

# Trash



## INTRODUCTION

### BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF ANDY MULLIGAN

Andy Mulligan was born and raised in South London. After completing university in the United Kingdom, he worked as a theater director and he had grand ambitions of running the Royal Shakespeare Company. However, the economic downturn in Britain under Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher left Mulligan out of work in the 1980s, resulting in a life-changing visit to Calcutta, India, where a friend was repairing an orphanage. Mulligan's exposure to poverty in India made him question his life's path and he returned to Britain to retrain as a teacher, after which he taught in Cornwall, England; Vietnam; Brazil; and the Philippines. It was Mulligan's exposure to children living on a landfill in the Philippines that inspired *Trash*, which he wrote while working as a teacher in Manila, though he drew on his experiences with impoverished communities in several cultures to flesh out the story and characters. Mulligan published his first young adult novel, *Ribblestrop*, in 2009, though it was the publication of *Trash* in 2010 that garnered him international acclaim as a writer—despite the fact that *Trash* sparked significant controversy over its depictions of violence and its use of profanity. Mulligan subsequently wrote seven additional young adult novels before turning his hand to adult fiction in 2019.

### HISTORICAL CONTEXT

*Trash* was based on Mulligan's personal exposure to several children living on a landfill in Manila in 2010, during a school trip with his 11-year-old students at the British School of Manila, in the Philippines. Mulligan found the landfill's children—like *Trash*'s protagonists Raphael, Rat, and Gardo—to be highly intelligent, charming, and resilient. There was a charity-run Christian school on site, on which Mulligan based *Trash*'s Pascal Aguilar Mission School. *Trash* also mentions Smoky Mountain, which was an actual Manila dumpsite that operated from 1969–1995. Raphael's story about a deadly garbage landslide is based on an actual 2010 landslide at the Payatas dumpsite in Manila, which killed over 200 scavengers. Mulligan's characters are also based on slum-dwelling children he met in Asia in the 1990s, including a Calcutta street boy who—along with Manila's young scavengers—inspired the character of Raphael. Mulligan's uses of pesos as currency and Latin American names for some characters allude to Latin America—notably Brazil, where Mulligan taught in the 2000s—while the character name “Jun” connotes East Asia (where Mulligan also taught). Mulligan likely situated his novel in a fictional city bearing these diverse real-world reference

points so that he could symbolize multiple real-world communities and thereby criticize 21st-century corruption and income disparity on an international scale.

### RELATED LITERARY WORKS

Mulligan was inspired by John Boyne's 2006 Holocaust novel [The Boy in the Striped Pajamas](#), which he reportedly kept on his desk while writing *Trash*. He was also inspired by the motif of “golden tickets” in Roald Dahl's 1964 children's novel *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*, in which a young impoverished boy named Charlie gains access to a better life after he finds a golden ticket in a Willy Wonka chocolate bar. Charlie's “golden ticket” to a better life prompted Mulligan to think about what a “golden ticket” might be for children living as scavengers on a landfill. Like *Trash*, Mulligan's 2015 novel *Liquidator* similarly revolves around a plot involving young people who band together to expose injustices they face in their developing country. Another popular novel featuring a young protagonist who wins out despite living in a corrupt society is Vikas Swarup's 2005 *Slumdog Millionaire*, in which a young man miraculously wins a fortune on a game show based on knowledge he acquired from a childhood on India's streets. An earlier example of a book with a social message about childhood poverty is Upton Sinclair's 1906 novel [The Jungle](#), which addresses immigrant child labor in a rapidly industrializing early-20th-century Chicago. Like Mulligan, Sinclair advocated for better treatment of society's most vulnerable children through his writing.

### KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** Trash
- **When Written:** 2010
- **Where Written:** Manila, Philippines
- **When Published:** 2010
- **Literary Period:** Contemporary
- **Genre:** Young Adult Fiction; Thriller
- **Setting:** A fictional city with a large population of impoverished children and a corrupt ruling elite, centering on a landfill called Behala
- **Climax:** Raphael, Gardo, Rat, and Pia escape to a happy life as fishermen on the beaches of Sampalo.
- **Antagonist:** Senator Zapanta
- **Point of View:** First Person (multiple narrators)

### EXTRA CREDIT

**From Page to Screen.** *Trash* inspired a 2014 movie bearing the

same name, with the action relocated to Brazil. At Mulligan's request, director Stephen Daldry cast three unknowns from a local *favela* in the lead roles of Raphael, Gardo, and Rat.

**Flash Fiction.** Mulligan wrote *Trash* in just 10 days (during which he wrote for 10 hours every day) while living in Manila.



## PLOT SUMMARY

Raphael Fernández is a “trash boy”: he’s 14 years old and he lives in a shanty on a giant landfill called Behala, spending his days collecting trash to sell for food. Raphael works with his best friend, Gardo, who looks after him. Behala’s residents mostly collect plastic, clean paper, and rags to sell by the kilogram. Since not many people in their city have toilets, human feces—or, *stupp*—ends up wrapped in paper and thrown in the trash, which is what most of Behala’s residents spend their days wading in as they dig out garbage with their feet or hooks that they fashion out of metal.

Raphael reflects on the day everything changed: it starts when Raphael finds a bag. Inside the bag is 1,100 pesos, a map, a key labeled 101, and identification for a 33-year-old man named José Angelico who worked as a servant in a rich part of town called Green Hills. Raphael splits the money with Gardo and he pockets the bag. That evening, the police showed up at Behala (which rarely happens)—they’re looking for the bag. Raphael’s auntie foolishly tells them that Raphael found something, so Raphael lies, saying that he found a shoe. Knowing that they could get in trouble for lying, Raphael and Gardo decide to hide the bag with a boy nicknamed Rat (whose real name is Jun-Jun, though people sometimes call him Jun). Rat, who is about 11 years old, lives by himself in a wet trash hole full of rats. Rat agrees to hide the bag and he recognizes the key: it’s for a locker in Central Station. The next day, the three boys go to the station and they retrieve an envelope from the locker: it contains a cryptic letter addressed to a Gabriel Olondriz at Colva Prison and a slip of paper with numbers, dots, and slashes on it. The boys realize they are getting mixed up in something important.

Father Juilliard, a 63-year-old man who runs the Pascal Aguila Mission School in Behala, is collating all the accounts of the boys’ story. One day, Father Juilliard is at the school when Rat, Raphael, and Gardo come in (with feet black to their knees and a smell that fills the room) asking to use the computer to research information for a newspaper quiz. Father Juilliard lets them through and he fetches some sandwiches for them. He doesn’t know then that the boys are looking up José Angelico. When the boys are done, they run off, and Juilliard never sees them again.

The police return to Behala that night and they raid Raphael’s home, arresting a terrified, hysterical Raphael and dragging him

into an interrogation room. A detective (referred to as the “tired man”) repeatedly asks Raphael about the bag as Raphael is knocked to the floor, dangled out of a window, and choked. Still petrified, Raphael lies that he doesn’t know anything about a bag—he only found some money in an electricity bill. The tired man threatens to break Raphael’s bones and leave him on the train tracks, but Raphael sticks to his story. Eventually, the tired man gives up and the police throw Raphael out of the station. Raphael walks three hours home, bleeding and battered, but alive—unlike poor José Angelico, who was killed in an interrogation room. Raphael explains that José Angelico was adopted—along with 33 other street kids—by a man named Dante Jerome, son of Gabriel Olondriz. José Angelico also had a young daughter and no other living family, which is why he was writing to Gabriel Olondriz. A maid named Grace—who worked for the vice-president Senator Zapanta along with José Angelico—briefly narrates to say that José Angelico was a kind man who worked hard to send his little daughter, Pia Dante, away to school, where she boarded with a local family.

Olivia, the 22-year-old volunteer at the Mission School, narrates the next part: Rat comes to her explaining that Gardo needs to see his grandfather in Colva Prison. Reluctantly, Olivia agrees to take Gardo there. As she walks through the prison—which is a stifling warehouse stacked high with cages full of people, including little children—Olivia feels terrified, faint, and distraught. They pass through to the hospital wing and a frail old man—Gabriel Olondriz—walks towards them. Olivia realizes that Rat and Gardo lied to her in order to deliver Angelico’s letter to Olondriz. Olondriz explains that he’s a political prisoner. Decades ago, he tried to expose Senator Zapanta for corruption (because Zapanta had “spirited away” \$30,000,000 of aid money intended for the poor) and Olondriz has been in prison ever since. When Gardo asks Olondriz about the letter—which mentions Zapanta and the phrase “it is accomplished”—Olondriz becomes very excited.

While Gardo is at Colva Prison, Rat and Raphael go to scope out Zapanta’s compound, using Rat’s life savings (which he’s been accumulating to afford passage home to an island called Sampalo, where he hoped to become a fisherman). An old gardener spots the boys in the compound and he explains that José Angelico stole \$6,000,000 from Zapanta’s private vault by sneaking it out in an old fridge. The gardener is happy about this because he hates the corrupt and miserly Zapanta.

Back at the prison, Gardo recites Angelico’s letter from memory to Olondriz. Olondriz explains that it’s coded and he asks a guard named Marco for his Bible. Marco agrees to pass on the Bible later. The next day, Olondriz dies peacefully in prison, and Olivia is arrested. Olivia’s father enlists the help of a man from the British Embassy who manages to get Olivia released, and she flies out of the country as soon as she’s let go. Olivia never sees the boys again, though her heart is still with them.

The police are now swarming Behala, so the boys flee to the city where they rent a tiny room the size of a coffin with the rest of Rat's money. Rat loosens a ceiling plank leading to the roof, in case they needed a hasty escape. Gardo returns to the prison, but Marco wants 20,000 pesos for the Bible. Rat is ashamed about what he does to get this money: he sneaks back into Behala and takes it from Father Juilliard's safe (though he leaves a note with his name, the only word he knew how to write). Rat has been lifting cash from the safe for a while, which is how he managed to save a bit in the first place, but he's never taken that much before. The next day, Gardo meets Marco at a tea-house to retrieve the Bible. After the exchange, Marco tries to grab Gardo and he yells for backup, but Gardo gets away by slashing Marco's eye with his hook.

That night, the boys try to decode the Bible by candlelight. It takes them all night, and Raphael thinks that José Angelico and Gabriel Olondriz's spirits are there with them. They crack the code at dawn and they realize they need to go to the graveyard to look for "the **brightest light**" that Angelico references in his coded message. Just then, Rat hears a creak outside. Thinking quickly, Rat leads the boys out through the ceiling plank and across the rooftops into a building full of street kids. Rat's quick thinking saves the boys' lives—the police are in hot pursuit. The police lose the boys when they flee with the street kids, running in all directions.

Frederico Gonz, who carves gravestones, steps in to say he was very sad when José Angelico asked him for a gravestone for his little daughter with the words "it is accomplished" on it. Some newspaper headlines say that the search for Zapanta's missing fortune continues, as do trials suspecting foul play in Zapanta's bankrupt company, "Feed Us!" Other headlines accuse Zapanta of corruption for having so much money in his vault in the first place, and some even call for a revolution to depose him.

The graveyard is crowded because it's the Day of the Dead, and the whole city has descended there to feast among their dead relatives. The boys search for Angelico's family grave for hours, eventually bribing a guard for its location. When they can't find it, Gardo climbs atop a marble angel and he sees thousands of candles burning brightly on the other side of the graveyard, where the poor people's graves are. Realizing they've been looking in the wrong place, the boys go over to the other side—where people live in shanties next to dug-up graves—and they eventually find the Angelico plot, where coffins for José Angelico's wife and son are stacked above ground. On top is a grave for his daughter, Pia Dante, which makes the boys very sad. As they look around the graves for a clue, a little girl asks what they're doing. She says her name is Pia Dante, and Raphael turns as white as a sheet, thinking Pia is a ghost.

It turns out that Pia's foster family took her to the graveyard to meet her father and they abandoned her there when Angelico never showed up. Pia only survived because some street kids from the graveyard shanties fed her scraps of food. The boys go

to get some food for Pia, who looks weak. She starts to get feverish as she eats, but Rat mashes up a banana and feeds it to her slowly, saving her life. They lay Pia down in the back of a shack and they head back to the grave: sure enough, Pia's coffin is full of cash. Raphael says the money looks like food and drink, a new life, and freedom from the stink. The boys know they aren't going to keep it all because it doesn't belong to them. They also know they can't take the money to a bank or any officials, as it would just be seized and end up right back in Zapanta's hands. Suddenly, Rat has an idea: he suggests they dump it in Behala for the other "trash kids" to find.

The boys and Pia sneak back into Behala in the dead of night with the money in a couple of sacks. First, Rat goes to the Mission School and he puts some money in Father Juilliard's safe, leaving another note with his name scrawled on it. Rat rifles through the cupboards and he finds a few donated backpacks and school uniforms. Rat, Gardo, Raphael, and Pia stuff four backpacks with money and they unfurl the rest into the growing typhoon wind, which whips up the money and spreads it far and wide across the dump. They also discover another letter from José Angelico. Rat wishes he could stay to watch the trash kids dig around for plastic and discover \$100 bills instead.

In the last chapter—collectively narrated by Raphael, Gardo, Rat, and Pia—the four of them sneak onto a train wearing the donated school uniforms (blending in with other school kids) and they ride nine hours to Sampalo. They since learned to fish, bought fishing boats, and they plan to live out the rest of their days happy and clean on the beach.

An Appendix shows José Angelico's second letter, in which he explains how he meticulously crafted his plan to steal Zapanta's money after Olondriz was jailed. He implores the person who finds the money to remember that it belongs to the poor and that it should be returned to them.



## CHARACTERS

### MAJOR CHARACTERS

**Raphael Fernández** – A 14-year-old "trash boy" who lives on a landfill called Behala with his auntie and cousins. Like most of the other children in the landfill, Raphael and his best friend, Gardo, spends their days sifting through mountains of trash (which are mostly comprised of human excrement) searching for valuable items that they can sell for food. Raphael is prone to bouts of anxiety but he's still relatively childlike and carefree in spite of his difficult life. Raphael's life changes, however, when he discovers a bag belonging to a man named José Angelico, which contains clues to a stolen fortune. The city police brutally beat Raphael in an attempt to gain information about the fortune, but Raphael (though traumatized) doesn't give up the bag because he feels solidarity with José Angelico,

who was killed by police during Angelico's own interrogation. Raphael—along with Gardo and another young boy from Behala named Rat—manages to stay one step ahead of the corrupt police force. Despite the boys' lack of education, they're able to outwit the police, find the stolen fortune, and distribute it in Behala for the poorest of the poor to find, just as José Angelico wished. Along with Gardo, Rat, and Pia Dante (José Angelico's young orphaned daughter), Raphael escapes to a life on the beach, away from the stinking landfill.

**Gardo** – A 14-year-old “trash boy” who is Raphael's best friend and who also lives on the Behala landfill. Gardo is more serious than Raphael (who's a little more naïve) and he looks after Raphael as they work together to sort trash, seeking plastic, paper, and rags that they can sell by the kilogram for food. Gardo is concerned when Raphael finds clues to a stolen fortune and he subsequently gets mixed up with the police, but Gardo sticks by his friend and he often thinks strategically to ensure the boys stay one step ahead of the police as they hunt for the money. With the coerced help of Olivia, who works at Behala's Mission School, Gardo seeks out a political prisoner named Gabriel Olondriz at a squalid prison and he bravely retrieves a coded Bible from a corrupt guard named Marco, despite fearing the consequences of being caught. After discovering the stolen fortune and distributing it among the poor, Gardo escapes to a better life with Raphael, Rat (another boy from the dumpsite), and Pia Dante, the orphaned daughter of José Angelico (the man who stole and hid the fortune from the corrupt Senator Zapanta).

**Rat / Jun / Jun-Jun** – A dumpsite boy who's approximately 11 years old. Rat isn't “lucky” enough to live in the shanty town that's built on the dumpsite because he has no family there, so he sleeps in a wet trash hole among the rat's nests (which is how he got his nickname). Rat is a streetwise young boy who lived for a while at the city's train station, but he wound up in Behala because he heard about the charity-run Mission School there. Rat befriends Father Juilliard and Olivia Weston (the volunteers who run the school) and he begins lifting money from the school's safe to get by. Rat is dangerously malnourished and he's so filthy that he blends in with the trash, often going unnoticed by others. Though Rat doesn't trust anyone, he falls into a fast friendship with two other dumpsite boys named Raphael and Gardo and he joins them in their search for a fortune that was stolen and hidden from a corrupt vice-president by a man named José Angelico. Despite being illiterate, Rat is highly intelligent, quick-witted, and light on his feet. His cleverness saves the boys' lives on multiple occasions, most dramatically during a police chase across the rooftops of the city. Rat eventually realizes his dream of escaping to a better life in Sampalo along with Raphael, Gardo, and a young orphaned girl named Pia Dante. It's Rat's idea to distribute the stolen fortune in Behala for the trash kids to find, thus realizing José Angelico's dying wish that the money be distributed

among the poor.

**Senor Zapanta (vice-president)** – The story's antagonist. Senator Zapanta is a corrupt, “fat” politician who lives in a luxurious gated compound while the citizens of his country live in squalor. Zapanta is portrayed as the story's most despicable thief because he “stopped a nation in its tracks” when he siphoned off millions of dollars of aid money intended for the poor and he stashed it in his private vault. Zapanta deeply underestimates the intelligence of his long-time servant José Angelico, who smuggles out \$6,000,000 from Zapanta's private vault in an old fridge. Zapanta will stop at nothing to reclaim his wealth, including imprisoning Gabriel Olondriz (who attempted to expose him decades ago) and having José Angelico killed. Although Zapanta doesn't directly engage with Rat, Raphael, or Gardo, he bribes the police to hunt down his fortune, putting the boys in grave danger. Toward the end of the story, newspaper headlines reveal that the public suspects Zapanta of corruption because of how much money was in his vault in the first place. Some newspaper columnists even call for Zapanta to be deposed. José Angelico's theft thus achieves the twofold purpose of returning Zapanta's money to the poor and exposing Zapanta for the fraud that he is.

