

Appendix

A letter from José Angelico:

To whom it may concern:

I am writing this knowing that if it is in another man's hands, then I am dead or soon to die. I took this money hoping that I would be the one to return it to where it belongs, and I had my schemes for doing that. But I write as a dead man, I think: for they will not take me and let me live.

My daughter is Pia Dante Angelico, and she has nobody in the world now. Perhaps I can appeal to you to make her safe and help her? She is as innocent as they are all innocent; I know I am betraying her. Pia, if ever you get to see this, know that my mission was

simple, and what I did, I did for you and children like you. From the day I came to know Mr Gabriel Olondriz — and I was a very young boy when I met him — a fire burned. He set me ablaze, as he started so many fires. He taught me many things, but he taught me most of all that Senator Zapanta's crime — the crime he uncovered and was jailed for — was monumental. Senator Zapanta stopped a nation in its tracks. He stopped our country making progress. Worse than that even, he gave other countries an excuse to stop helping us. For the millions he took, how many millions did he prevent even being offered? Worse, worse even than that — he reassured other politicians, officers, clerks, teachers, shopkeepers, neighbours that to steal is to rise, and to rise with your foot on the face of the poor is natural law. Even the poor believe that, and it is one of the reasons we stay poor.

Pia, I got tired waiting. There is a saying

from St Matthew, 'Knock, and the door shall be opened' — and maybe that is true of God, but it is not true of man. The locks and chains that I have seen. The seals on the doors, my child. In our life, the doors remain shut. That is why I set my life to serving Senator Zapanta, in the hope that one day he would leave his door ajar, and let me through it.

I waited many years before he did, so let me tell you what happened, just so there is no mystery. Just so you know how simple it can be, to rob those who rob us.

Senator Zapanta has a traditional, frightened mind. His smiles are false: he is worried all the time. He has lost money in bad deals, and he despises banks. His own father lost a lot of money when a bank collapsed: Senator Zapanta trusts only cash. That is why in the basement of his home he built a vault, and that is why the dirty money from his crimes is kept under the ground.

He moves money from the vault to a smaller safe upstairs. He only moves small sums, keeping the main chamber locked. It requires a key and a combination. How do I know this? Because he came to trust me with both. To live without trust is difficult, and tiring. What he came to trust in me, Pia, was what he thought was my sweet, obedient stupidity. I have spent the years being only willing and obedient. I have followed orders, and smiled. I have spent a lifetime nodding, serving, providing, assisting — and no task has ever been too great, just as no task has ever been left undone. For those reasons, I rose and got closer. I became essential to Senator Zapanta, because I was one of the only men in whom he placed trust.

He took me down to the vault eight years ago. The door is metal, and so heavy it runs on wheels. Inside the room are locked boxes, but the cash was kept on a shelf, in bricks. Those bricks came and went. He told me he

liked to have six million there, because six million filled the shelves. When the bricks of cash ran down, he would move money from his banks, and a briefcase would arrive. He started by always taking me down with him. Then — one day, three years ago — he gave me the key, and the combination, and sent me down alone. He would change the combination after every trip, of course — so there was never any danger of me visiting the vault without permission. I came to see that he only used five sets of numbers. He had five sons, so he used the birthdays of his boys. He thought I was too stupid to memorize numbers, and the key — he knew — could not be copied if it never left the house. He did not imagine that in my room I kept notes, and memorized them, and worked out the variations of numbers. Pia, I burned my notes in the kitchen stove lest anyone check. I learned from Gabriel Olondriz, and I burned them as soon as I made them.

He was right about the key, of course, but — once again — he did not think his houseboy would draw it and take the drawing to a locksmith on the other side of the city. He did not think the houseboy would return, and try the copy the next time he got a chance, and note how it failed to match, drawing revisions carefully and crumpling the paper to look like trash, to smuggle it out again. He never thought that, just like my godfather in jail, with years to think and plan — I, José Angelico, thought in years rather than days or hours. Sixteen times I tried the key-copies before we got it right. Then it was a question of waiting for the right combination of circumstances. When Senator Zapanta announced a three-month trip to Europe, it seemed the time. The house staff was scaled down. Repairs and re-decoration of several rooms was announced — this would mean so many visitors. I started to worry about the fridge in the servants' kitchen, and I broke the

thermostat twice, and mended it again. When someone suggested we call in the repair man, I told my friends that I'd run out of patience and would buy a new one myself, out of my own wages. The housekeeper promised she would try to make it a house purchase, but I told her that in this hot country we needed a reliable fridge, and I would not wait.

The housekeeper trusted me. The guards trusted me. The thing I worried about most was that once I'd filled the fridge with money, we'd be stopped at the gate and searched — we are routinely searched, of course. But I was José Angelico, with the right papers, and there were delivery vehicles going in and out all morning, and I'd wrapped the thing in plastic and roped it ready for loading. We sailed through.

Getting the money from the vault to the fridge? It took two trips. I chose a Thursday, which is when I pull all the household trash together for the dump truck.

Nobody is surprised to see the houseboy dragging two, three or four awkward bags of trash around — especially when the builders are at work, making so much mess. When Senator Zapanta discovers the simplicity with which six million dollars disappears, I hope that he will fall to his knees and howl. Remember, Pia — and remember, Senator — whatever is said about me, I was no thief. I simply took back the money that was ours, and now I am about to put it in this coffin.

I have, of course, created the alternative route: if you have travelled this route, it is only with the help of Mr Olondriz — so I hope you are a friend. My final letter to him will lie in box 101, for 101 is the thing you cannot resist. With it lie instructions that only he will understand. The key to the box will stay safe with me.

Now I am so tired.

I am about to place the coffin in a grave that will be marked with your name, my child.

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I mean to find a way of returning it to the people from whom it was stolen. But if someone is reading this, it means I am almost certainly dead and the money is in their hands, and I can only say, 'Beware, because this money belongs to the poor. That is what you cannot resist.'

It seems fitting that the Day of the Dead is approaching. We will meet again, Pia Dante, but in the brightest of lights.

It is accomplished.