister Olivia, and how they had my picture taken, and I was thinking all the time, *What if, what if, what if?* – till I couldn't sleep.

*What if they stake out the tea-house?*

*What if they get me?*

*What if they just shoot me?*

*What if they have the whole place surrounded?*

*What if they're all there in plainclothes, waiting for me, and I don't see them till it's way too late?*

They would break every bone in all our bodies, slow and mean and loving it.

Raphael had told me all about the window in the police room, and I knew if we were taken, none of us would come out of there. I knew I would die before I let them take me or the others: I would fight until they had to kill me, because what Raphael told me scared the life out of me, and I know I could not have done what he did.

It was Tuesday afternoon we were to meet, just after Marco's shift – same place: the tea-house in Chinatown. I washed the good clothes Sister Olivia bought me, because you don't get so many street boys round that area and I wanted to blend in more. Raphael and Rat shadowed me all the way, but separated up and keeping a distance – we didn't want to be a threesome in case policemen were waiting.

I used a fifty to buy a baseball cap, and with the trainers on I didn't look like a street boy at all, and I just walked quickly through everyone and everything – but I had my hook, though – we all did – we'd cut them down, nice and short, and mine was in my jeans at the back, where I could get it easy, and it was sharp all down the edge, because I have had to fight before, and cursed when I had nothing.

The little tea-house was dark, with shutters down, and I went straight in, not looking up, through to the table we'd used last time, right up by the kitchen, with a red lamp over it just bright enough to count out money. Marco was there before me, all alone –

quite a big man, with a big, thick neck, and I slid in opposite him thinking, *Do it fast, do it fast* – I was still walking in my mind, and I wanted to be walking out of there, even though it looked like no one was around, it all looked safe, and even the kitchen was quiet.

Marco, of course – he wanted to see the money first, so I counted every note, and I could see greed in those little eyes so I thought maybe I was safe really, and twenty thousand was enough for him: I counted it out, sitting on the edge of my seat, getting ready – and he pulled the Bible out of his bag, and laid it down on the table as the Chinese who owned the place put cups down in front of us.

I told him he needed to prove it was Gabriel Olondriz' book, because I was thinking how easy it would be to give me any old Bible, then come back asking for money all over again – but he opened the cover soon as I asked, and I could see where the man had signed it, and notes – best of all, I could also see lines of letters and numbers like the code he'd talked about. Also, the whole thing was so well worn I guessed that it had to be the real one.

So I left the money where it was, took up the book, and I moved fast.

Maybe Marco hadn't expected me to just cut and run like that, but I'd been thinking how to play it, and I remembered the kitchen being near, and that was where I'd go – I jumped up and ran straight for it. Even so, I wasn't fast enough, and he got me: he kind of threw himself over the table and grabbed me hard, shouting, and the cups all crashed to the floor, and the money went everywhere, all over the floor. He half let go, panicking about the money, I think, so I got an arm free – I twisted like a fish, and saw there was someone running towards us through the shop. I heard a whistle blow then, and people were shouting – the grip on my arm got tighter, but I bucked and tore myself away, fighting for my life, I guess, and Marco was shouting: 'I've got him! I've got him!'

My hook was in my hand then.

Yes, I dragged it from my pocket, and I turned and cut up at his face: I don't know what I cut but I felt it cut through something, and the man cried out and fell backwards. He let go, of course, and I think I must have got an eye – and I'll be honest, I hope so: I hope he's a one-eyed prison guard now, and telling his tale about how he tried to sell a little boy after a deal was made, and that boy turned round and took his eye out – I hope his whole cheating face is cut right through, my gift to a filthy traitor.

I didn't have time to look, though, because I was crashing out into that kitchen, straight into a policeman who was just running in: I went under him, and he tripped, and I slashed with my hook again but missed – and then I crashed out into a yard and over a fence, and I was running.

'Gardo! Gardo! Gardo!'

It was Rat, right on my heels: I heard two gunshots, but felt no bullets, but someone started to scream – I passed Rat the Bible and we separated, me crossing under a bridge through traffic, people watching but no one reaching for me, even when I jumped up on

a taxi which was moving right at me, over the roof and rolled in the street – a moment later I was up and ducking into a fish market, and ditching my shirt – that lovely shirt – and I ran through where it was darkest, where there were boys cleaning fish over the drains, and no one was after me, but I still kept running right through and down to the canal. I swam fast to where the shacks come down to the water, and I hauled up and used my hook again to slash up my jeans and hack them short – my trainers too, I kicked them off and gave them to some kid who was watching me, and I walked along the bank, then in among the huts, praying to God that both my friends were safe, and shaking all over.



We were safe, but right away we knew we wouldn't be for long.

This is Raphael again, but writing it with Rat to get it just right – because the next part of this was my fault, I think. I just about saw Gardo run and Rat streak after him, and then a policeman was shouting at me, so I took off, right across the street, with the buses braking and blasting their horns. I think they must have followed me, and I'm not as quick – and even though I went the back ways, I think they saw the direction I took and made some guesses. Rat thinks maybe they photographed me and Gardo when we arrived at the tea-house.

Anyway, I think we came within an ace of being caught, and why they didn't just grab us first, I don't know. Maybe they wanted to be sure it was the Bible we wanted and needed to know why. Maybe they thought a prison guard could take on a little kid like Gardo and they'd have him for sure, cornered in a tea-house. I do not know.

Anyway, I think they must have had photographs because the next morning they were knocking on the door again, right where we lived. Rat reckons they put men out, showing our pictures and showing money, because someone gave us away ...

Raphael.

