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Opening extract from

The Island of Thieves

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1

I didn't mean to burn down our garden shed. But now I'm glad I did. If I hadn't, none of this would have happened. The island. The gold. It was all because of burning down that shed.

One afternoon in the holidays I was sitting in there playing with a box of matches. Striking one. Watching it burn. Blowing it out. Throwing the dead stick on the floor and reaching for another.

I was bored.

You're not allowed to say that word in our house.

Only boring people get bored, says Dad. *Interesting people can always find something to be interested in.*

You can't be bored, says Mum. *There's so much to do here! Why don't you play a game? Or ring a friend? Or go for a bike ride?*

But I didn't feel like doing any of that stuff. So I hid in the shed and played with matches.

Suddenly I smelled smoke. I looked around. Flames were blazing up the walls. One of the matches must have still been burning when I dropped it on the floor.

I sprang at the door, wrenched it open and threw myself outside.

As I rolled across the grass, my clothes smoking, I saw my mum standing at the French windows, her mouth open in a silent scream. Then she ran to fetch her phone.

By the time the fire engines arrived, the shed had burned itself out. They drenched it anyway, making sure no sparks blew into any of the neighbours' houses. The chief fireman gave me a long lecture about fire safety. So did Mum. And Dad. They were still discussing how to punish me when the phone rang. It was Mrs Spencer, ringing to say she was very sorry, but they really couldn't have me to stay. What if I burned down *their* shed too? Or even their house?

'It was an accident,' said Dad. 'He'll never do anything like it again.'

But Mrs Spencer wouldn't listen.

Dad sat at the kitchen table with his head in his hands. 'I don't believe it,' he groaned. 'We'll have to take him with us.'

'We can't,' said Mum.

'Then what are we going to do?'

'Someone will have him.'

'Oh, yes?' asked Dad. 'Who?'

My parents were having their first holiday together *without children* since my big sister Grace was born. My kid brother Jack was staying with his friend Bongo. Grace was staying with her friend Ruby. I would have been staying with Finn Spencer, but his parents wouldn't

have me now. After the shed incident, nor would anyone else.

'I don't mind staying here,' I told my parents.

'No chance,' said Dad.

I had another suggestion. 'I could share Gran's room at the Home. I like playing chess with her friend Isaac. And the food's not bad.'

But Mum vetoed that too. 'If no one will have you, we'll just have to cancel the holiday.'

That was when Dad panicked. He rang everyone he knew.

Everyone he could think of.

Even his brother.

Which was how I came to be sitting in the back of the family wagon at half-past five on that Tuesday morning, whizzing down the A11 towards London.

Apparently I'd met Uncle Harvey a few times at weddings and funerals, but he'd never been to visit us in Norwich and I couldn't even remember what he looked like. I wouldn't have chosen to go and stay with him, but it couldn't be worse than staying at home with Mum and Dad. Could it?

The drive took hours. By the time we finally arrived in Uncle Harvey's street, Dad was flipping out. 'We're going to miss the plane,' he said, breathless with panic. 'I knew we should have left earlier.'

'We're going to be fine,' said Mum calmly. 'Look, we're here already. That's number nineteen.'

Dad grabbed my bag from the boot and scanned the street for traffic wardens, then raced up the steps and

rang the bell. Mum and I followed right behind him. We stood on the top step, looking at the paint peeling off the front door and the rubbish bags stacked against a lamppost spilling tin cans and orange peel. Two women jogged past. A man came out of another house wearing a blue suit and carrying a racing bike. He put the bike in the road and swung himself into the saddle.

Dad rang the bell again. 'Where the hell is he?'

'Simon!' said Mum.

'Sorry,' said Dad. 'But where is he?'

'Asleep,' I mumbled. 'If he has any sense.'

'He can't be asleep. He knows we're coming.' But Dad took out his phone and rang Uncle Harvey. There was a long pause. Then: 'Hello? Harvey? Where are you? We're outside! Didn't you hear the bell? It doesn't matter. Forget it. Could you let us in?'

Six minutes later (Dad timed it), the front door was opened by an unshaven man wearing a long silk dressing gown decorated with yellow butterflies. 'Simon! Sarah! How lovely to see you!'