**José Angelico** – A 33-year-old man who is killed by the police during an interrogation just before the start of the story. Although José Angelico dies before the novel's action, he is central to the plot. José Angelico was adopted by Dante Jerome, the son of Gabriel Olondriz, a man who was imprisoned decades ago for attempting to expose a corrupt politician named Senator Zapanta. José Angelico—whose wife and son died—works as Senator Zapanta's servant to pay for his young daughter, Pia Dante, to attend school in another town. José Angelico devises an elaborate plan to steal Senator Zapanta's fortune so that he can return it to the poor. Right before José Angelico is caught, he throws a bag in the trash with clues to the location of the hidden fortune, which three young scavengers named Raphael, Gardo, and Rat discover. The boys successfully find the fortune, save Pia Dante, and honor José Angelico's wishes by distributing the fortune among the city's poorest residents. The three boys feel a great deal of solidarity with José Angelico and his cause, and they often feel as if he is supporting them from beyond the grave.

**Olivia Weston (Sister Olivia)** – A kindhearted 22-year-old British volunteer at the Pascal Aguila Mission School on the Behala landfill. Olivia originally travelled to the city in which the story is set to go surfing, but she ultimately decided to stay and help out at the school. The children living in Behala steal Olivia's heart, and she's particularly fond of a young orphan nicknamed Rat. However, Rat and two other boys from the landfill, Raphael and Gardo, put Olivia in grave danger when they dupe her into taking Gardo to Colva Prison. They do so in order to meet a political prisoner named Gabriel Olondriz who was jailed by a corrupt politician named Senator Zapanta.

Olivia is distraught after witnessing the squalor of the prison, which is stacked full of starving people in tiny cages, many of whom are young children. Olivia is arrested by the police after her visit to the prison, but her father (who is wealthy and well-connected) sends a man from the British Embassy to negotiate for her release. Despite the risks Olivia faced, she's ultimately glad that the boys tricked her. Olivia feels that she learned many things from her exposure to Behala and Colva Prison that she couldn't have learned at university, and she says that she left a piece of her heart behind when she left the country after her release.

**Gabriel Olondriz** – An elderly, frail political prisoner at Colva Prison. Decades ago, Gabriel Olondriz attempted to expose a corrupt politician named Senator Zapanta, but he was imprisoned instead. Raphael, a young boy from the Behala landfill, discovers a letter in the **trash** from a man named José Angelico addressed to Gabriel Olondriz. Gardo, Raphael's best friend, visits Olondriz in prison (the day before Olondriz dies) in order to deliver him Angelico's letter. Olondriz explains that Zapanta pilfered away \$30,000,000 of international aid money intended for the poor and that he ruined the lives of countless people with his corrupt greed. Olondriz is heartbroken when he learns from Gardo that his grandson, José Angelico, was killed—but he ultimately dies a happy man because the letter contains a coded message, meaning that José Angelico was able to continue Olondriz's work and somehow retrieve the money and give it back to the poor.

**Pia Dante Angelico** – An eight-year-old girl who is orphaned when her father, José Angelico, is killed in a police interrogation. Pia is abandoned in the city graveyard by her foster family after her father fails to show up there, but she survives because some street kids feel sorry for her and they feed her scraps of food. Raphael, Gardo, and Rat meet Pia when they find her half-starved and waiting for her father by her family gravestone. Pia is too young to realize that her father hid the fortune he stole from the corrupt Senator Zapanta in a grave marked with Pia's name. After finding this money, the boys take Pia under their wing, and she escapes with them to a better life at the end of the story—just as her father wished.

**Father Juilliard** – A 63-year-old volunteer who runs the Pascal Aguila Mission School on the Behala landfill. Father Juilliard longs to make a difference in the miserable lives of the dumpsite kids, but he recognizes that attempting to educate them is essentially hopeless since they'll likely never make it off the landfill. Most of the people who are born in Behala die there, spending their lives scavenging among rotting **trash** to survive. Juilliard is particularly fond of a young boy nicknamed Rat, whom Juilliard gives extra food and cash even though this is against the school's rules. Father Juilliard hasn't seen Rat, Raphael, and Gardo since the day they lied to gain access to the school computer while they were hunting for Senator Zapanta's stolen fortune. Nevertheless, it seems the boys are

still in touch with Father Juilliard, who's now pulling together all the accounts of the parties involved so that the boys can tell their story of how they discovered the fortune, exposed Zapanta's corruption, and changed the lives of everyone living in Behala.

**Frederico Gonz** – A gravestone-maker who narrates a brief chapter to say that a man named José Angelico approached him to make a gravestone for his daughter, Pia Dante. Unbeknownst to Frederico Gonz, the gravestone contains a coded message because it houses a fortune stolen from the corrupt Senator Zapanta rather than Pia Dante (who is alive).

**Tired man** – A police detective in search of Senator Zapanta's stolen fortune. The tired man brutally interrogates Raphael, violently choking him and threatening to break Raphael's bones one by one—but he is unsuccessful in getting any information out of Raphael. The tired man concludes that Raphael, just like all the city's scavengers, is worthless "**garbage**."

## MINOR CHARACTERS

**Grace** – A maid for the corrupt Senator Zapanta. She narrates a short chapter to say that she knew Senator Zapanta's servant José Angelico and she thought Angelico was a "kind" man.

**Marco** – A corrupt prison guard who's in possession of political prisoner Gabriel Olondriz's coded Bible. Marco demands a hefty bribe from Raphael, Gardo, and Rat in exchange for the Bible, and he unsuccessfully attempts to double-cross them after accepting the bribe.

**Gardener** – An employee on Senator Zapanta's compound. The gardener gleefully informs Raphael and Rat that Zapanta is livid because José Angelico stole \$6,000,000 from Zapanta's private vault and smuggled it out in a broken fridge.

**Raphael's auntie** – A woman who lives on the city's landfill in a shack along with her children and her nephew Raphael. She inadvertently draws attention to Raphael when the police are hunting for a bag in the landfill, which results in his arrest and violent interrogation.

**Station boys** – A group of homeless children who control the city's central train terminal, fighting off other children who attempt to hustle there. Rat, Raphael, and Gardo have to bribe the station boys for access to a luggage locker containing clues to Senator Zapanta's stolen fortune.

**Mr. Oliva** – An employee at Colva Prison who demands a large bribe from Olivia Weston when she visits the prison with Gardo.

**Dante Jerome** – The son of political prisoner Gabriel Olondriz. Dante Jerome was a passionate advocate for the poor and he adopted 33 street children (José Angelico among them) to save them from poverty.

**Maria Angelico** – José Angelico's wife who died long before the events of *Trash*.

**Jose Angelico's son** – José Angelico's son who died at a young age.

**Thomas** – The impromptu leader of the community that lives on the Behala landfill.

**Mohun** – A columnist for the *Daily Star* newspaper who writes an article criticizing Senator Zapanta.

**Olivia's father** – The wealthy father of Olivia Weston. He negotiates with the British Embassy to secure Olivia's release from prison.

**Pascal Aguila** – An activist or “freedom fighter” for the impoverished. Aguila is assassinated after exposing three politicians for corruption. Pascal Aguila's family members are longstanding benefactors for the Mission School on the city's landfill; the school bears Aguila's name.

## TERMS

**Stuppa/stupp** – An informal word for human feces used by the community of scavengers who live on the Behala landfill. The landfill is full of *stuppa* because the majority of the city's residents don't have access to running water or toilets, so they wrap their feces in paper and throw it in the trash. Mulligan references *stuppa* often to allude to the general poverty of the fictional city he writes about and to remind the reader of the putrid conditions in which the landfill's residents are forced to dwell. Even though the landfill's residents spend their lives wading through *stuppa*, they can never get used to the smell.



## THEMES

In LitCharts literature guides, each theme gets its own color-coded icon. These icons make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. If you don't have a color printer, you can still use the icons to track themes in black and white.



### CHILDHOOD, POVERTY, AND INJUSTICE

*Trash* is a fictional story based on author Andy Mulligan's experiences as a volunteer aid worker on a landfill in the Philippines. The book is packed with visceral descriptions of children living in abject poverty, exposing actual conditions faced by the world's poorest children as well as the injustice of a world that largely ignores them. The story's central protagonists, Raphael, Gardo, and Rat, are young “trash boys” who eke out a living by sifting through mountains of putrid trash in a landfill named Behala where they live. Affluent people in the surrounding city live comfortable lives while impoverished children are largely ignored, imprisoned, or killed. Mulligan thus demonstrates how the children who live among trash are treated like “trash” by

others, suggesting that their suffering is caused by society's unjust treatment, namely the deliberate ignorance of impoverished children or outright discrimination and violence against them.

Mulligan's descriptions of life in poverty emphasize the inhumane levels of squalor that many young children in Behala are forced to endure. Many children are forced to live in rotting waste, which they find repulsive, traumatizing, and dangerous. Though the children have never known anything else, they never get used to the “stink” of trash—mostly comprised of human feces (or “stuppa”)—that they have to wade through day after day. Raphael tries “not to breathe too deep because of the stink” and he is acutely aware of how badly he smells, often commenting that he's “stinking” when he's around other people. The “lucky” children (like Raphael) live in shacks built above mountains of trash, while others (like Rat) have to live in rat-infested “damp and dark” holes of trash that Raphael finds “disgusting.” Gardo fears rats because he “got bitten once and his whole hand went bad.” Raphael is also traumatized by an accident at his old home, Smoky Mountain, in which the trash caved in and buried almost a hundred “poor souls” alive, who are “rotting with the trash.” He fears being condemned to the same fate, often commenting on how “dangerous” it is when trash slides around, and how easily he could disappear into the trash himself. All of this together conveys just how miserable life is for Behala's children—they have no choice but to live miserably among society's waste and they constantly fear injury or death.

For Mulligan, the real tragedy is that children are forced to live in such appalling conditions because others in society turn a blind eye to them, leaving them vulnerable to further abuse and severely limiting their prospects. Mulligan emphasizes that the children who are “doomed” to “breathe the stink all day, all night” have little hope of integrating into society and escaping life on the landfill because they are shunned when they venture beyond Behala's boundaries. Raphael feels he “might as well have been invisible” in public spaces like Central Station and the graveyard. Rat also explains that he's typically refused passage on buses because he's so filthy that he's chased away like a “curse,” meaning that most people only think about their own revulsion at the boys' smell and filth, rather than show any desire to help them out of their plight. Since the children are largely ignored by society, they are forced to work from a young age, foregoing childhood and education to relentlessly scavenge trash that can be sold for food. Raphael explains that he started “working” on the landfill when he was three, and the kids “never stop,” all they do is “crawl and crawl, and sort and sort.” Father Juilliard (who manages the charity-run Mission School in Behala) feels that his task is hopeless: most of the children cannot come to school because they need to scavenge to survive. He often wonders what good an education is to children who will never make it off the landfill. Olivia (a

volunteer at the Mission School) similarly reflects on how hopeless the children's prospects are when she sees young children and old men living on the landfill side by side and thinks, "if you have any imagination you can see the child and what he is doomed to do for the rest of his life." Clearly, people outside of Behala are either unwilling or ill-equipped to help the children—either way, their passivity plays a significant role in "doom[ing]" the kids to the difficult lives they lead.

The children also fear becoming more visible in society because they are vulnerable targets for a corrupt police force that subjects children to unjust imprisonment and violent brutality. Raphael feels like he is "breaking the law" just for walking through Central Station and he is terrified of the guards because "the prisons take kids quicker than they take men." Mulligan exposes the fates of imprisoned children through Olivia's eyes: she is traumatized by the sight of children stacked alongside adults in stifling "cages" like animals, stinking like "sweat and urine" for no crime beyond being "poor." Homeless runaways are also tortured and killed by the police, implying that attempts by children to escape their squalid environments might result in them being murdered or maimed and left to fend for themselves, ending up even worse off than before. Raphael says, "if a new kid shows up with nowhere to go, and the police get him—they wait 'til night, break his legs and put him on the tracks." The police similarly threaten Raphael with the same fate when interrogating him, saying they will break his bones and throw him in the trash, like the "garbage" that he is.

Mulligan's fictional story thus offers a harsh social commentary on the real injustices of societies in which the upper classes condemn impoverished children to lives no better than the lives of "rats." Like rats, disadvantaged children are ignored, avoided, and violently punished or even murdered when they attempt to become more visible in society, leaving them with no options but to live and die amid trash.



## CORRUPTION, POWER, AND THEFT

Andy Mulligan's novel *Trash* argues that corruption is society's most disgraceful form of stealing. Mulligan's story revolves around theft:

impoverished children have to steal to stay alive, bribes are necessary transactions in day-to-day life, and the plot revolves around the theft of millions of dollars from the wealthy Senator Zapanta's private vault. Despite the prevalence of theft throughout the story, Mulligan argues that theft that's intended to help poor people stay alive isn't theft at all, since such people are owed a basic level of subsistence by society. In contrast, Mulligan believes the true theft is committed by society's corrupt elite, which he exemplifies through vice-president Zapanta's actions. Senator Zapanta steals millions of dollars of personal wealth by siphoning off government funds intended for the poor through bogus business deals, forcing the city's poor to live amid rotting waste in slums built on landfills

and cemeteries. Zapanta also maintains his wealth by imprisoning or killing anybody who threatens his fortune, dooming several characters to untimely, often violent, deaths. The book thus portrays corruption as the most unforgivable transgression a person in power can commit because it robs others of their freedom—or even their lives.

Mulligan implies that theft by and for society's poorest is not really theft at all, because the poor are owed a tolerable standard of life by their society. For instance, Rat (a young malnourished boy who sleeps among rats in a landfill called Behala) regularly lifts small amounts of money from the charity-run Mission School on site. Yet Mulligan portrays Rat's thieving as justified because Rat merely dreams of affording train fare home where he can become a fisherman away from the "stink" of Behala, where no child should be condemned to live. Mulligan similarly describes José Angelico—a poor man who steals a fortune from Senator Zapanta—as "no thief" because José Angelico intends to distribute the fortune among the poor. Mulligan depicts José Angelico's theft as an act of justice rather than theft, because Zapanta's fortune came from government aid money, meaning it actually "belongs to the poor" and so it is merely being returned to them.

Mulligan contrasts the children's and José Angelico's arguably justified theft with Senator Zapanta's corruption, through which Zapanta hoards government aid money, condemning countless people to hopeless poverty. A political prisoner named Gabriel Olondriz explains that the aid money Senator Zapanta "spirited away" was intended for "hospitals and schools," but that "the city remained poor" while Zapanta grew absurdly wealthy. José Angelico similarly accuses Senator Zapanta of stopping "a nation in its tracks" and preventing their country from "making progress" so that Zapanta could fill his personal vault with "dirty money from his crimes." Mulligan exemplifies Zapanta's crimes through an article in the "Star Extra" newspaper, which describes a court case questioning Zapanta's attempt to recover debts from his bankrupt company by raising taxes on rice, which likely affected countless people who struggle to afford the rice on which society's poorest subsist. When Raphael, Gardo, and Rat—three young scavengers who live on the landfill—discover the \$6,000,000 that José Angelico stole from Zapanta, Raphael remarks that the money looks like "food and drink and changing my life." Essentially, for the "trash boys" who live in the landfill, this enormous sum represents freedom from a deplorable life of poverty. Since Zapanta's vault was full of aid money, his unethical hoarding means that he is directly responsible for the suffering of those forced to live in slums, graveyards, and landfills.

Senator Zapanta's attempts to protect his stolen wealth also result in the deaths of several characters, which demonstrates how government corruption has a direct effect on society's most vulnerable populations—particularly those who speak out

against an authority figure's wrongdoings. Mulligan shows how people who attempt to bring corrupt politicians to justice are killed for their efforts, enabling corrupt figures like Zapanta to keep exploiting government resources for personal gain at the expense of the poor. Gabriel Olondriz, for example, is unjustly imprisoned after attempting to expose Senator Zapanta's theft of government aid money and he eventually dies after spending countless years in the squalid Colva Prison. Zapanta's corrupt efforts to keep his hands on the money he has stolen are also directly responsible for the deaths of several characters, such as José Angelico, who is killed by police during a violent interrogation when he is suspected of stealing Zapanta's fortune. Additionally, two of Olondriz's servants are killed when Olondriz's house is burned to destroy evidence against Zapanta.

Thus, even though the poorest people in Mulligan's fictional city steal a little to get by and José Angelico steals a fortune to return it to the city's poor, their theft is nothing in comparison to Zapanta's. Mulligan contrasts these examples of theft to demonstrate how corruption is actually the greatest form of theft in a society, as it either robs people of the hope for a better life or it ends their lives entirely.



### COMMUNITY, LOYALTY, AND SOLIDARITY

Andy Mulligan's novel *Trash* is a moving tribute to the power of community and solidarity. Mulligan's story centers on a young boy named Raphael and his two friends Gardo and Rat. They all live as scavengers, or "trash boys," on a rotting landfill called Behala. Despite the story's disheartening setting, the characters' grim lives are somewhat alleviated by a sense of community. Moreover, the loyalty between the central protagonists and their solidarity with other impoverished people in the story are instrumental in enabling the boys to survive when they are on the run from the police (for uncovering clues to a stolen fortune) and escaping to a better life. Thus, by demonstrating how community, loyalty, and solidarity are essential to the boys' success, Mulligan ultimately argues that these are invaluable forces which help people to cope, survive, and even thrive amid trying circumstances.