We met up again early evening. We slunk in different ways, as planned, and climbed up to our little box of a house, way up the ladders to the top of the pile. We were so pleased to see each other, we just shook hands and hugged and laughed.

Rat went down to get food, as he couldn't read, and Gardo and I set to straight away, no messing. No messing.

We knew the clock was ticking, so we just drove on – you think we could have slept?

We lit a dozen candles, put them around the Bible and the paper. First we had to argue about what exactly a book-code was, and though he was the one who heard about it from the old man, I can say it was me who saw how it worked – no offence to Gardo, but I've got quicker eyes. He says we did it together, and that's true.

We sat and studied like two little schoolboys. The Bible covers were worn, the pages were dirty. Just inside the front was a column of numbers: 937, 940, 922 ... All high numbers like that, ten of them, down in a long column. Now, we'd never been educated in numbers, but to survive you have to add up and take away – none of us were stupid, so we had some ideas.

The pages they marked were all towards the end, and Gardo remembered the old man had been talking about the Gospel.

'St John,' he said. *'It is finished.'*

That was where we started looking, and that's where a lot of fingers had been. All those pages were coloured in and used so well they were even thinner than the rest – we had to be careful they didn't come off in our hands. The bit about the crucifixion was on page 940 – the first number in the strip. So we concentrated on that page. All along the bottom, in someone's handwriting, was written:

*And at that time the sky grew dark and Jesus cried out, 'It is accomplished' – and the curtain of the temple was rent in two, top to bottom – the earth quaked and the graves were opened and the saints were raised ...*

Gardo saw that each line of print had a tiny number to mark out the Bible verse, so now we tried out a hundred combinations, muddling backwards and forwards. We put the numbers in the strip against the numbers in the column. We tried counting down, and then across, but it wasn't easy because nobody knew what it was we were expecting – so he'd do one thing, I'd do another and contradict. We got to a point where we were going over the same ground again and again. All we knew was that the numbers we had – 940.4.18.13.14 – had to be set against the lines somehow, so as to turn them into letters – that was what the old man had said. But whatever we tried we ended up with

gibberish.

Rat came back smelling of rum, with a nip for each of us. We ate, and he went to sleep for a while.

Gardo and me settled to trying more variations. We put out new candles, and we weren't fighting any more. He'd have a go, and hand over to me. While he tried again, I just sat and thought and thought, then he did the same.

Midnight came round, I think, and maybe that was the magic. It was the end of the month, and we were slipping into All Souls' Day – that's the Day of the Dead here. Maybe José Angelico and Gabriel Olondriz came and sat beside us – I swear it was crowded in the room. Maybe they put the answer right in his head – because Gardo hit the jackpot. Instead of going left to right, he went right to left. 4 lines down, 18 words to the left, he got a capital 'G'. 13 down, and 14 to the left, he got an 'o'. It was the first time we had a word.

He moved on 5 letters and got nowhere, so we decided that the slash might mean change the page, so we turned over. That didn't help us, so we turned the page back. 5 lines down, 3 letters in, we got 't'; then 6 down, 4 across, we got our next little 'o'. The slash meant 'turn back a page', and now we had two very meaningful words, and we just looked at them, hardly breathing:

*Go to*

We turned back a page whenever there was a slash, so we were going backwards through the book of John. It was falling out all over us, just counting carefully, straining our eyes because the words were so small. We made mistakes, but we were laughing, because the whole thing was opening up.

*Go to the map ref where we lay look for the brightest light my child.*

Rat woke up and we read it to him.

He shook our hands, then we hugged him, and he said: 'I know what a map ref is.' My, were his eyes big and shiny. 'I was in some class,' he said, 'and they're all doing maps. That's a map "reference", that's what it's talking about. *Where we lay* is where we were – where we met, maybe? And he's thinking his little girl is reading this.'

'Open the map,' I said. I thought even then he was being a smart-arse, but we were learning to try everything anyone said, every way. 'Let's look at it again,' I said.

We'd stared at the map a hundred times, hunting it for arrows or crosses, wondering if they'd been marked and removed, straining our eyes over it. We stared and stared, and Rat said, 'A map ref is a reference to the numbers, OK? It's a line of numbers.'

'Numbers again?' I said. My head was aching, but we went back to the letter. There were no numbers apart from the code we'd just cracked, so we turned back to the map. Numbers all round the edges, but still no way in. Until I looked at the envelope and

saw: *Prisoner 746229*.

I read it aloud.

‘That wasn’t his number,’ said Gardo quietly.

‘What wasn’t? What are you saying?’

‘When we arrived. We were in the waiting room, and the prison boss came in and asked Sister Olivia about the name. He said we had the number wrong, because at first I thought maybe we had the wrong guy completely.’

‘You go up and down, that’s all I remember,’ said Rat – and that’s what cracked it. We split the six numbers into two: 746 and 229. Sure enough, the map had a 74 and a 22, they were right there along the sides, and took us straight to a square in the middle. In it was a graveyard. In fact, the graveyard covered the square, and we never did find out what the 6 and 9 were.

‘He put the fridge by a graveyard,’ said Rat quietly. ‘That’s what the gardener said.’

‘*Where we lay*,’ I whispered. ‘That means where we are ... buried.’

There was a little silence, and then we all started to laugh again, quiet as we could. There was a little light coming through – we’d worked through the night, and had our answers. We held hands, we slapped our palms and Gardo kissed me right on the head. It had all just fallen all over us, and we were getting close. A graveyard in the centre of the city – the Naravo. We’d go and look for *the brightest light* – a special grave, maybe? Or a part of the church? Once again, the trash boys were ahead of the trash police.

Or so we thought.

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**

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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