I could see the relief on my parents' faces. When Uncle Harvey hadn't answered the door they really thought they'd have to take me to Corfu. Their holiday would have been ruined. Now they could hand me over and get away for a whole week of sunbathing and reading books by the pool and smoochy candlelit dinners.

'Here's Tom,' said Mum, pushing me forward. 'He's very excited about staying so near Portobello Road. Aren't you?'

'Hi,' I said.

Uncle Harvey said 'Hi' back and shook my hand. He was taller than my dad, and thinner too, and he looked much younger, although I knew the actual age difference was only two years and five months.

Mum said, 'Are you sure you don't mind doing this?'

'I'm looking forward to it,' said Uncle Harvey. He had a mischievous smile. 'We're going to have a wild time together.'

'Not too wild,' said Dad. 'Tom's been in enough trouble recently.'

'That sounds interesting. What type of trouble? What have you done?'

'Oh, nothing much,' I said. 'Everyone just likes to get annoyed with me all the time.'

'I know *exactly* what you mean,' said Uncle Harvey.

I knew he didn't. He was just saying so to be nice. But I still appreciated it.

Dad gave me a quick, awkward hug. 'Bye, Tom. Be good.'

'Bye, Dad. Have a great holiday.'

Mum kissed me. Then she stepped back and looked at me nervously. 'I hope we're doing the right thing. You *will* behave yourself, won't you?'

'Of course he will,' said Uncle Harvey. 'Now, stop worrying. I hereby give you permission to enjoy yourselves. Get thee to the airport and have a glass of wine.'

They didn't argue. Just rushed down the steps and ran along the street to their car, not wanting to give my uncle the chance to change his mind.

We stood on the step together, Uncle Harvey and I, watching Mum and Dad drive off. Then my uncle turned to me and said, 'So, Tom. Here we are.'

'Yup,' I said. 'We're here.'

'It's nice to see you after all these years.'

'Er, you too.'

'You look exactly how your father looked when he was your age. Maybe you look like me too. What do you think?' He turned his head from side to side, showing me his profile.

I stared at my uncle's face, searching for some connection between him and my father and myself, and finally I said, 'I think we might have the same nose.'

'Of course we do,' said Uncle Harvey. 'It's the Trelawney nose. Passed from generation unto generation. Without this nose, you can't be a Trelawney. Now, let's go inside.'

His flat was on the fourth floor. As we trudged up the stairs together, Uncle Harvey said, 'There is one thing I have to warn you about. I didn't want to tell your father. I thought he might be upset. But you're not going to mind, are you?'

'Depends what it is,' I said.

'Give me a chance and I'll tell you. When your father rang, I said you could stay in my flat, and you can. The only thing is, I won't actually be here. I've got to go abroad. On urgent business. But you can look after yourself, can't you?'

'No problem,' I said.

'Are you sure?'

'Oh, yeah. I'll be fine.'

'You'll have a wonderful time.' He opened the door of his flat and led me inside. 'This is the perfect place for a bachelor. Treat it as your own. Invite friends round. Have parties. It's all yours. Does that sound OK?'

'That sounds great,' I said.

'Good. I did try and explain this to your father, but he got so cross with me, I had to say I'd change my plans.'

'He's been looking forward to this holiday for fifteen years,' I explained. 'He and Mum haven't been away together without kids since Grace was born. Not even for a weekend.'

'That's what he said. I didn't think he'd be very happy about you staying here alone—'

'He wouldn't.'

'—so I thought we needn't tell him. Is that terrible?'

'No,' I said. 'That's fine.'

'You really don't mind?'

'When you've gotta go, you've gotta go.'

'I'm glad you see it like that, Tom. Strictly speaking you're probably a bit young to be left alone, aren't you?'

'I'll be fine,' I said, already imagining how I would spend a week alone in London. And then, not wanting to discuss whether it was actually legal to leave me by myself in a flat for a week, I asked, 'Where are you going?'

'Peru,' said my uncle.

'Wow. Cool. What are you doing there?'

'Oh, it's a long story.'

'I've got time.'

'It's also a secret.'

'I won't tell anyone, I promise.'

Uncle Harvey shook his head. 'I'm sorry, Tom. You might be my nephew, but I hardly know you. How could I possibly trust you with such an important secret?'