Mulligan shows how the deplorable lives of scavengers living in Behala are made more tolerable by the sense of community among those who are in the same boat. For example, although the landfill's residents spend their days seeking plastic, paper, and rags that they can sell for food by crawling through putrid, rotting garbage comprised mostly of human feces (or, "stupp"), they are able to derive enjoyment from their time together as a community by cooking rice over communal cooking fires, sometimes with "music and singing" which makes them happy despite their plight. The landfill's close-knit community also provides emotional support for its members who are treated

unjustly by the outside world. For instance, when Raphael returns to Behala after being brutally beaten by the police, Olivia (a volunteer at the site's charity-run school) reflects on the emotional support in the community. She observes, "When one of their number is hurt, everyone feels the wound." Mulligan thus shows how a sense of community among people facing hardship can help them through difficult times.

The loyalty among Raphael, Gardo, and Rat—as well as the solidarity they share with other poor people—is a source of strength for them throughout the story. It even saves various characters' lives: Raphael, for example, finds the strength to endure violent police brutality through of solidarity with a poor man named José Angelico (who stole a fortune from a corrupt vice-president and was subsequently killed in a police interrogation). Even when a detective referred to as the "tired man" interrogates Raphael and he threatens to break all of Raphael's bones "one by one" and throw him in the trash, Raphael refuses to divulge the location of a bag containing clues to the hidden fortune. Raphael reflects, "Where did I find the strength? I know that it was José Angelico's strength." Raphael, Gardo, and Rat are also saved from certain death during a police chase when they jump into a building where dozens of street kids live. The street kids surround the protagonists and they mask the boys' presence from the police out of sheer solidarity. Raphael remarks, "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 [...] suddenly we were a mighty crowd, pouring into the hallway. It saved us, I swear." Mulligan thus shows how solidarity between people enduring similar struggles is highly valuable because it can provide strength through trying ordeals and even saves people's lives.

Furthermore, although Raphael, Gardo, and Rat are hopelessly poor, they cannot condone the idea of taking money that could benefit the lives of other poor people. In this way, the novel suggests that remaining loyal to one's community is even more important than fulfilling one's personal needs and wants. Rat admits that the boys never planned on keeping the stolen fortune for themselves when he says, "I promise you one thing we all knew was that it was not ours and we would not even try to take more than a little." Instead of taking more for themselves, the boys and José Angelico's young orphaned daughter, Pia, only take a small bagful of cash each—enough to buy train fares to Sampalo and buy fishing boats from which they can carve out a living—and they distribute most of the \$6,000,000 across Behala for the city's poorest to find. Their actions reflect their loyalty to their community and José Angelico (whose dying wish was for the stolen fortune to be returned to the poor). The boys similarly adopt Pia into their "team" and they carve out a life together as fishermen in Sampalo, despite not knowing Pia at all. By taking Pia under their wing, the boys also reflect their loyalty to José Angelico by



honoring his other dying wish that whoever finds the fortune take care of his daughter. The boys thus reveal that their solidarity with the impoverished directs their choices, despite several opportunities to be more selfish. The story's poorest characters are the most commendable because they value the plight of others more than their own personal needs. Overall, the solidarity among the story's protagonists demonstrates how a sense of community can make difficult circumstances tolerable and how loyalty to other vulnerable people can pull them out of poverty or even save their lives.



## INTELLIGENCE, EDUCATION, AND STREET SMARTS

In Andy Mulligan's high-paced thriller *Trash*, the protagonists are three young, uneducated children named Raphael, Gardo, and Rat. The boys survive by scavenging on a landfill and they manage to outwit everyone in their story, ranging from highly-educated volunteers at a charity school to an entire police force under the control of a corrupt vice-president named Senator Zapanta. Though the boys have little formal education and Rat is illiterate, they've learned to get by on their wits. The boys' smart thinking enables them to make it through their struggles alive and to keep Zapanta's stolen fortune out of the hands of the society's corrupt elite. Mulligan thus shows that people should not underestimate poor, uneducated members of society—like the “trash boys” of his story—because intelligence and education don't always go hand-in-hand, and there is immeasurable worth in every individual's life experience. The ability of such people to survive under such challenging living conditions is itself a testament to their potential.

Despite the boys' lack of formal education, Mulligan emphasizes their quick thinking (acquired from life on the streets) which keeps them one step ahead of the city's powerful police force. When Raphael is being interrogated by the police, he's able to think up a lie on the spot—about finding money folded in an electricity bill—that keeps the bag the police want out of their hands. Raphael recalls details about what electricity bills look like in the moment, despite having only seen them in the trash. Mulligan thus demonstrates how street smarts can sometimes be more useful than a formal education, as this type of intelligence enables Raphael to “think[] fast” and “fight[] for [his] life” when dealing with a corrupt, violence police force. Similarly, Rat (who is both illiterate and the youngest protagonist) realizes almost instinctively that the police are about to raid the boys' room and jumps into action to lead the boys to safety across the city's rooftops. Raphael says, “Rat has been chased so often, that he must have had extra senses.” Again, Mulligan demonstrates how skills acquired from lived experience such as intuition, courage, and resourcefulness shouldn't be underestimated, as these are what allow Rat to save his friends and himself. Raphael even says that Rat has

“extra senses,” suggesting that Rat's lack of education (and his subsequent reliance on his wits and instincts) isn't a flaw—it actually puts him at an *advantage* over others.

Beyond the “trash boys,” Mulligan emphasizes that practical real-world experience is valuable for everyone and it even rivals formal education. Olivia (a well-educated British volunteer) feels that her real-life exposure to Behala and Colva Prison teach her things about life that university cannot, including insights about the importance of money, the value of relationships, and human nature. She reflects, “it occurred to me that to see the world of Behala, and now a jail—perhaps it would teach me more than I'd ever found at university.” Through Olivia's reflections, Mulligan demonstrates that life experience can be more valuable than formal studies because such experiences can teach people about what the world “revolves around” on the ground in ways that can't be gleaned from a textbook.

Mulligan also argues that wealthier individuals tend to unfairly underestimate the aptitude of the poor—who have acquired practical skills from living on the street and surviving hardship—by showing how the novel's wealthy characters are often duped by the poor, uneducated ones. For example, a servant named José Angelico steals Zapanta's fortune from under Zapanta's nose—Zapanta reveals information about his private vault's combination, assuming that José Angelico is poor, uneducated, and therefore “too stupid to memorize numbers.” Mulligan reinforces his claim about the high aptitude of poor, uneducated people by demonstrating how Behala's residents are highly enterprising despite their lack of formal education, as they've organized their scavenging into an efficient “business.” For instance, a large team of the landfill's children work together to separate straws and cups from fast food trash, which enables them to earn food money more efficiently than if they had to fend for themselves. Their professional acumen in organizing and distributing labor is derived from their lived experience on the landfill; this showcases how much potential they have despite having no access to education. Mulligan thus argues that it is a mistake for those wealthy enough to afford formal education to overlook the intelligence, capabilities, and potential of those who lack access to formal education. Life itself, he suggests, can sometimes be the most powerful teacher.



## SYMBOLS

Symbols appear in **teal text** throughout the Summary and Analysis sections of this LitChart.



## TRASH

The novel's poorest characters spend their lives wading through trash on a landfill called Behala,

and their close proximity to garbage represents society's misguided view of such impoverished people as metaphorical trash: disposable, unsavory, and ultimately worthless. People who live on Behala are forced to scavenge amid the garbage for plastic, paper, and rags that they can sell for food. As such, the story's antagonists—especially the corrupt police force—frequently refer to the young scavengers who live on the landfill as “garbage,” meaning that they are worthless. However, the story's protagonists, Raphael, Rat, and Gardo, are not the “trash boys” others assume they are—despite being uneducated and unimaginably poor, they are intelligent, quick-witted, kindhearted young boys with much more potential than the life they've been allocated.

It's the police, by contrast, who are the real “garbage” in the story: they've let themselves be corrupted with bribes, meaning they abuse their power to imprison the poor, torture homeless orphans, and engage in frequent police brutality. Trash thus comes to symbolize the moral corruption of the authority figures in Mulligan's fictional city, which keeps innocent people oppressed and living in landfills while selfish people remain in power. Raphael, Rat, and Gardo often allude to this symbolism when they are proud that they, mere “trash boys,” are able to stay one step ahead of the “garbage police.”



### BRIGHTEST LIGHT

The “brightest light” is used as a metaphor for solidarity among poor people. Raphael, Rat, and Gardo attempt to recover Senator Zapanta's hidden fortune by decoding a cryptic letter written by a man named José Angelico, and Angelico tells the boys to look for “the brightest light” at the graveyard if they want to find the fortune. When the boys arrive at the graveyard, they see thousands of poor people with candles streaming in to celebrate the Day of the Dead, generating “the brightest light” for miles around. This is one of many such examples in the novel of impoverished people finding joy in the simple daily rituals and celebrations of their communities. This bright light, as both a literal and metaphorical bright spot amid the grim setting of the graveyard, thus symbolizes how poor people are a similar kind of bright spot for one another amid their suffering. And given the terrible conditions of the society at large, poor people are also “the brightest light” in the city—they are the only hope for leading the city out of moral corruption and into genuine love, compassion, and equality.



### QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the Ember edition of *Trash* published in 2011.

## Part 1: Chapter 1 Quotes

☞ No, never—because what we mainly find is *stupp*.

**Related Characters:** Raphael Fernández (speaker)

**Related Themes:**

**Related Symbols:**

**Page Number:** 4

### Explanation and Analysis

As the novel opens, Raphael Fernández, one of the story's three protagonists, paints a picture of his life as a scavenger on a landfill called Behala. Raphael—like many other children in this fictional city—was born on the landfill and he is so poor that he has to scavenge for trash to sell (such as paper, plastic, and rags) to buy rice so he doesn't starve. The city he lives in has many poor people, however, so most of the residents don't have access to toilets or running water. Instead of using bathrooms, they wrap up their feces in paper and they throw it in the trash: this is what Raphael calls *stupp*, and it's what Raphael spends most of his day crawling through to scavenge for survival.

Mulligan paints a picture of the degree of poverty faced by the story's protagonists through Raphael's opening description of his day to day life in Behala. The reader learns that the protagonists live in abject poverty, surrounded by deplorably unsanitary filth, and that there are many people in the wider public who also face some degree of poverty (since they have no access to running water or toilets). Though Behala is fictional, it was inspired by a real landfill in Manila (the capital of the Philippines) that Mulligan visited, meaning that Behala reflects actual conditions faced by real children in the world. Mulligan's description is intended to paint a picture of the extremes of poverty that many of the world's young children are forced to endure, and to prompt the reader to reflect on the injustice of any society that allows children to live in such appalling conditions.

☞ Gardo's my partner, and we always work together. He looks after me.

**Related Characters:** Raphael Fernández (speaker), Gardo

**Related Themes:**

**Related Symbols:**

**Page Number:** 7

### Explanation and Analysis


After Raphael has described Behala (the landfill he lives on), he describes the closest people in his life, starting with his best friend, Gardo. Raphael's description of his "work" with Gardo draws attention to the fact that these children are condemned to a life of childhood labor. Shortly after this passage, Raphael explains that he started working—meaning scavenging for trash to sell in exchange for food money—when he was three years old. This description draws attention to the injustices of child labor faced by children in poverty, both in the fictional society of the story and in the real world.

At the same time, Raphael reveals that his friendship with Gardo is a source of strength and that he has someone to lean on in his day-to-day life. Through the brief statement, "He looks after me," Mulligan introduces the idea that despite the appalling conditions in which young children like Raphael and Gardo have to live, they have a strong sense of community and they draw great strength from the loyalty they share with others in the same position. This allows them to be resilient—and even happy—despite their difficult circumstances.

☝ We get the fast food too, and that's a little business in itself. It doesn't come out near me and Gardo, it goes down the far end, and about a hundred kids sort out the straws, the cups, and the chicken bones. Everything turned, cleaned and bagged up – cycled down to the weighers, weighed and sold.

**Related Characters:** Raphael Fernández (speaker), Gardo

**Related Themes:**   

**Related Symbols:** 

**Page Number:** 14

### Explanation and Analysis

In the story's opening chapter, Raphael describes the day to day life of a childhood scavenger living on a landfill called Behala. So far, the reader has learned that the landfill is appallingly squalid. Since most of the city's residents don't have access to toilets, they throw their feces in the trash, which is what the scavengers wade through most of all. Nonetheless, there is a strong sense of friendship and solidarity among people in Behala that helps make life more bearable. Raphael and Gardo, for example, are close friends


who work together and lean on each other for support.


Now, it becomes evident that despite the poverty and lack of resources among Behala's residents, they are actually very enterprising. Several children have organized their scavenging into an efficient machine that runs like a veritable "business," through team work and division of labor. Mulligan thus shows that although these children are hopelessly poor, their intelligence and aptitude are not to be underestimated: having to survive with so few resources teaches these children valuable life skills and it indicates how much more they are capable of, despite their lack of formal education.

## Part 1: Chapter 4 Quotes

☝☝ Trash is often wet, and the juices are always running. Maybe the ground here was a bit lower, I don't know—but it was always muddy [...] I got down low with the candle, trying not to breathe too deep because of the stink [...] It might seem crazy asking a kid if you can come into his hole, but this hole was about the only thing Rat had, apart from what he wore. I would not have lived there – anywhere would have been better.

**Related Characters:** Raphael Fernández (speaker), José Angelico , Gardo, Rat / Jun / Jun-Jun

**Related Themes:** 

**Related Symbols:** 

**Page Number:** 25

### Explanation and Analysis


Raphael and Gardo have just discovered a bag full of cash, a man named José Angelico's identification, a map, and a mysterious key. Shortly afterward, the police arrived, asking about a bag. Raphael and Gardo don't trust the police so they decide to hide the bag with a young boy named Jun (whose nickname is Rat because he lives alone in a muddy trash hole among rat nests. In this passage, Raphael describes Rat's home. Mulligan offers frequent visceral descriptions of Behala to convey the level of squalor these children are forced to endure and keep it fresh in the reader's mind throughout the story.


Notably, it's evident that even though the boys were born on the dumpsite and they've known no other life, they still never become accustomed to Behala's filth, which is emphasized through Raphael's discomfort with the perpetual smell of feces and rotting trash, the constant

slimy wetness, and—as will become shortly apparent—the rats who crawl, like the children, among the trash, making it feel alive. Thus, in addition to the dangers of living in Behala, kids like Raphael, Gardo, and Rat also have to live with a constant feeling of disgust, which only adds to the sense of dehumanization they experiences as society's poorest members.

☛ When Smoky Mountain went down, there were nearly a hundred killed, and everyone knows some of those poor souls are still down there, down with the trash, turned into trash, rotting with the trash.

**Related Characters:** Raphael Fernández (speaker), Rat / Jun / Jun-Jun, Gardo

**Related Themes:** 

**Related Symbols:** 

**Page Number:** 25

### Explanation and Analysis

Raphael and Gardo are hiding a bag they recently found with Rat, a boy who lives alone in a muddy trash hole among rat nests. As they approach Rat's home, Raphael reflects on a terrifying landslide at his old home, another landfill called Smoky Mountain, which buried many people alive. Raphael's description here underscores his frequent worries about dangerous parts of the landfill where trash slides around under its own weight and his perpetual fear of being buried alive himself. Together, this indicates that he is traumatized by the landslide on Smoky Mountain. Mulligan thus shows that the dumpsite's children not only have to live in filth, which they find disgusting—they also face ever-present risks of injury or death, which saturates their lives with trauma and fear.


The name "Smoky Mountain" references a real dumpsite that operated in Manila, Philippines from 1969–1995, and the landslide in Raphael's memories likely alludes to a 2010 garbage landslide at the Payatas dumpsite (where many of Smoky Mountain's residents moved to after Smoky Mountain was closed). The actual landslide buried over two hundred people alive. Mulligan's references to real places and events show that even though his story is fictional, the fears and dangers that the characters are exposed to are very real: they capture an unimaginably unjust reality that persists for many of the world's poorest children.

## Part 1: Chapter 5 Quotes

☛ On the other hand, I did not want Raphael hiding and drawing attention that way, so that's why I kept him right in the middle of it.

**Related Characters:** Gardo (speaker), Rat / Jun / Jun-Jun, Raphael Fernández

**Related Themes:**    

**Related Symbols:** 

**Page Number:** 33

### Explanation and Analysis

Gardo watches over Raphael while the police search Behala for a bag that was dumped in the trash. Unbeknownst to the police, the boys found the bag but they hid it the day before because they don't trust the police. Gardo wants to avoid arousing suspicion, so they join in the search, acting happy and carefree like the dumpsite's other children.


In this passage, Mulligan demonstrates Gardo's intelligence and strategic thinking, which is a hallmark of his personality. Like Raphael and Rat, Gardo is highly intelligent and he has acquired a wealth of knowledge from his life experience as a scavenger in a corrupt city, despite having no substantive formal education. His smart thinking keeps the police's attention off Raphael and shows that poor, uneducated children should not be underestimated. They have a lot of know-how based on their perpetual need to stay one step ahead in order to survive. This sort of streetwise intelligence proves crucial to the boys' success in the story.

Mulligan also subtly indicates—through the boys' hesitation to trust the police or draw attention to themselves—that the city they live in is corrupt. The police cannot be trusted, which means they are not concerned with upholding the law, but achieving the goals of the people who bribe them. This unjust system ultimately puts vulnerable, impoverished children at great risk for being overlooked, taken advantage of, or outright abused. Nevertheless, the intelligence and loyalty among the protagonists (indicated here by Gardo's act of carefully watching over Raphael) enables them to thrive in such difficult circumstances.

☛ In our little neighborhood there were more cooking fires than usual, and a few cases of beer. There was music and singing, and everyone was happy.

**Related Characters:** Gardo (speaker)

**Related Themes:** 

**Related Symbols:** 

**Page Number:** 36


### Explanation and Analysis

It's evening in Behala, and the police have left after paying the dumpsite's residents to search for a missing bag. Gardo describes the festive atmosphere of communal cooking, singing, and drinking in the little corner of the dumpsite that he calls home. Today was a good day for Behala's residents, since they were paid (not much, but something) for their scavenging by the police as they searched for a missing bag. This small win accounts for their festive mood and it shows that despite having a lot to be miserable about in their lives, the residents are able to come together, celebrate, and enjoy one another's company on good days despite the overall misery they experience in their lives.

Gardo's description shows that even though the dumpsite's residents are forced to live in such pitiful, squalid conditions—in crowded shacks on piles of rotting, stinking trash that they scavenge in to stay alive—there is a strong sense of community among the poor that makes life more tolerable. The way the residents cook communally, have merry evenings, and celebrate small wins together shows how powerful a sense of solidarity can be to people who have little of anything else, as it can punctuate an unjustly miserable existence with bearable—even joyful—moments that give people the strength to keep going.

 Ten thousand is a lot of money!

**Related Characters:** Raphael's auntie (speaker), Olivia Weston (Sister Olivia), Gardo, Raphael Fernández

**Related Themes:** 

**Page Number:** 38


### Explanation and Analysis

Raphael and Gardo sit with Raphael's auntie in the evening after the police have left. Raphael's auntie explains that she only told the police Raphael found something because of the reward, even though Raphael and Gardo think she was stupid to draw attention to Raphael like that.


Raphael's Auntie shows here that "ten thousand" is an

incomprehensibly large sum to people who live on the landfill and eke out maybe 100 pesos or so a day to support their families from hours of back-breaking scavenging through filthy trash. This amount, however, is exactly how much Olivia Weston later reveals a fancy dinner costs in the city. Raphael's Auntie thus exposes the dramatic income disparity between people who are destitute and people who are wealthier, since what a wealthier person would spend on a meal amounts to months of relentless labor for a landfill family. The implicit comparison shows how unjust the level of poverty that Behala's residents have to endure is. It also exposes how easy it would be for someone in a better position to make a dramatic difference to the life of a poor person in this city—by simply foregoing a fancy dinner, they could make a lasting difference to a poor family's life, yet this rarely happens, revealing the moral failing of people who are better off yet who ignore the plights of those less fortunate.

## Part 1: Chapter 6 Quotes

 I was told once about runaways, and it made me sick. How if a new kid shows up with nowhere to go, and the police get him—they wait till night, break his legs and put him on the tracks.

**Related Characters:** Raphael Fernández (speaker), Rat / Jun / Jun-Jun, Gardo

**Related Themes:**  

**Page Number:** 45

### Explanation and Analysis

Raphael, Gardo, and Rat discovered a bag the previous day with a key to a locker in the city's Central Station, and so far, they've successfully kept it hidden from the police (who are searching for the bag). Now, they are on their way to the station to see what's in the locker. On the way there, they start to worry about the risks they face by seeking out the locker. Raphael's description of a rumor about the way the police treat vulnerable young children proves to be true, as shortly after this passage, Raphael is threatened with the same fate while under police interrogation.


The description of police behavior in this quote exposes how untrustworthy the police in this city are, and how corrupt the city is for allowing authority figures to get away with such behavior. Raphael also shows that the city's poorest children face very real risks of violence, abuse, and murder in this society when they venture into public spaces and draw attention to themselves, meaning they have

nowhere to go except back to the dumpsite. With an absence of safe alternatives to the lives that impoverished children are condemned to, their poverty essentially becomes a prison since it's inescapable.

## Part 2: Chapter 1 Quotes

☛☛ His final act—the one that killed him—was to expose three senators who'd been siphoning off public taxes and stowing them off-shore. They all resigned and the prosecution rumbles on. Pascal Aguila was shot to pieces in a taxi, on his way to testify. Twenty-six bullets—the same caliber as a policeman's gun—and his murderers were never found.

**Related Characters:** Father Juilliard (speaker), Señor Zapanta (vice-president), Pascal Aguila

**Related Themes:** 

**Page Number:** 54

### Explanation and Analysis



Early in the story, Father Juilliard, a 63-year old man who manages the charity-run Pascal Aguila Mission School, provides the backstory for Pascal Aguila, after whom the school is named. It turns out that Pascal Aguila was a poor boy who managed to train as a lawyer and who became a lifelong advocate for the city's poor. Aguila fought imprisonment, eviction, and lack of access to education and water before attempting to expose three corrupt politicians. Mulligan uses Aguila's story to foreground the pervasive corruption in this society that Senator Zapanta (the corrupt vice-president and the story's antagonist) exemplifies within the novel. Mulligan's appeal to a history of corruption that extends beyond Senator Zapanta's implies that his criticisms of corruption are not limited to Senator Zapanta's specific actions in the plot—they encompass a much wider scope. Mulligan essentially argues that corrupt, elite politicians are usually responsible for the miserable plight of poor people in a society, and therefore they're the world's true villains—both in his story and in real life.


## Part 2: Chapter 2 Quotes

☛☛ It sounds crazy, but there was some part of me sure I'd never found it, and some other part of me begging me not to give up—maybe for José Angelico, because we knew more about him now.

**Related Characters:** Raphael Fernández (speaker), Rat /

Jun / Jun-Jun, Gardo, Tired man, José Angelico

**Related Themes:**  

**Related Symbols:** 

**Page Number:** 69

### Explanation and Analysis


Raphael, a young dumpsite boy, recently found a bag that the police are after while scavenging in trash. The bag contained a key, which Raphael, Gardo, and Rat (the story's three protagonists) used, to retrieve a letter from a locker in Central Station. When the boys return to the dumpsite in the evening, they find the place crawling with police, and Raphael is arrested. Despite enduring a brutally violent interrogation by a detective referred to as "tired man"—in which Raphael's face is split open, his body is dangled out of a window, and he is choked—Raphael vehemently denies finding a bag.

In this passage, Mulligan shows that Raphael feels a strong sense of loyalty to José Angelico (the original bag's owner and the author of the letter), who was recently killed during a police interrogation. Like Raphael, José Angelico was an orphaned street boy in his childhood, and Raphael's solidarity with José Angelico in this regard gives him the strength to endure the violent abuses of his interrogation. Through Raphael's ordeal, Mulligan indicates that the police in this society are dangerous, unethical, and corrupt. They frequently abuse their power (typically for the highest bidder) and harm—rather than protect—vulnerable, poor children. Nonetheless, the sense of loyalty and solidarity that Raphael feels with the story's poor characters (such as José Angelico) is profoundly valuable. It provides a sense of support that gives the protagonists the courage and resilience to see their quest through to the end, despite the difficult odds they face.

## Part 3: Chapter 1 Quotes

☛☛ Little Jun had me wrapped around his little finger in about two days, and I was forever giving him little bits of food, and little bits of money. I don't know how else a boy like that survives.

**Related Characters:** Olivia Weston (Sister Olivia) (speaker), Rat / Jun / Jun-Jun

**Related Themes:** 

**Page Number:** 84

### Explanation and Analysis

Olivia Weston, a volunteer at the charity-run Mission School on at the Behala dumpsite, narrates several chapters to describe her involvement in the protagonists' story. The boys are about to approach Olivia to trick her into helping them go to Colva Prison so that they can visit a prisoner there, with the hope of uncovering more information about a cryptic letter they found. Before Olivia is approached, she reflects on her fondness for Jun (who goes by Rat). Olivia's description reveals that Rat has a high level of emotional intelligence; despite being poor and uneducated, he is successfully able to charm people out of food and money that he needs to survive. Throughout the story, Mulligan argues—as he implies here—that life is a valuable teacher, meaning uneducated people should not be undervalued since they often prove themselves to be highly adept at getting by out of sheer necessity. In fact, later on in the story, Olivia herself reflects that her time in Behala was more valuable to her than a university education, suggesting that acquiring practical skills and lived experiences can even be *better* than book learning.

☛ When one of their number is hurt, everyone feels the wound.

**Related Characters:** Olivia Weston (Sister Olivia) (speaker), Raphael Fernández, Father Juilliard

**Related Themes:** 

**Page Number:** 85

### Explanation and Analysis

Olivia Weston comments on her experiences as a volunteer on the charity-run Mission School in Behala, shortly before the protagonists trick her into accompanying them to Colva Prison. Here, she reflects on Father Juilliard's description of the moment Raphael walks into Behala, bloody and beaten from his police interrogation: Raphael is immediately surrounded by an outpouring of grief for the violence he endured by the other residents, who immediately run out and comfort him. Their reaction is so visceral that it's as if each of them was personally afflicted by Raphael's suffering. Through this observation, Olivia emphasizes the deep sense of empathy, loyalty, and solidarity in Behala's tight-knit community. It really does seem as if they share in each other's joy and pains. Mulligan thus underscores how a


strong sense of community can provide great support to people who are suffering and help make their trials more bearable. At the same time, Mulligan portrays the genuine love and care present among society's poorest members in order to humanize communities who are often dehumanized by the story's more privileged characters.

## Part 3: Chapter 3 Quotes

☛ Behala also makes you want to weep, because it looks like an awful punishment that will never end – and if you have any imagination, you can see the child and what he is doomed to do for the rest of his life. When you see the old man, too weak to work, propped in a chair outside his shack, you think, *That is Raphael in forty years. What could possibly change?* These children are doomed to breathe the stink all day, all night, sifting the effluent of the city. Rats and children, children and rats, and you sometimes think they have pretty much the same life.

**Related Characters:** Olivia Weston (Sister Olivia) (speaker), Gardo, Raphael Fernández

**Related Themes:** 

**Related Symbols:** 

**Page Number:** 92


### Explanation and Analysis

Olivia is in a taxi with Gardo on the way to Colva Prison. As they pass through the squalid Colva town, Olivia reflects on the pitiful conditions in which many of the city's poor have to live. Here, she thinks about the heartbreaking conditions in Behala. Through Olivia's voice, Mulligan shows that children who are born on the landfill usually never make it off, meaning they're condemned to live amid rotting trash for their whole lives. As the reader has learned, when children attempt to venture out of Behala, they are typically ignored or they face great risks of imprisonment, violence, abuse, and even death. The landfill's children are thus essentially dehumanized by the city's wider population. They are not really treated like human beings at all, but rather like "rats" because they are avoided, shunned, or targeted in public, leaving them with no options but to crawl through the city's waste to survive, until they grow old and die.

## Part 3: Chapter 4 Quotes

☛ They're poor. They do many things.

**Related Characters:** Gardo (speaker), Olivia Weston (Sister Olivia), Gabriel Olondriz

**Related Themes:** 

**Page Number:** 104

### Explanation and Analysis



Olivia, a volunteer at the charity-run Mission School on the Behala dumpsite, has been duped into accompanying Gardo into Colva Prison. Gardo wants to meet with a political prisoner named Gabriel Olondriz to help him decode a cryptic letter, and so he pretends that Olondriz is his grandfather. As Olivia and Gardo walk to the prison's hospital, they pass through a large, stifling warehouse full of emaciated prisoners—including many children—stacked on top of one another in tiny cages, all stinking of urine and sweat. Olivia is horrified and disturbed by what she witnesses—she can't fathom why children would be in prison at all. Gardo, who is much calmer, explains that poor children are targets in this society. Here, Mulligan exposes another very real danger faced by impoverished children who draw attention to themselves in public while trying to survive. He implies that children cannot even navigate public spaces without the very real threat of winding up in much worse environments than the slums.

José Angelico steals Zapanta's fortune and Rat steals money from the Mission School), Mulligan draws a clear distinction between theft for survival or the common good and the type of greed Zapanta is involved in. Through Olondriz's description, Mulligan argues that Zapanta is deplorably corrupt and he is the story's worst thief, since his actions condemned his citizens to the miserable conditions in which they're forced to live. Zapanta thus stole not only money, but the hopes and dreams of a nation for decent lives with tolerable living conditions and access to basic human rights.

## Part 3: Chapter 7 Quotes

☞ I had so much evidence. Unfortunately for me, I was naïve. My office was raided. The same night there was a terrible fire at my house. I was away but both my maid and my driver were killed in it. And every scrap of evidence went up in smoke.

**Related Characters:** Gabriel Olondriz (speaker), Señor Zapanta (vice-president), Olivia Weston (Sister Olivia), Gardo

**Related Themes:**  

**Page Number:** 104

### Explanation and Analysis


While Gabriel Olondriz is explaining how he wound up in prison to Gardo and Olivia, he reveals that he was targeted by the corrupt Senator Zapanta after discovering evidence that would incriminate Zapanta many years earlier. Here, Olondriz explains how his evidence literally “went up in smoke” and he also reveals that Zapanta essentially murdered two people when Olondriz's house was burned down.

So far, the reader has learned that Zapanta is a colossal thief who robbed a nation of the chance to pull its citizens out of abject poverty. Now, Mulligan strengthens his case against Zapanta through Olondriz's voice, by emphasizing the way Zapanta treats Olondriz's staff as disposable: Zapanta lets Olondriz's maid and driver die simply to cover his tracks and destroy evidence that would result in the loss of his wealth. Similarly, Zapanta destroys Olondriz's life by throwing Olondriz in prison to silence any future threats to his wealth. It's evident that Zapanta is so greedy and depraved that he not only steals people's money and their dreams for a decent life—he robs people of their lives entirely. Olondriz's speech thus functions to flesh out the extent of Zapanta's corruption and to implicate Zapanta in the story's most appalling theft.

## Part 3: Chapter 5 Quotes

☞ What matters is that forty years ago I came upon information that Senator Zapanta had spirited away thirty million dollars of international aid money [...] But no schools or hospitals were ever built, and the city stayed poor.

**Related Characters:** Olivia Weston (Sister Olivia), Gabriel Olondriz (speaker), Señor Zapanta (vice-president), Rat / Jun / Jun-Jun, José Angelico, Gardo

**Related Themes:** 

**Page Number:** 104

### Explanation and Analysis

Gabriel Olondriz, an old and frail political prisoner in Colva Prison, explains to Gardo and Olivia how he wound up in prison. His explanation clues the reader in to specific details about the crimes of the corrupt vice-president (and the story's antagonist), Senator Zapanta. Olondriz reveals that Senator Zapanta lined his personal vault with international aid money that was intended for the city's poor. Whereas other characters steal throughout the story (for instance,



### Part 3: Chapter 10 Quotes

☝ I learned perhaps more than any university could ever teach me.

**Related Characters:** Olivia Weston (Sister Olivia) (speaker), Gardo, Gabriel Olondriz, Olivia's father

**Related Themes:** 

**Page Number:** 149

#### Explanation and Analysis


Midway through the story, Olivia is arrested because she and Gardo visited a political prisoner named Gabriel Olondriz in Colva Prison. Luckily, Olivia's well-connected father sends a man from the British Embassy to negotiate for her release, and Olivia immediately leaves the country. Here, she reflects on what she learned during her year in Behala: she's adamant that her exposure to life on the ground among impoverished people transcends anything she could have learned about the world in a textbook.


Through Olivia's reflections, Mulligan broadens his argument about the value of life experience in teaching people life skills that are not to be underestimated. Thus, he makes the claim that even for those who *do* have access to formal education, there are still greater things they can learn from life itself—especially an understanding of how the world really works, how marginalized people survive despite the challenges they face, and how people band together to stay resilient despite miserable lives of poverty. Olivia's character thus represents Mulligan's social message that volunteering is a valuable pursuit that should be commended and encouraged, not only because supports the poor but also because it teaches the volunteer profound insights about the world.

### Part 4: Chapter 4 Quotes

☝ Once again, the trash boys were ahead of the trash police.

**Related Characters:** Raphael Fernández (speaker), Senor Zapanta (vice-president), José Angelico, Marco, Gabriel Olondriz, Rat / Jun / Jun-Jun, Gardo

**Related Themes:** 

**Related Symbols:** 

**Page Number:** 175


#### Explanation and Analysis

Raphael, Gardo, and Rat have fled Behala and taken refuge in a crowded slum in a tourist area of the city. Gardo has just managed to seize a Bible belonging to Gabriel Olondriz from a corrupt guard named Marco, and although the police attempted to catch Gardo, they failed. The boys are now in possession of the Bible, which will enable them to decode José Angelico's cryptic instructions to the location of Senator Zapanta's hidden fortune. Here, Raphael reflects—as he often does throughout the story—that despite being treated like “trash,” the boys have managed to evade the “trash” police. Raphael's play on the word “trash” suggests that even though the city's residents often denigrate children who live on the landfill they and refer to them as worthless garbage, it's actually the corrupt police who are the city's real garbage. Trash thus symbolizes the moral corruptness of the city's authority figures, rather than the boys' characters, since the boys—unlike the police—are intelligent, resilient, and deeply concerned about the plight of the city's poor.

### Part 4: Chapter 6 Quotes

☝ Rat had been chased so often, and grabbed at so often, that he must have had extra senses.

**Related Characters:** Raphael Fernández (speaker), Rat / Jun / Jun-Jun, Gardo

**Related Themes:** 

**Page Number:** 179

#### Explanation and Analysis

Raphael, Rat, and Gardo's tiny room in a city slum is about to be raided by the police. Suddenly, Rat notices that the stack of shacks they're in has gone oddly quiet, and he hears a creak on a ladder. Almost instinctively, he realizes that the police are approaching and so he leads the boys to safety through a loosened plank in their room and across the city's rooftops. Mulligan once again emphasizes Rat's intelligence: despite the fact that Rat is illiterate and he has never been educated, he's honed sharp sensory skills from his life as a homeless boy. Rat is alert and quick-witted and he thinks fast on his feet; his skills essentially save the boys life.



Raphael's comment here shows that a lack of education implies nothing about an individual; children who don't have access to one shouldn't be underestimated. In fact, Rat's senses—which he's developed from being perpetually on the run—even seem sharper than a typical person's. Mulligan thus underscores both the value of life experiences and the intelligence and potential of those who

have no choice but to learn from life.

## Part 4: Chapter 7 Quotes

☞ What was ten million dollars doing in your house, sir?

**Related Characters:** Mohun (speaker), Senor Zapanta (vice-president), Gardo, Raphael Fernández, Rat / Jun / Jun-Jun, José Angelico, Gabriel Olondriz

**Related Themes:**  

**Page Number:** 188

### Explanation and Analysis

Toward the end of the story, Rat, Raphael, and Gardo are closing in on the location of the money that José Angelico stole and hid from the corrupt Senator Zapanta. Around this same time, a newspaper columnist named Mohun publishes an article that criticizes Senator Zapanta from having so much money hidden in his home to be stolen in the first place. The article reveals that José Angelico's theft was an ingenious way to expose Senator Zapanta's corruption since the public are now aware that Zapanta had been hoarding money. Another article, by an unnamed student, similarly accuses Zapanta of corruption and it calls for a revolution.

Thus, in stealing Zapanta's fortune, José Angelico found a way to return it to the poor *and* expose Senator Zapanta, thereby finishing the work that Gabriel Olondriz started and vindicating Gabriel Olondriz's death. José Angelico's act also exposes—once again—that the city's poor are no less intelligent than the city's wealthy, and they should not be underestimated, since they are capable of achieving great things, including changing the fate of a nation.

## Part 5: Chapter 1 Quotes

☞ We were amongst wealthy people in very fancy clothes, and we felt even greyer and dirtier, but there was nothing for it, and still nobody was worrying about us – no one seemed to see us, like we were ghosts.

**Related Characters:** Raphael Fernández (speaker), Senor Zapanta (vice-president), José Angelico, Gardo, Rat / Jun / Jun-Jun

**Related Themes:** 

**Page Number:** 198



### Explanation and Analysis



In the final stages of the story, Raphael, Gardo, and Rat are in the city graveyard searching for José Angelico's family plot, where they suspect the Senator Zapanta's stolen fortune is hidden. It takes them several hours to realize they are in the wrong part of the graveyard, among the city's rich, who are feasting and celebrating the Day of the Dead. Raphael's comment about how invisible the boys feel captures the moral failings of society's more fortunate citizens because it symbolizes how the city's poor children are generally treated by those who are more fortunate. The city's affluent typically turn a blind eye to the plight of the city's poor children even though the children are clearly destitute, filthy, and hungry.

Mulligan emphasizes how the wealthy privilege their personal lives over social needs among the city's poor as they prefer to feast undisturbed and opt to ignore the boys, likely hoping they'll go away. Mulligan thus demonstrates how the city's wealthy pretend there is no poverty problem by simply ignoring it—which further perpetuates childhood poverty. Mulligan implies that ignoring the plight of poor children instead of helping them is morally problematic because it condemns children to poverty instead of helping them out of it.

☞ And that is when we saw *the brightest light*.

**Related Characters:** Raphael Fernández (speaker), Senor Zapanta (vice-president), Pia Dante Angelico, Gardo, Rat / Jun / Jun-Jun, José Angelico

**Related Themes:**  

**Related Symbols:**  

**Page Number:** 198

### Explanation and Analysis

As the story's climax approaches, Raphael, Rat, and Gardo are in the city graveyard, where they're narrowing in on the location of the hidden fortune that José Angelico stole from Senator Zapanta. They've been struggling to understand a clue telling them to "look for the brightest light" until they climb on top of a monument and they see thousands upon thousands of poor people pouring in to the other side of the graveyard with candles to celebrate the Day of the Dead. Suddenly, they are able to make sense of the clue.


The light given off by the candles is literally the brightest light in the graveyard, but it also metaphorically represents


the poor as the bright beacon of hope in this corrupt and morally bankrupt city. José Angelico similarly refers to his daughter Pia as the “brightest light” in his final letter, emphasizing that the city’s poor children are the moral hope for this city, much more so than corrupt politicians and a wealthy elite who turns a blind eye to the depravity of the city and the plight of many of its citizens. Mulligan thus symbolizes the city’s poor with “the brightest light” while describing the city’s authority figures as “trash.”

## Part 5: Chapter 5 Quotes

☝ I wanted to hang back and see what happened when the first trash boy of the morning hooked up—not a stupp, but a hundred dollar bill.

**Related Characters:** Rat / Jun / Jun-Jun (speaker), José Angelico , Pia Dante Angelico , Gardo, Raphael Fernández

**Related Themes:** 

**Related Symbols:** 

**Page Number:** 220

### Explanation and Analysis

Rat, Raphael, Gardo, and Pia have just lugged José Angelico’s hidden fortune back to Behala and sent it flying into the wind all over the landfill for Behala’s residents to find when they scavenge trash in the morning. Rat’s reflection that he wishes he could have waited to see the trash kids discover the money shows how deeply the sense of community runs among those who live in Behala. They really do share in each other’s pains and joys, and to see thousands upon thousands of people discover they are no longer condemned to life on the landfill would not only thrill the kids who find the money, but it would also bring Rat (and the other boys) profound happiness.

Although the boys aren’t able to stay, Rat’s desire to that moment together with the community shows how deeply the ties between the landfill’s poor run. Even though Rat himself was relatively isolated from the community

(because he lived alone, away from the shacks), he still feels a strong sense of solidarity with those who are trapped in the same poverty that he has just escaped, and therefore he wants to experience the moment of elation that each person will feel when they realize they have been liberated from their miserable life of scavenging through human waste. It’s clear that Rat and the boys don’t think for an instant about the fact that the money could have been theirs—they only think about the happiness it will bring to their community. Mulligan thus underscores the moral value of community through Rat’s kindhearted reflection.

## Appendix Quotes

☝ Beware, because this money belongs to the poor.

**Related Characters:** José Angelico (speaker), Senor Zapanta (vice-president)

**Related Themes:** 

**Page Number:** 229

### Explanation and Analysis

The closing lines of Mulligan’s story are delivered in a letter penned by José Angelico. José Angelico explains how he meticulously planned over several years to gain Senator Zapanta’s trust and steal his fortune. Here, José Angelico—knowing he might not survive to see out his task—warns the person who finds the money that it “belongs to the poor.” This phrase is important because it enables Mulligan to justify José Angelico’s theft as a benevolent act of social justice. Even though José Angelico stole from Senator Zapanta, he is no thief—he was only returning to the poor what already belonged to them. Mulligan thus closes his story by reinforcing the idea that even though the plot is full of theft, Zapanta’s theft—of money that could have saved countless lives and provided access to a basic quality of life for his citizens—is the real crime. The novel makes it clear that greed and corruption, as opposed to stealing as a matter of need, are among the most morally depraved qualities a person can embody.



## SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

The color-coded icons under each analysis entry make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. Each icon corresponds to one of the themes explained in the Themes section of this LitChart.

## PART 1: CHAPTER 1

Raphael Fernández is a dumpsite boy. Though he hates to say it, the thing he finds most often at the dumpsite is “stupp,” which is human excrement. It’s often wrapped in paper and thrown in the **trash**, on account of the city’s lack of toilets or running water. The overwhelmingly large dumpsite—which one can smell long before one sees it—is named Behala, and the dumpsite people crawl and sort through mountain-sized piles of trash all day long. Raphael and his friend Gardo usually never find anything interesting—only *stupp*. But one day, Raphael does find something.

Raphael has been a “**trash** boy” since he was three. These children look for plastic (which can be sold by the kilogram) along with paper, metal cans, glass bottles, and clothes. The kids wear clothes that they find, but mostly they weigh up cloth and sell it like anything else. Raphael wears hacked-off jeans and a large T-shirt but no shoes, because the kids feel out the trash with their feet. Down the way, a hundred or so kids sort the fast food waste, picking out straws and cups to weigh and sell. On a good day, Raphael will make 200 pesos. On a bad day, maybe only 50. A trash boy lives by his “hook,” which he uses to sort through trash. Gardo and Raphael work together, rapidly sorting through the *stupp* and gathering plastic.

*The novel’s opening paints a visceral picture of the abject poverty in which people in Mulligan’s fictional city live. Mulligan uses sensory details like the prevalence of human feces (stupp), the pervasive odor of the landfill, and the imagery of people perpetually crawling through trash to portray the unimaginably appalling conditions in which children are forced to live in this society.*



*Raphael’s claim that he started working when he was three shows that impoverished children are often forced into child labor in appalling conditions (emphasized by how they feel for plastic and paper with their bare feet as they wade through human feces). Nonetheless, Raphael shows how enterprising the community is: despite having no formal education or resources, they have organized their scavenging into an efficient, fine-tuned machine of teamwork that functions like a business.*



## PART 1: CHAPTER 2

Raphael recounts the day everything changed: he is working with Gardo by the crane belts that offload **trash**. Even though this location dangerous and trash rains down everywhere, it’s the best place to sort because the trash hasn’t been picked over. Gardo is 14, just like Raphael, but Gardo is in charge because he’s seven hours older and bit tougher and more serious. Raphael is happy that he has Gardo on his side. That day, Raphael finds a “special,” a bag from a rich area, meaning it contains valuable trash like food and it isn’t contaminated with *stupp*.

*Raphael’s anxiety about the dangers of trash falling indicates that the children of Behala live in constant fear of being injured or killed due to their environment. The fact that trash without feces (stupp) is cause for excitement further underscores how deplorable the conditions at Behala are. Meanwhile, Raphael and Gardo’s teamwork demonstrates deep loyalty that will be essential to the boys’ survival as the story unfolds.*



Suddenly, a small leather bag falls out of the bag and into Raphael's hands. Inside is a map of the city, a key with a yellow tag labeled "101," and a wallet containing a photo of two little children in school uniforms and an astonishing 1,100 pesos—enough for countless chickens, beers, and hours in the video hall. Raphael gives Gardo 500 pesos and he notices an identification card for a José Angelico in the wallet. The boys surmise that José is 33 years old, unmarried, employed as a houseboy; he lives in a place called Green Hills. Raphael surreptitiously slips the bag into his pocket to avoid drawing attention to himself.

Mulligan begins to quantify the boys' poverty, which the reader can compare with other examples that are raised later in the story. For example, the 1,100 pesos feels like a fortune to the boys because it's equivalent to one or two weeks' worth of their earnings. This only amounts to about \$58 USD, though, which emphasizes just how little money people in Behala subsist on. Raphael proves his loyalty to Gardo by splitting the money almost equally, while his instinct to avoid attention shows that he is quick-thinking and aware of his surroundings.



## PART 1: CHAPTER 3

That evening, Raphael and Gardo are kicking a ball around while Raphael's auntie boils rice over a communal cooking fire with 30 or so other people. Suddenly, the police show up—a rare sighting in Behala. Raphael only remembers a few other occasions when he's seen them: one time, they came to arrest a man who slit his wife's throat and left her to bleed out into the shack underneath. Another time, the police came to hunt down a political candidate. This time, they've come for the bag. The police talk briefly with Thomas (the informal leader of the community) and they offer 10,000 pesos to anyone who hands the bag in.

Mulligan's description of evenings among Behala's residents shows that even though they live in such awful conditions, there is a strong sense of community, including evenings cooking communally around the fire. This seems to provide some respite from the grim reality of their existence. Raphael's mention of the police coming to hunt a political candidate in the past hints that the government in this society might be corrupt.



Raphael's skin goes cold and he almost raises his hand, but something in him doesn't trust the policemen. Raphael's auntie tells the policemen that Raphael found something and he panics, telling them that he just found a shoe. The police explain that they need the bag to solve a crime and they offer to pay the community—including Raphael, who they single out—to search for it. Raphael knows his auntie wants to keep him out of trouble, but he thinks she was wrong to speak up.

Raphael's failure to trust the police hints once again that the city's authority figures may be corrupt and therefore untrustworthy. Raphael's quick thinking on the spot (whereby he denies finding a bag) demonstrates a streetwise intelligence that Raphael's auntie lacks, since she inadvertently draws attention to Raphael, making him more vulnerable.



Raphael lives with his auntie. Raphael sleep in a box the size of a sheet with his cousins (and sometimes Gardo). Raphael keeps his most precious finds from the dumpsite in a beer crate back on his side of the box, including a pair of jeans, a broken penknife, a cup with a picture of the Virgin Mary, a broken watch, and—since that morning—the bag. Gardo wants to move the bag because he didn't like the way the police looked at Raphael. Gardo says they ought to hide it with Rat because nobody ever goes to that part of the dumpsite—not even the other dumpsite kids.

Raphael's description of his cramped and pitiful living quarters once again indicates the level of poverty that children in this society have to endure. Gardo's plans reveal that he, like Raphael, has pragmatic intelligence. Despite having no education, Gardo is able to think strategically to hide the bag from the police. Gardo's willingness to involve himself in Raphael's predicament also demonstrates his loyalty.



## PART 1: CHAPTER 4

Rat's real name is Jun-Jun, but he's nicknamed Rat because he lives in a **trash** hole full of rats. After dinner, Raphael and Gardo weave their way through a part of the dumpsite that disgusts them, knee-deep in watery muck and wary of the rats that make the dumpsite move as if it's alive. Gardo is skittish because of a previous incident where a rat bite severely injured his hand; Raphael fears trash falling and burying him alive, which happened at another dumpsite called Smoky Mountain. The boys quietly call out Rat's name and they hear a response through the clamor of squeaking, as a gaunt-looking Rat emerges. Raphael wishes he'd brought some food for Rat, who doesn't get to eat as often as the other dumpsite kids.

Raphael explains that they need to hide a bag and Rat cheerfully agrees to stash it in his walls, though he warns the Raphael and Gardo that the rats will eat it soon. The boys strategize that they will pretend to find the bag in a few days—that way they can earn wages while pretending to look for it since they are still skeptical about the reward. Rat looks over the map and the identification card, and Gardo worries that they might be getting caught up in a murder case. Rat suddenly breaks into a smile and he convinces Raphael and Gardo to give him 100 pesos because he recognizes the key: it's from a luggage locker at Central Station, where Rat lived for a year. Rat suggests that they all go there.

*Mulligan's visceral description of Rat's living quarters once again expose the unimaginably squalid conditions of the dumpsite. Gardo's rat bite and Raphael's fear of being buried alive show how traumatized they are by the very real dangers they have experienced, while their disgust suggests that they never quite get used to Behala's miserable conditions despite having known little else. Meanwhile, Raphael's empathy for Rat's hunger demonstrates an undercurrent of solidarity among the boys, as they're all facing similar struggles of poverty.*



*Rat's easy willingness to help Raphael and Gardo further demonstrates a burgeoning sense of loyalty among the three boys. The boys' skepticism about the reward indicates once again that the police might not be as trustworthy as one might assume. Rat's recognition of the key shows that Rat, like the other two boys, is a quick thinker with a sharp memory— he, too, is highly intelligent despite having few resources to educate himself.*



## PART 1: CHAPTER 5

Gardo explains that Raphael forgot to mention he was so excited that he wanted to go to Central Station straight away until Gardo stopped him. Gardo knows the police will be all over Behala in the morning and it will be suspicious if Raphael wasn't there. Gardo explains that he needs to look after Raphael, who's a bit childlike. The next morning, lots of people—even the tiniest kids—turn out to pick over the landfill because the police are paying them to search for the bag. It's so crowded that the trash slides around dangerously under the crowd. Trash trucks are stopped outside the gates and kids pile into them to get first pick of the new trash. Gardo keeps Raphael in plain sight to avoid drawing suspicion from the police.

*Gardo's strategic thinking and sense of caution shows his practical intelligence at navigating the real world despite his lack of formal education. Gardo's description of Raphael suggests that Gardo looks after him like a little brother, demonstrating a strong bond between the two. The dangerous conditions at the landfill hint at how vulnerable people are to injury in this environment, and the sheer magnitude of the crowd demonstrates that the community is so poor that they will endure unsafe conditions out of necessity.*



The police instruct the kids to work on the dump trucks coming in from the upscale McKinley neighborhood, where the bag went missing. Rat just sits there and smokes while the other children search. Rat is so grey and filthy that he always blends in with the landfill and so he goes unseen. The other kids are excited because McKinley residents have toilets, meaning the trash had no stupp. Gardo and Raphael start to realize how important this bag is to the police and they both feel frightened—but they hide their fear, pretending to be excited like the others. Raphael is still “more sure than ever” that he doesn’t want to turn in the bag. Meanwhile, somebody finds a handbag and there is a lot of commotion until the police realize that it isn’t the right one.

The line of trucks waiting to get in is getting longer. Gardo knows the dumpsite is a longshot, as somebody could have grabbed the bag before it even got to Behala. Eventually, the police give up and they pay everyone. That night, there is a festive mood in Behala’s “little neighbourhood” around the cooking fires; some people even have beer. Only Raphael’s auntie is worried. Gardo still thinks it was stupid for her to speak up—the police took her aside and threatened to search her pallet-house.

Raphael smiles easily and he assures his auntie that there is nothing in the house and nothing to worry about. Raphael’s auntie frets about how much money 10,000 pesos is, and Gardo has to remind her that there is no chance the police will actually pay up. Knowing that Raphael doesn’t think things through so carefully, Gardo begins silently strategizing. Later, the boys reassure themselves that they can investigate the locker and then give up the bag or even just throw it in the dumpsite for somebody else to find. Gardo recalls that they thought they were being smart, but he forgot to factor in one important thing: the police will never let up if they want something from you.

## PART 1: CHAPTER 6

The next day, Raphael and Rat convince Gardo to lead them to the station. Gardo insists they go early to avoid any police. The train runs right by the dumpsite (and through towns where people’s homes crowd the tracks), so the boys jump on easily. Gardo tries to talk Raphael out of the plan—he’s worried about the police and he’s heard they’ve raised the reward—but Raphael is still convinced the police wouldn’t pay. Rat looks back and forth as they argue. Eventually, they agree to see what’s in the locker before deciding what to do. Rat convinces the boys to let him unlock the locker on his own—he’s more likely to outrun the police alone, and he knows the “station boys.”

*Mulligan once again emphasizes the filth that children are forced to live in through the fact that Rat blends in with the trash, as well as the other children’s excitement at an opportunity to wade in trash that doesn’t have human excrement (stupp) all over it. Raphael and Gardo’s ability to control their emotions and conceal their find once again shows that they have amassed substantial street smarts from their lived experiences on the landfill.*



*Gardo’s description of the festive atmosphere in the evening shows how the community rallies together to make life more tolerable by cooking, singing, and making music together. The juxtaposition between the boys’ quick thinking and Raphael’s auntie’s naivety implies that the boys are much sharper than her—they know it’s crucial to avoid drawing attention to themselves.*



*Gardo’s confidence that the police will never pay the reward further hints that the police force is untrustworthy and dangerous. The boys’ strategic plans about what to do with the bag once again expose their aptitude and intelligence, no doubt gathered from a life in which they’ve learned from experience to constantly be on guard for their own safety.*



*The boys continued strategizing displays their sharp thinking once again, while Raphael’s lack of faith in the police emphasizes that they are not to be trusted. Raphael’s descriptions about the shanty towns along the railroad imply that there is a high level of poverty in this city, and that the impoverished are vulnerable because they are forced to live in cramped and potentially dangerous environments. Rat’s familiarity with the station boys shows that impoverished communities share a sense of solidarity, which Rat and his friends can leverage to ensure their safety.*



The boys jump off the train right before it arrives in order to avoid the station guards. Gardo nearly falls on Raphael, whereas Raphael notices that Rat is agile and fast. The three of them are immediately herded into a corner by the station boys, who control the station—they keep the place clean and they don't openly beg or sell, which keeps the guards off their backs. Rat goes forward and negotiates with them, eventually handing over 70 of Raphael's pesos in exchange for five minutes' passage. Raphael notices menacing guards in the crowd and he begins to get scared—the prisons are full of street kids whom the police round. Others aren't so lucky: it's rumored that the police break some kids' legs and then they leave the kids to die on the train tracks.

Rat knows exactly what he's doing: he ducks behind some customers while Raphael and Gardo walk right past as if nothing happened. The lockers aren't smashed, which meant the police haven't gotten to them yet. Soon, Rat walks toward Gardo and Raphael with an envelope under his arm, cautioning them to walk casually. Gardo convincingly slows down to fiddle with a slot machine as they stroll toward platform four. They jump onto the tracks and run, relieved, before ducking into some undergrowth. Grinning, Rat hands over the envelope, which contains an ominous-looking letter addressed to a Gabriel Olondriz at Colva Prison. The letter is full of nonsense words and a code with numbers and slashes. At this, the boys realize that they're involved in something serious.

## PART 2: CHAPTER 1

Father Juilliard, who's 63 and runs the Pascal Aguila Mission School on the Behala dumpsite, says that he is the one gathering the accounts of this story together (with names changed). Juilliard loves the school, though it's almost a futile effort—it's hard to lure kids to school when they need to scavenge to survive and have so few prospects. Father Juilliard knows Jun (referring to Rat's real name). The two of them became friends, and Father Juilliard gives Jun bandages and extra meals even though this is forbidden. The school is full of rules, and Father Juilliard thinks rules should be broken once in a while. There's even a rule demanding silence on the stairs in memory of Pascal Aguila, a "freedom fighter" lawyer for poor people's rights who was assassinated in a taxi after exposing the corruption of three senators.

*Rat's agility is a testament to the skills he's picked up through a life of scavenging, implying that life can teach people many things even if they are not formally educated. The station boys similarly display a strong sense of organization and enterprising in controlling the station with their unified front and bribery. On the other hand, Raphael's fear of imprisonment and police brutality suggests that poor children are highly vulnerable to abuse as soon as they make themselves more visible in public.*



*Rat once again demonstrates a streetwise awareness of how to navigate public spaces without drawing attention to himself. Gardo's self-control in slowing down to fiddle with a slot machine and look casual similarly displays both his intelligence and his streetwise strategic thinking. It's clear that the boys have gleaned a lot from living on the streets despite being uneducated.*



*Father Juilliard's feeling of futility in his efforts with the Mission School reinforces this community's lack of opportunity, since he hints that the children will be stuck on the landfill indefinitely. Mulligan emphasizes the prevalence of child labor in Behala by showing that the children cannot even afford to stop working long enough to go to school for a few hours a day. Meanwhile, Pascal Aguila's fate reveals that the city is indeed corrupt, and that people who attempt to expose corruption often pay with their lives.*





Father Juilliard explains that the house mother, Sister Olivia, is actually—and foolishly—more involved in Raphael’s tale. One Thursday, a thin and ashy Jun offers to pay if he, Raphael, and Gardo can use the school’s aging computer to research some information for a newspaper quiz. Father Juilliard notices the boys’ bare feet, dirty legs, and strong odor that “fill[s] the room.” He waves the money away and he lets them through. To this day, Father Juilliard is amazed at how intuitively kids handle computers: the boys go straight to a search engine and type a name. Father Juilliard asks Jun if he’s eaten that day (he hasn’t) and so Juilliard fetches some sandwiches. He asks about the quiz, but Gardo just looked serious and Raphael answers in “his own language” which Father Juilliard, ashamedly, barely knows.

Jun takes a sandwich; his filthy, skeleton-thin hands make Father Juilliard “wince.” Juilliard has grown very fond of Jun, as has Sister Olivia. Olivia wants to adopt Jun, but foreigners usually can’t do so—this saddens Father Juilliard because so many babies “crawl into **trash**” as soon as they’re able. Father Juilliard will never forget Jun’s amazement at running water and his clean body after he gave Jun his first bath. Once the boys are finished on the computer, Father Juilliard jokes with Jun about coming to class, mentioning incentives like bags of rice. He slips Jun 50 pesos on his way out. Father Juilliard now knows that the boys deceived him “beautifully”—they’d looked up José Angelico and Gabriel Olondriz. Rat is up to something too, which Father Juilliard says Rat will reveal himself. Juilliard never sees the boys again.

*Father Juilliard’s sensory description of the children’s pervasive smell and filthy legs helps the reader to visualize the appalling conditions in which Behala’s children are forced to live. Despite the boys’ poverty and lack of education, however, they once again display intuitive intelligence in their ability to navigate a computer so quickly. The boys’ deception with the quiz also displays strategic thinking and perhaps even a pragmatic sense of care for Father Juilliard, since their deception shields him from knowledge that could implicate him in their actions.*



*Father Juilliard’s description of Jun’s (meaning Rat’s) emaciated state, Rat’s first bath experience, and the pitiful plight of babies who crawl into trash all emphasize that impoverished children in this area lack access to basic resources or opportunities to improve their lives. Father Juilliard’s surprise at the boys’ deception shows that people often wrongly underestimate the skills and intelligence of those who are poor and uneducated.*



## PART 2: CHAPTER 2

Raphael says that the story gets serious now. As Gardo predicted, four vans of police come to Behala that night; the officers search everyone’s homes and they arrest Raphael. It’s hard for Raphael to tell this part, but nobody else can. The police drag Raphael to a car. Gardo yells and tries to yank Raphael away, but his uncles hold him back. The car pulls away while Gardo and Raphael’s auntie scream. Raphael rocks back and forth, feeling his world fall out from under him. Raphael sobs and he claims that he didn’t do anything wrong. The policemen reply that they know but they keep driving anyway. Even though Rat has the wallet, Raphael resolves to say nothing. The boys know about José Angelico—there’s “a fight beginning.”

*The violent manner in which Raphael is arrested and the extent of his fear are highly disturbing. Both indicate how vulnerable poor people are in this society because they have to fear the police, who are supposed to protect citizens’ safety. Behala’s residents display a strong sense of community through their attempts to protect Gardo from being arrested too. Additionally, the reader learns that Raphael is developing a sense of solidarity with José Angelico despite having never met him.*



The police car pulls into the station and goes underground while police dogs bark. Raphael wets himself out of fear. The officers pull him out of the car under bright lights and they carry him into a cell containing only a concrete bench. Seconds later, a policeman came in to comfort Raphael, who throws up all over himself and cries for his auntie like he's never cried before. Suddenly, a man comes in and has Raphael hauled upstairs and placed in a room marked "six." A tired man explains that Raphael is in Ermita Police Station and he asks about the bag. Raphael tries to speak, but nothing comes out. Eventually he squeaks out that he doesn't know anything about a bag.

The tired man says that this won't end until Raphael gives them the bag. Shaking, Raphael knocks over a glass of water. Playing "a terrified, foolish child," he swears he's never found one but that he did find 1,100 pesos. The police knew he'd been lying about something—they ask about the money, and Raphael lied, saying he found it alone "by belt number four." Suddenly, Raphael is knocked to the floor; his face splits open and his mouth fills with blood. The police haul Raphael up to the chair by his hair as he screams that he was with Gardo. The police slap Raphael's bleeding, snotty face and they ask what the money was in. Thinking fast, Raphael says that it was in an electricity bill.

The tired man fires repeated questions at Raphael: he asks how "trash like you" can read (Gardo and Raphael's auntie taught him), how much money he found (1,100 pesos), and where the bag was (there was no bag). The man lunges at Raphael's neck, pinning him to the wall. Raphael soils himself and he screams that he didn't find a bag. The police hang Raphael out of the window by his ankle, where all Raphael can see is a stone floor far below. Later, Gardo and Rat ask if Raphael came close to confessing, but he says that some deep part of him couldn't—he just kept saying no. The officers pull Raphael back in and he fell to his knees, begging and repeating that he doesn't know anything. Somehow, he knows now that he got the strength from José Angelico.

The tired man twists Raphael's arm behind him and says that they could break all of Raphael's bones—starting with his arm—and drag Raphael to a "special place" for "garbage" like him. Then they could put Raphael's body in a sack in the trash. The tired man asks Raphael if that's what he wants. Unable to speak, Raphael blinks and waits for a snap—but none comes. Again, the man asks where the bag was and Raphael sobs, saying that he doesn't know anything about a bag. Looking more tired, the man sizes up Raphael's soiled body, as if deciding on its value. Eventually, the tired man says, "Get him out." Before Raphael knows it, he's out on the street and running as fast as his wobbly legs can go. He is free and—unlike José Angelico—alive.

*The detailed description of Raphael's ride to the police station and Raphael's visceral fear at being separated from his caregiver show how vulnerable he is. The fact that children can be treated in such a traumatizing manner by the police hints that this city's government is highly corrupt. Raphael's initial resolve to say nothing about the bag despite his fear both proves his courage and suggests that he feels a strong sense of solidarity with José Angelico, the bag's owner.*



*The sheer horror of the violence that Raphael endures shows that the police are indeed overstepping the boundaries of their power, and it reinforces just how vulnerable impoverished children are in this society. It's no exaggeration that Raphael is fighting for his life, which no child should have to do in police custody. Raphael's quick thinking at making up the story about the electricity bill shows just how astute he is—especially under pressure.*



*The tired man's metaphoric reference to Raphael as "trash" is ironic, as the brutality that Raphael is enduring implies the exact opposite: it's the police who are acting deplorably—like scum, or "trash"—by violating Raphael, threatening his life, and assuming his poverty means he is of no value. However, Raphael draws a great deal of strength from his sense of solidarity with José Angelico, which implies that people in vulnerable positions can endure difficult encounters through such solidarity.*



*The reference to Raphael as "garbage" shows once again that the police unfairly assume that poor people are worthless. Yet Raphael is able to trick the police into believing he doesn't have the bag, indicating that he is, in fact, highly intelligent. The police's brutality exposes just how vulnerable to abuse and trauma impoverished children are, while revealing that the police force is corrupted in some way since they are willing to go to such lengths to get the information they want.*



## PART 2: CHAPTER 3

Raphael runs amid the fresh, cool rain, feeling the world come back to him. He realizes that the police had nothing if he was their only clue, and he feels pretty proud of himself, a “garbage” boy, for outsmarting the “garbage police.” Raphael walks three hours to Behala. He tells the reader about José Angelico: it turns out the man was killed in a police station during an interrogation. Raphael shudders, wondering if it was the same room he was just in, and whether the police dropped Angelico out of the window onto that stone floor. Raphael knows that he stuck to his lie for José Angelico and for Angelico’s daughter.

José Angelico had been arrested on suspicion of robbing \$6,000,000 from the vice-president, for whom Angelico worked as a houseboy for 18 years. It’s hard for Raphael to imagine that sort of money, which is even more in pesos. On the computer, Raphael, Gardo, and Rat learned that José Angelico was an orphan who’d been adopted by the son of Gabriel Olondriz (which was the name on the coded letter). Raphael thinks that the police might have forced José Angelico to confess and that he threw the bag out before they got him. José Angelico wrote to Gabriel Olondriz because the police were coming for him. Shaking in the rain, Raphael knows that he, Gardo, and Rat will have to deliver that letter to Olondriz in Colva Prison.

*Mulligan once again invokes the symbolic reference to the police as the real “garbage” in this story rather than Raphael, who completely outsmarted them despite his poverty and lack of education. Raphael reveals that his strong loyalty to José Angelico is based in their shared experiences with police brutality, implying a sense of solidarity among vulnerable people in the story, even if they don’t know each other.*



*Mulligan reveals the extent of wealth disparity in this society: the vice-president’s fortune is so tremendous that it’s unimaginable to a poor child like Raphael. Raphael’s suspicion that the police forced José Angelico to confess reinforces the growing implication that the police are corrupt and they are likely working for the vice-president. Again, Raphael emphasizes his sense of solidarity with José Angelico when he reveals his intentions to deliver the letter to its intended recipient.*



## PART 2: CHAPTER 4

Grace begins narrating because Father Juilliard asked her to discuss José Angelico’s nature as man. Grace has been a maid of Senator Zapanta—the vice-president—for four years. To Grace, José Angelico was a “kind, gentle, trustworthy, and honest” man, and she thought it “impossible” that he would steal from Senor Zapanta. José Angelico’s wife and son had died years before. Angelico worked as a live-in houseboy in order to send his young daughter, Pia Dante, to school. When Angelico was taken, Grace was “very, very upset.” She went to find Pia Dante in the town where she boarded, but Pia Dante had disappeared. Grace doesn’t know what happened to Pia Dante, but she thinks Pia might have ended up on the street like so many other kids.

*Grace’s intervention into the narrative reveals important facts about José Angelico’s role as Senator Zapanta’s longtime servant. Zapanta’s refusal to let Pia Dante live with José Angelico hints at his malevolent nature, while Grace’s thoughts about José Angelico and his resolve to educate his daughter imply that Angelico is, by contrast, a good man. José Angelico and Pia Dante’s story demonstrates how poverty unjustly separates families and leaves poor children highly vulnerable, since they often end up on the streets.*



## PART 3: CHAPTER 1

Olivia Weston, the 22-year-old house-mother at the Mission School, says she also has a part in this story; Raphael, Rat, Gardo, and Father Juilliard asked her to “write it down carefully.” Originally, she traveled to the area in order to surf and she visited Behala to deliver some money from her affluent parents. Olivia fell “in love” with the children living on the dumpsite, so she ended up staying and working at the school. Like Father Juilliard, Olivia is very fond of Jun (meaning Rat, who calls Olivia “Sister” or “Mother”) and she often gives him extra food and money. Jun’s way with adults is probably how a boy with nobody manages to survive.

The day after Raphael returns from the police station, Jun brings him and Gardo to visit Olivia. When Raphael arrived at Behala, bloody and beaten, the whole neighborhood came out because when one of them is hurt, “everyone feels the wound.” Olivia notices Raphael’s battered face and she wonders how somebody could do that to a child. Gardo looks forlorn as Jun explains that Gardo has no family and he will lose his home unless he gets some papers to his grandfather, who was falsely arrested because of “corruption,” in prison. Since Olivia is a foreigner, she can say she’s a social worker and they’ll let her through. The boys look desperate, and though Olivia is bewildered by this story, her heart breaks for Gardo—which is how she finds herself in a taxi to Colva Prison.

Olivia says that her vanity allowed the boys to manipulate her. She takes Gardo alone with her, stopping on the way to get him some new clothes since even his best clothes are stiff with dirt. She’s surprised at how carefully Gardo chose them and that he wants the most expensive ones. After some negotiation, she pays for a whole new outfit on her credit card because she knows a dumpsite boy won’t be let into Colva Prison. Olivia is taken aback by how handsome Gardo looks with clean clothes and shoes on. His radiance and happiness melt her heart.

## PART 3: CHAPTER 2

Father Juilliard says that had he known what the boys were up to, he would have warned Olivia that it was a “scam.” He hates to say it, but the children in Behala are some of the best liars in the world—lying is probably a survival tactic. The boys had a special plan for Father Juilliard. He thinks Raphael and Gardo were “smart” but what Jun did really shocked him.

*Olivia’s fondness for Jun (meaning Rat) showcases his ability to charm adults into giving him money and food, another streetwise skill he likely cultivated from a life on the streets. This once again demonstrates that Rat is an emotionally intelligent boy despite his lack of education and resources. The fact that Rat needs to go to such lengths in order to survive reinforces the extreme poverty faced by children like him.*



*The collective pain that Behala’s residents express at Raphael’s abuse highlights the strong sense of empathy and community in this little corner of the city, which makes the difficulties of life in such poverty more bearable. Once again, the boys display their strategic and emotional intelligence when they’re able to trick Olivia into taking them to Colva Prison. She appears to be no match for their wily smarts, despite her educated and clearly affluent background.*



*Gardo’s transformation shows how easily children could be saved from the poverty they are condemned to, hinting that their plight is at least in part a function of society’s failure to step in and help. The fact that Gardo needs clean clothes to gain access to public spaces like Colva Prison also implies that society’s poorest children are typically shunned or avoided.*



*The skills and aptitude picked up by society’s poorest are clearly a force to be reckoned with— they have to be smart and savvy in order to survive.*



## PART 3: CHAPTER 3

The taxi drives Olivia and Gardo to a “squalid” part of the city, even more so than Behala. Still, Behala is a stinking pile of rubbish and shacks—Olivia can’t believe people have to live there. It breaks her heart to see an old man next to a child and to realize that the only future a child has is “to breathe the stink” until they die, like rats. Colva looks like it’s been ripped up by an earthquake: children live in shacks outside the prison to smuggle food in to their incarcerated relatives, who would otherwise starve. As Olivia and Gardo enter the prison, they’re both scared.

After a long wait, a friendly man named Mr. Oliva comes in. He’s immediately charmed by Olivia immediately and he thanks her for volunteering in their poor city. Mr. Oliva suggests that Gardo go in alone because the prison conditions are rough, but Olivia insists on accompanying him. Mr. Oliva explains that there are “fees” for unplanned visits, and Olivia winces as she hands over 10,000 pesos—the day cost her a lot, and she’d planned on spending that at an expensive dinner that night. Olivia becomes increasingly frightened as they’re led deeper into the prison, which became darker, hotter, and full of eerie sounds like clanging metal, heavy boot stomps, shouting, and “dreadful” echoing laughter.

## PART 3: CHAPTER 4

In Colva Prison, Olivia is shocked to see a maze of small cages stacked on top of one another like a towering, “oven-hot” warehouse holding emaciated people stinking of urine and sweat. She becomes disoriented and distraught at the sight of children holding smaller children in cages. Surprisingly, the prisoners are polite and cheerful. A haze of hands stretches out toward Olivia, clamoring for water or pesos, amid cries for help. Gardo takes Olivia’s hand to steady her, but she is paralyzed by shock. They pass through to the hospital, where Gabriel Olondriz is being treated. Olivia feels faint and she sobs, asking Gardo why there are children in there. He replies matter-of-factly that poor kids steal for food. Eventually, a weak man supported by guards slowly approaches. He looks at Olivia as if he’s been expecting her.

*Olivia’s description of Colva, the town surrounding the prison, shows that many people in this society live in abject poverty. Olivia also emphasizes the lack of prospects that poor people in this society have, since they are condemned to live and die in poverty and filth. The resolve of the impoverished (in helping their relatives with food) once again indicates that a sense of community is what pulls vulnerable people through difficult circumstances.*



*Mr. Oliva’s thinly-veiled demand for a bribe (which he disguises as “fees”) again demonstrates the corruption on which the city runs. Olivia’s worry about not affording her dinner throws the poverty of Behala’s residence into relief, since the 10,000 pesos she worries about is equivalent to several months of income for a trash scavenger. Mulligan implicitly hints that society’s affluent likely turn a blind eye to the plight of the poor since it doesn’t take much at all to save a child from months of poverty, yet there are still many poor children in the city.*



*Through Olivia’s eyes, Mulligan further depicts the abuses that impoverished children face in this society, since many are caged like animals and left to wither in squalid conditions. Gardo’s comment that poor children are often imprisoned shows that when poor children make themselves more visible in society, they are highly vulnerable to such abuse. In other words, “trash boys” like Gardo have no safe place to go: if they stay in Behala they endure filth and poverty, but if they leave they might be rounded up and subjected to the even worse alternative of starving to death in a cage.*



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## PART 3: CHAPTER 5

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A frail Gabriel Olondriz—who looks to be on the brink of death—greeted Olivia, happy for the company. Olivia is confused that he doesn't greet Gardo, who freezes and goes quiet. Gabriel Olondriz and Gardo talk softly in "their own language" before Gabriel Olondriz tells Olivia that she's been had—Olondriz doesn't know the boy, nor does he have a house, and Olivia paid way over the going bribe of 1,500 pesos to get to Olondriz. Despite Gardo's imploring, Olondriz refuses to talk to Gardo privately. Olondriz is shocked that Olivia has no idea who she's visiting. He explains that he brought corruption charges against a very powerful Senator Zapanta when \$30,000,000 of aid money, intended for schools and hospitals, disappeared 35 years ago. None of these institutions were built, and Olondriz has been rotting in prison ever since.

*Gabriel Olondriz makes clear the deplorable magnitude of Senator Zapanta's corruption. He implies that although prison guards regularly demand bribes, the biggest theft in this society is Senator Zapanta's, since millions of dollars intended for the poor mysteriously disappeared under his watch. Olondriz thus shows that Senator Zapanta is directly responsible for the city's extreme poverty, and that Senator Zapanta's corruption extends even further. He clearly controls the police and courts of law as well, given Olondriz's plight as a political prisoner.*



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## PART 3: CHAPTER 6

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In the present day, Gardo says that he's sorry about tricking Olivia. Rat wanted to confide in Olivia, but Gardo refused, and for that he's sorry. Gardo was terrified for Raphael when they took him; Gardo thought Raphael would break, but he didn't. After that, Gardo knew they'd have to leave Behala and he thought it safer to keep things between them. Gardo is terribly sorry for how things ended for Olivia.

*Gardo's remorse reveals that the boys feel a great deal of guilt for their actions, hinting once again at the strong sense of community in Behala, which the boys violated when they tricked Olivia.*



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## PART 3: CHAPTER 7

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Back at Colva Prison, Olivia is confused about how so much money could disappear. Gabriel Olondriz explains that this can happen with bogus contracts. He discovered that Senator Zapanta had siphoned money off and stockpiled it in a vault in his home. Olondriz worked meticulously to gather a mass of evidence, but his house—and all the evidence—was burned down, killing two of his servants. Then, Zapanta charged Olondriz with murder and Olondriz was convicted. Olondriz says he'd been "stupid," and stupid people, like the poor, end up in prison.

*Olondriz expands on Senator Zapanta's corruption, revealing that Zapanta not only condemned his people to poverty but he is also directly responsible for the deaths of several others (including Olondriz's innocent servants) and for perverting the course of justice by imprisoning Olondriz. Mulligan emphasizes that the poor gravely suffer at the hands of such corruption because so many of them end up in prison.*



Gardo wipes Gabriel Olondriz's forehead and he asks Olondriz who Dante Jerome was and what the "harvest" was. Olondriz goes quiet and quizzes Gardo, who explains that José Angelico wrote a letter saying that if Olondriz could visit Senator Zapanta's house right now, his "soul would sing because it is accomplished." Olondriz gapes, looking "luminous," and he takes Gardo's hands. Olondriz knows Gardo is a dumpsite boy because, like Olivia, he's volunteered with them—he knows that even under clean clothes, the smell never goes away. Gardo explains that he found the letter in a locker but he didn't dare to bring it because the police killed José Angelico during interrogation. Olondriz buckles and he shakes with pain, and Olivia knows she can't do anything but watch.

*It's clear that Senator Zapanta is also likely responsible for José Angelico's death and for the brutal treatment that Raphael endured at the hands of the police. Olondriz's grief over Angelico's death underscores the degree of suffering that such corruption causes. The fact that Olondriz recognizes Gardo as a landfill scavenger by his smell reinforces the filthy conditions that children like Gardo have to endure. Gardo's lingering odor also metaphorically represents the inescapability of his fate as a trash boy in this society.*



## PART 3: CHAPTER 8

In the present, Raphael apologizes to Olivia: he hopes to see her again and to thank her in person. Meanwhile, Raphael and Rat are restless while Gardo are at the prison. They pore over the letter, which they've almost memorized (even the numbers). Rat decides they should go to Senator Zapanta's house (which is located in Green Hills among the rich and famous) to make sense of the letter's cryptic message. They need money first, and Raphael is broke. Rat laughs and he leads Raphael back to his hovel by the rat nests. Raphael squirms as they approach, wondering how Rat can tolerate living in such a "disgusting" part of Behala. Rat isn't "lucky" like Raphael but he loves his home. Some of the rats are even friendly—they never bite him since he's so thin.

*The strong sense of community in Behala is once again emphasized by Raphael's remorse at violating it through the boys' treatment of Olivia. Mulligan reminds the reader of the sheer squalor in Behala with descriptions of the filth in which Rat has to live. The fact that Raphael is "lucky" to live in a shack above the trash as opposed to in the trash itself reiterates just how serious the plight of the impoverished is. Raphael's persistent disgust in Behala once again shows that despite knowing no other home, he never quite gets used to the filth that he has to endure day in and day out.*



Rat says the rats ate the bag and he warns Raphael not to rob him. Raphael laughs until Rat pulls out a metal box containing a "fortune" of 2,326 pesos: he's been charming people like Olivia out of money and saving by not eating. Rat isn't from Behala—he came from Sampalo and he wants to go home. There was no work in Sampalo, though, so he came to Behala to save 50,000 pesos for a boat so that he can be a fisherman and live on the beach, clean and free of Behala. He thinks Raphael and Gardo should come too, knowing that the police will never leave Raphael alone. Raphael thinks about his bruises, his terrifying nightmares, and his auntie, who seems fearful of having Raphael around now.

*The boys' description of Rat's money as a "fortune" once again shows how poor they really are, since his "fortune" amounts to a mere quarter of Olivia's dinner budget. The children's poverty is similarly emphasized by the fact that Rat chose to live in Behala's filth because it was the best option he had. Rat once again displays how savvy and emotionally intelligent he is since he's amassed his money on the basis of sheer charm. Finally, Rat's desire to escape to Sampalo with Gardo and Raphael shows his growing sense of loyalty to them.*



## PART 3: CHAPTER 9

Rat starts narrating (with Raphael writing for him). The boys take a bus to the terminal. Though Raphael is beaten up, he does the talking since Rat would be turned away for being too filthy. They ride two hours to Green Hills, past malls and stadiums, and into a lush “paradise” by the ocean, much nicer than the “sludge and stupp we call Behala.” Rat knows that Raphael is scared, so Rat keeps a fast pace to distract him. They approach Senator Zapanta’s gate, which is guarded with dogs and machine guns. Raphael gets nervous but Rat keeps going, climbing a tree to get into the grounds. The boys gape as they scurry past a golf course, trees, ponds, impossibly soft grass, and Zapanta’s “fairy tale” castle of a house.

Suddenly, from behind, a gardener gently asked what the boys want. Raphael panics and he runs into the grass, but Rat yells out to calm him, knowing there is no danger. Rat tells the gardener that they’re just roaming. The gardener, happy for company, sits for a smoke with the boys. Cheerfully, he explains that the police have been all over for days. Rat stays silent, waiting for the gardener to let the story out himself. The gardener says that apparently, José Angelico, a “nice enough boy,” smuggled out \$6,000,000 in a broken fridge—and the gardener couldn’t be happier about it. He hopes that José Angelico gave the money away before the police killed him, because Senator Zapanta stole from everyone, even the boys and the gardener himself.

## PART 3: CHAPTER 10

Back at the prison, Gabriel Olondriz tearfully explains that José Angelico was one of 32 children whom his son Dante Jerome adopted while running a school. José Angelico was “the sweetest boy” and he was one of Olondriz’s favorites. José Angelico visited Olondriz in prison last year and he wanted Olondriz to meet Pia Dante because Olondriz was her godfather. Weeping, Olondriz says that José Angelico had high hopes of becoming a doctor or a lawyer—he must have gotten tired of waiting for life to pan out for him. Turning to Gardo, Olondriz says that they’d better talk about the letter. To Olondriz’s amazement, Gardo has memorized the whole thing and he begins to recite it.

*The fact that Rat is shunned in public spaces underscores the extent to which most people ignore the plight of impoverished children—they’re more focused on their own revulsion than on their desire to help those condemned to a life like Rat’s. The luxury of Zapanta’s compound reinforces the degree of income disparity in this society and it underscores the injustice of a society that allows children to live in human waste while powerful figures live in an inaccessible “paradise.” Meanwhile, Rat once again displays his emotional intelligence through his ability to manage Raphael’s fear.*



*The gardener’s amicable attitude with the boys and his glee at José Angelico’s successful robbery implies that the gardener feels a sense of solidarity with others who are poor in comparison to Zapanta’s wealth. Mulligan explicitly identifies Zapanta’s wealth as a deplorable theft from those who are less privileged. José Angelico’s clever act of smuggling the money out of Zapanta’s compound in broken fridge implies once again that the wealthy severely underestimate the intelligence of the poor.*



*Gabriel Olondriz reveals that (like the protagonists) José Angelico was a street kid, reinforcing the idea that there is a strong sense of solidarity among the city’s impoverished. Dante Jerome’s actions show how childhood poverty can be ethically addressed instead of ignored. José Angelico’s actions reveal that poverty leaves people with so few opportunities in this society that they are driven to theft. Meanwhile, Gardo’s ability to memorize the letter once again shows his intelligence and aptitude despite his lack of education.*





In the letter, José Angelico writes that he thinks of Gabriel Olondriz daily and he raises a glass to Olondriz's honor (and "in memoriam" of Dante Jerome). He continues that the "seed-corn" has been planted and "soon the harvest" because "it is accomplished" (which he writes three times in a row). José Angelico knows they're coming for him and he prays the letter finds Olondriz. He's afraid for Pia Dante, but the "seeds are safe," "the veil of the temple is rent in the midst," and Olondriz's "soul would sing" if he could go to Senator Zapanta's house. Olondriz goes pale and he asks Gardo (in his language) if there is also a slip of paper containing numbers and slashes. Gardo says that there was. Olondriz becomes excited because the numbers are a code.

Gabriel Olondriz calls Gardo an "angel" and he's glad Gardo didn't bring the letter. Olondriz quietly explains that the numbers are a simple "book-code" referring to passages in his Bible. At the crucifixion, St. John said "it is accomplished," meaning everything that was stolen was restored. Olondriz is extremely excited, but the guard, Marco, comes in to end the visit. Marco won't fetch Olondriz's Bible, but Olondriz said Marco is trustworthy and that he'll bring it to Gardo later. Outside the prison, Gardo explains what transpired to Olivia and he warns her that things are getting dangerous, for her too.

The next morning, Gabriel Olondriz dies peacefully in prison. Olivia assumes that Marco realized the Bible was valuable. She doesn't know what happened next because the next morning, the police show up and take her to the police station. Father Juilliard is able to contact Olivia's father, who sends a man from the British Embassy who manages to get her released. Olivia takes a plane out of the country that same day. Reflecting on her time in Behala, Olivia says that she learned something she never could have at university: that money is precious—like water—and Behala is in a vicious drought. Olivia left a part of her heart with the boys, especially Rat, and she tearfully thanks them for "using" her.

## PART 4: CHAPTER 1

Right after Gardo comes back to Behala, the police blaze in with sirens blaring, and the boys know they have to run. The boys grab Rat's money and they sneak out through the **trash** with no time to say goodbyes. Rat decides that they should hide out in a tourist area with lots of street kids; he even cuts Raphael's hair to disguise him. Gardo, Rat, and Raphael rent a windowless room the size of a "coffin" high up in a stack of shacks, and though Gardo makes fun of him, Rat loosens part of the roof in case they need to escape.

*The fact that José Angelico had to conceal his intentions in a code once again implies that the authority figures in this society are corrupt, since the guards clearly intercept materials that are intended for Olondriz. José Angelico's fear for Pia Dante's safety reminds the reader that young, poor children are highly vulnerable in this society.*



*Gabriel Olondriz confirms that the prison is indeed corrupted with Zapanta's spies when he says that Gardo was right to keep the letter out of the guards' hands. Gardo's strategic intelligence is revealed once again since he was smart enough to suspect foul play at the prison and his actions protect the contents of the letter from the guards' prying eyes. Gardo's fear that Olivia is unsafe for visiting a political prisoner hints at the dangers of living in a corrupt city.*



*Olivia's arrest symbolizes the risks that people face in places where the authorities are corrupted by powerful, self-serving people. Olivia's reflections about what she learned from her experiences in Behala and at Colva Prison show that there is tangible value in real-world experiences that challenge one's preconceptions and comfort level. Through Olivia's comments, Mulligan argues that such exposure even rivals the values of a formal education because it shows people how the world really works.*



*Rat continues to demonstrate his savvy, streetwise intelligence by leading the boys to a tourist area, cutting Raphael's hair, and—most of all—anticipating the need for a hasty exit. The comparison of the boys' room to a "coffin" likens those sleeping there to dead people, again suggesting that poor people are essentially dead to the rest of society.*



The boys know they need Olondriz's Bible, so Gardo bravely walks to the prison and he watches the building for three days. Eventually, Gardo spots Marco leaving and he follows him, making sure to be seen. He returns with bad news: Marco wants 20,000 pesos for the Bible. The boys aren't even sure if they can trust Marco—surely the price on their heads was high. Marco could easily take the money and turn the boys in, and they know they wouldn't make it out alive. So they wait, watching the news, which features many pictures of Senator Zapanta. Rat is aching for the “fat pig's” money and he thinks if he ever gets to heaven, he'll ask the brave José Angelico if Angelico stashed the bag out of desperation or if he had a plan.

A week later, Rat goes back to the dumpsite in the back of a **garbage** truck. He doesn't tell the boys why. To the reader, Rat admits that he habitually steals small unnoticeable amounts from the Mission School's safe once a month (using the code Father Juilliard writes in his diary on his desk). Rat feels bad, but he opens the safe and takes all 23,000 pesos it contains—that will be enough to pay off Marco. Feeling guilty because Father Juilliard is like a father to him, Rat draws a picture of himself and Father Juilliard as best he can and he puts it in the safe. He rides in the back of a truck to the city and he crawls under a blanket to cuddle next to Raphael, trying not to feel like an “ungrateful thief.”

## PART 4: CHAPTER 2

Rat feels awful about stealing the money; the boys agree to return it if they can decode the Bible and find the stolen money. Gardo meets Marco in a tea-house, worrying about the police grabbing him and beating him to death. After the exchange, Gardo takes the Bible and he runs toward the kitchen, but Marco grabs him as police whistles go off. Gardo takes his garbage-fishing hook from his back pocket and slashes wildly at Marco's face. Marco falls back, and Gardo thinks he got Marco's eye. Outside, Gardo tosses the Bible to Rat and he bolts through traffic, a fish market, and into the canal as gunshots go off behind him. Downstream, Gardo hacks up his clothes so they looked different and he walks back, praying that Rat and Raphael are safe.

## PART 4: CHAPTER 3

During the commotion, Raphael saw Rat running toward Gardo. Raphael takes off in the other direction, running into traffic and he thinks that the police must have followed him home. Rat thinks the police must have taken their pictures outside the tea-house and offered a reward, meaning somebody gave the boys up. In any case, the next morning, the police show up at the door of where the boys are living.

*Gardo's strategic thinking is highlighted in the way he approaches Marco without exposing himself to the rest of the guards, showing yet again how intelligent he is despite being uneducated. Marco's demand for a bribe, as well as the high possibility of a price on the boys' heads, explicitly show how corrupt the society is: it's clear that the wealthy can use their money to manipulate the authorities. Rat's admiration for José Angelico's bravery shows a growing solidarity with José Angelico's actions.*



*Mulligan once again highlights Rat's intelligence through Rat's ability to consistently and surreptitiously steal from the same place without being caught. At the same time, Rat's guilt shows that he hasn't been stealing out of greed, but necessity, since he usually only takes a tiny fraction of the money despite needing 50,000 pesos to start a new life, away from Behala's trash and rats. The growing bond between Raphael and Rat shows that they are starting to become like family.*



*Mulligan emphasizes that the boys are not really thieves at all through their intent to return the stolen money, which contrasts with Zapanta's morally reprehensible theft. Marco's intent to rat the boys out after accepting a bribe shows once again how corrupt the authority figures in this society are. Gardo's quick thinking in tossing the Bible to Rat, running in the opposite direction, and disguising his clothes before reconvening with the boys once again emphasizes his streetwise intelligence.*



*The police's actions show that corruption extends far and wide in this society: a reward, it seems can make anything happen, whether the demand is ethical or not.*



## PART 4: CHAPTER 4

Raphael sits down with Gardo to try to decode the Bible by candlelight. They flip to the crucifixion passage that Gabriel Olondriz mentioned. They know the code's numbers somehow match the text but they can't figure out how. Midnight strikes—it's the Day of the Dead. Raphael thinks that José Angelico and Olondriz's spirits have joined them. Eventually, they realize that the slashes mean to turn a page. They decode the message, which reads: "Go to the map ref where we lay look for the **brightest light** my child." Rat remembers from school that "map ref" meant they had to find coordinates on the map. Then Gardo remembers that Olondriz's prisoner number on José Angelico's letter is wrong. They try that, and it works: the coordinates point to a graveyard. Rat likes how "the **trash** boys were ahead of the trash police."

*The effort it takes the boys to decode something involving reading exposes how little formal education the boys have. They once again draw strength to battle a challenging task from their strong sense of solidarity with José Angelico and Gabriel Ortiz. Even though both characters are dead, the boys feel as if they are cheering them on from beyond the grave, which bolsters their determination to decode the letter. Though the boys don't know it yet, the "brightest light" symbolizes the city's impoverished community as a beacon of hope, while "trash" symbolizes the police, in contrast, as scum.*



## PART 4: CHAPTER 5

The police come quietly as the boys were fold the map. Rat doesn't know how he heard the ladder creak—maybe it was José Angelico and Gabriel Olondriz's help. He opens the hatch as Raphael freezes. Rat slaps Raphael and they climb silently onto the roof. They climb to the next roof and they make their way down, past people's windows who just stare. Suddenly, there is shouting and whistles. A policeman comes over the ledge, looking straight at Rat, and he reaches for his gun—but the boys manage to climb further and they slip out of reach.

*Rat's heightened sensory alertness—no doubt cultivated from a life on the streets—saves the boys lives since he senses, in the nick of time, that the police are surreptitiously approaching to raid their tiny room. Once again, the boys draw strength from their sense of solidarity with José Angelico and Gabriel Olondriz. It really seems like they are all one united team, which connotes an innate sense of community among them.*



## PART 4: CHAPTER 6

Raphael thinks that Rat must have extra senses from being chased so often—he knows to bolt when he hears a sound. The boys are scrambling on rooftops with the police following, but Rat's quick thinking leads them to a shack where a hundred or so street boys sleep. They somehow manage to make the large, scary jump through the window; Raphael almost misses, but the street boys haul him in. Everyone cheers and they all run out as a noisy, chaotic crowd, confusing the police. Gardo—thinking quickly—holds out their remaining cash in front of a taxi when they hit the main road. They jump in before the driver can smell them and they head to the graveyard, which, luckily, is crowded with people gathering for the Day of the Dead.

*Raphael implies that Rat's life on the street has enabled him with greater alertness than a typical person, implying that the skills of people who are poor and uneducated should not be underestimated, since life experience is a valuable teacher. The street boys reveal a strong sense of solidarity with the three protagonists in identifying with their plight and helping them to escape, which underscores the strong sense of community among the city's impoverished.*



## PART 4: CHAPTER 7

Frederico Gonz, a man who makes gravestones, narrates on Father Juilliard's request. Graves for the poor are stacked on top of each other like boxes, so the stone seals the box closed. Gonz remembers José Angelico from the burial of José's son. When José showed up, looking gaunt and thin, to say his daughter had died, Gonz didn't suspect anything—he only felt pity for the poor man who had nobody left in the world. José had asked for a stone that read "Pia Dante Angelico: *seeds to my harvest, my child. It is accomplished.*" There was nobody but José at the funeral but they put the coffin in and sealed it up. When Gonz heard that José had been killed, he said a prayer for him.

A page from the *Star Extra* newspaper reports that the investigation to recover Senator Zapanta's money continues, while Zapanta (who denies all charges) is in court for a trial on his subsidiary company "Feed Us!" It collapsed in debt and it was responsible for a rice price hike. A page from the *Inquirer* newspaper reports that the "much-loved" vice-president is in "despair," and that Senator Zapanta became famous a few years ago for clearing "squatters" to build a shopping complex, campaigning against illiteracy using unpaid orphans, and shrinking his education budget by 18 percent. A page from the *Daily Star* wonders how the Senator could have been stockpiling millions in his house in the first place. Similarly, a *University Voice* article accuses Zapanta of corruption (for hoarding money) and it calls for revolution.

## PART 5: CHAPTER 1

There is a traffic jam approaching the graveyard as crowds pour in for candlelit festivities among the graves. Raphael knows that the police wouldn't have buried José Angelico, so they look for a family grave instead, but the graveyard is a crowded maze. Rat decides to ask a guard; it takes a few hours to buy flowers, bribe the guard, and get directions. They search until dark, feeling grey, dirty, and invisible among the wealthy crowd. Gardo climbs up a marble angel to get a better view. Then the boys see "the **brightest light**": thousands of poor people's candles from the other side of a wall. The graveyard is divided into two parts, they were on the wrong side all along.

*Gonz's sadness for José Angelico reinforces the idea of a sense of community and empathy among the city's underprivileged. Meanwhile, Pia Dante's gravestone contains similar language as Angelico's letter to Olondriz ("seeds," "harvest," "it is accomplished"), which implies that the grave, too, may be a code for something related to Angelico's stolen fortune.*



*The newspaper articles provide tangible examples of Zapanta's theft and corruption: it's evident that Zapanta has displaced the poor, used unpaid child labor, stolen education funding, set up bogus companies, and raised taxes on basic necessities for the poor. The articles also show that José Angelico's theft has even wider implications for society, since it exposes Zapanta's hoarding to the public it thus gives people cause to question Zapanta's leadership. José Angelico's theft, thus, cleverly completes the task that Gabriel Olondriz started: it exposes Zapanta's corruption and it weakens his power.*



*The boys' sense of invisibility at the graveyard shows that society ignores poor children instead of helping them. The necessity of a bribe once again exposes the pervasive spread of corruption in the city. Additionally, the division of the graveyard symbolizes the unethical divide between the city's rich and poor, while the "brightest light" metaphorically represents the poor as a united communal entity, and it also implies that they are the beacon of hope for this corrupt city.*



## PART 5: CHAPTER 2

People live in shacks on the other side of the graveyard among the poor people's graves. The broken graves sadden Raphael the most. When people can't afford the rent, the guards break the boxes and dump the bodies aside in a rotting pile. Finally, Gardo finds the Angelico grave. Underneath the words "Maria Angelico, wife of José Angelico," "the **brightest light**" is etched, which makes Raphael shiver. The boys see Pia Dante's grave stacked on top and they read out the familiar words "seeds," "harvest," and "accomplished." They are deeply saddened by the thought of José's little girl, and they don't know what to do next. Although the police wouldn't have hesitated, the boys don't want to bust open a bunch of graves. As they look around for clues, a tiny girl appears and she asks who they're looking for.

*Mulligan expands on the appalling conditions in which the city's impoverished children live through descriptions of shacks built alongside dug-up graves and rotting bodies, exposing the unsanitary and repulsive nature of life in abject poverty. The boys' sadness for Pia Dante's fate once again expresses a sense of community among the poor, since like them, she was a young, poor, orphan. Their sadness similarly demonstrates their strong loyalty to José Angelico and the people he cared about. Meanwhile, the etching on Maria Angelico's grave once again symbolizes poor people as the bright spot in this corrupt city.*



## PART 5: CHAPTER 3

The little girl, who has long black hair and a school uniform on, is sitting patiently atop a higher grave. Raphael explains to her that they're looking for José Angelico. The girl didn't think José was coming—she's been waiting for a week and he hasn't come. Rat asks who the girl is, and she responds, "Pia Dante." Raphael goes cold and he nearly falls down. He thinks they're looking at Pia Dante's ghost sitting across from her own grave, waiting to see her father.

*The plot thickens as the reader learns that Pia Dante isn't actually dead, making the boys realize that there's more to her grave than meets the eye. The image of a young orphan waiting alone for her father in a graveyard for several days incites pity for the trials of the poor in the city, as she has likely had to fend for herself during this time.*



## PART 5: CHAPTER 4

Of course, Pia Dante isn't a ghost. She looks weak and smells bad, so the boys decide to clear their heads and get some food, especially for Pia. As Pia starts to eat, however, she became feverish. Rat, who's been starved before, knows what to do: he feeds Pia water and a chopped-up banana, like baby food. Raphael and Gardo still think Rat saved her life. It turns out that Pia was brought to the area by her host family, who left her there when her father didn't show up. Some children found her and they took her to a graveyard shack. She's been waiting for José ever since. The boys pay someone to let Pia sleep nearby and they get her a blanket to shield her from the cool typhoon wind. Rat cries as he tucks her in.

*Pia Dante's story draws attention to the plight of poor children, who are vulnerable to abandonment and starvation in a city that ignores them, like Pia was. At the same time, the kindness of other poor children and the boys' immediate concern for Pia's welfare highlight the sense of community and solidarity among the city's impoverished. Rat once again saves a character's life with his quick thinking and skills rooted in life experience: he knows exactly how to feed the starving Pia to keep her alive.*



Gardo buys some brandy because the boys need courage to break open a grave after midnight on the Day of the Dead. They know they will only keep a bit of the money because it isn't theirs. They go into the graveyard, feeling ghosts all around, and pry open Pia Dante's grave with a broken knife and a spike. Curiously, there is a coffin but no smell (Behala boys know how dead things smell, even bodies). They haul the coffin down and they pry it open. Sure enough, the money is there. What does \$6,000,000 look like? To Raphael, it looks like food, a new life, a future. They know they won't steal it because of all the things Gabriel Olondriz said. Raphael knows Olondriz is there among the ghosts, arm in arm with José Angelico.

*The sense of loyalty among the boys to Gabriel Olondriz's cause and José Angelico's actions is palpable: they have no intention of keeping the money because they believe that it belongs to the poor. Raphael's vision of the money as access to a tolerable life reinforces that Zapanta stole many people's hope and condemned them to miserable poverty by hoarding money in his vault. The boys' immediate recognition of the absence of a dead body smell similarly underscores the intolerable squalor that Zapanta's theft has forced on the poor.*



## PART 5: CHAPTER 5

Jun says that he no longer goes by "Rat." Even though he's narrating the last part of the boys' story, they "are a team now." After finding the \$6,000,000, the boys try to figure out what to do with the money. They can't take it to a bank since it would just be taken from them. Rat suggests throwing it in Behala, for anyone to find. They laugh and they bundle the money that Senator Zapanta stole from his people in two sacks, grab Pia Dante, and ride back to Behala in a cart with some street kids, entering from the canal at the back. Jun goes straight to the Mission School and puts back Father Juilliard's money (leaving another drawing). He thinks his next idea saved their lives: he grabs some donated school uniforms and backpacks from a cupboard and he takes them to the others.

*Jun's heartening description of the boys as a "team" shows how strongly their bond has grown and emphasizes the solidarity between them. Their plan to dump the money in Behala and thereby distribute it among the city's poorest while keeping out of Zapanta's hands is another clever move that highlights the boys' sharp-witted intelligence, moral fortitude, and solidarity with their wider community. Rat again reveals his quick thinking and streetwise intelligence when he wisely grabs disguises for the group.*



The group stuffs four backpacks with money for themselves and they unfurl the rest (most of it) into the heavy typhoon wind, which scatters money like a storm all over Behala. Jun wishes he could have seen the first boy to pick up a \$100 bill instead of stupp, but he knows they can't hang around. At the bottom of the sack, Raphael finds another letter from José Angelico, which Gardo holds onto. They change into the school uniforms, wash their faces, and leave (with Pia Dante in tow) to catch a train.

*Jun's moving wish to see the joy on the children's faces when they discover the scattered money emphasizes the sense of community among Behala's poor because it highlights the way they share in each other's pain and joy. The unquestioning way the boys adopt Pia into their group similarly emphasizes their loyalty to José Angelico and solidarity with poor, young orphans.*



## PART 5: CHAPTER 6

Raphael, Gardo, Jun, and Pia Dante get on the train, looking just like all the other school kids (except their backpacks are stuffed with cash) and they ride all night to Sampalo. They step onto a beach that's "more beautiful than creation." That was some time ago. Now, the lying is over. They've learned to fish and bought fishing boats, and they will live happily until the end of their days.

*Mulligan gives his protagonists the happy ending they desire and the fresh start that society owed them in the first place. They have formed a new little community in a place where they have access to water, can be clean, and can earn a living—the minimum that every person deserves in life.*



## APPENDIX

The second letter from José Angelico asks whomever finds this letter to take care of his daughter, Pia Dante. Angelico explains how, inspired by Gabriel Olondriz's efforts, he meticulously planned over years to steal back the money that Senator Zapanta stole from the poor. The senator "stopped a nation in its tracks" and he stopped other countries' aid because he stole aid money too. He believed that "to steal is to rise" by stepping on the poor. Zapanta's one weakness was thinking so little of the poor that he never guessed one of them could outsmart him. Over years of observation, José figured out the pattern of Zapanta's revolving safe combinations and many other complicated details that enabled him to steal the money. José wishes he could see Zapanta howl after realizing what happened. José reminds whomever finds this letter that the money belongs to the poor, and he signs off.

*José Angelico's final letter serves the dual purpose of morally justifying his theft and implicating Zapanta as the story's real thief, since what Zapanta stole is not only money, but the hopes and dreams of a nation and the lives of its most vulnerable citizens. José's meticulous plan to outsmart Zapanta indicates how intelligent he was despite being poor and largely uneducated. Zapanta's folly, meanwhile, shows how misguided it is for a person to underestimate a person simply for their poverty or lack of education. As Mulligan shows, such people are the unsung heroes of this society.*





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