'We could do a deal,' I said.

'A deal? What kind of deal?'

2

'I've actually just come back from Peru,' said Uncle Harvey. We were sitting at his kitchen table, drinking grapefruit juice from tall, thin glasses. Sunlight poured in from the big windows. When I'd told my uncle about burning down the garden shed, he laughed for a long, long time before wiping the tears from his eyes and agreeing that such an excellent story was definitely worth a secret or two in exchange. He just wished, he said, that I had a picture of my dad's face when he saw what remained of the shed. Then he made me swear on my life not to spill a word to anyone, whoever they might be, and told me everything.

'I was mostly in Lima, the capital,' he said, 'but I had a few days to spare so I did a bit of travelling. The day before I came home, I was staying in a small town in the Andes, miles from anywhere. In the afternoon, pottering about, as you do, I stumbled across a junk shop. Sitting on the shelf behind the counter there was a silver necklace. Very simple, very pretty. The guy could see I was a *gringo*, so he tried to charge me two hundred

dollars. I offered forty and he bargained me up to seventy. That was still way too much but I needed a present for a girl, so I handed over the cash.'

I had a couple of questions – what's a *gringo*, for instance? – but Uncle Harvey didn't give me a chance to ask anything.

'The necklace was wrapped in a piece of paper,' he continued. 'I didn't really look at it. I just stuffed it in my pocket and hurried back to the hotel. Next morning, I had an early start. I packed the necklace in the bottom of my suitcase, and that's where it stayed till I came home. In the evening I had a date with that girl. I dug out the necklace. I'd stuffed it in a sock, still wrapped up. I was just about to throw the paper away but something caught my attention, I don't know what. Call it instinct, call it luck, call it whatever you want, but I happened to notice one of the words on the paper was written in English. As soon as I saw that, I sat down and started working out what it said.'

He opened a blue folder and took out a single sheet of crinkly, browned paper.

'Here it is. This is what I found.' Uncle Harvey wiped the table with his sleeve and laid the paper carefully in front of me.

It was covered in black marks. Leaning down and looking at them, I realised they were letters. Words. Sentences. So tightly packed and squiggly that every one was an effort to decipher. At the bottom of the page there were two tiny sketches of a gull and a flower. I inspected them for a second, then pored over the spiky writing.

This is what I read:

12th. This daie we went ashore and toke stoke of muche fine fruit, no one knows the name. We procured wode too.

13th. Sailed Northwards.

14th. The same corse.

15th. About three aclock we found a frigate bownd for Panama. She was laden with Spanish clothes and honie and maize and wyne and much gold and more silver, too much for our owne shippes to carry. Our Captayne sent the crew ashore in a pinnace and we tok the frigate and we sailed to the South.

16th. We came to anchor among some islands. One of them we had visited before, some days earlier, and it was named by our Captayne the Islande of Theeves for the nature of the natives. Here we did land and got a lyttle water. There was not a native to be seen. Our Captayne took the pinnace ashore and I went with hym and six men also, who were sworne by God to be secret in al they saw. Here we buried five chests filled with gold and three more chests filled with silver. We placed them at the Northern tip of the Islande in a line with the

That was where it ended. In mid-sentence. Just when it was getting interesting. I turned over the page, but there was nothing on the other side. I looked at my uncle. 'This is cool.'

'I know.'

'So what are you going to do when you get to Peru?'

'Go back to that shop and find the man who sold me the necklace.'

'Has he got the rest of the pages?'

'I don't know.'

'Why don't you call him?'

'I don't know his number. I don't even know his name. That's why I've got to go back there and find him.'

I couldn't help laughing. 'So this whole thing might be a waste of time?'

Uncle Harvey shrugged his shoulders. 'Life is about risk.'

'You can't just fly to Peru because of a piece of paper!'

'That's exactly what your father would say.'

'It's what anyone would say.'

'Not me.'

'But it might be a forgery! Or a joke! Maybe someone wrote this a week ago for a play or a fancy-dress party!'

'They didn't.'

'How do you know?'

'I've had it tested. I had the same doubts as you, Tom. I thought it couldn't possibly be genuine. But who on earth would fake a piece of old English parchment and place it in a junk shop halfway up a mountain in the middle of the Andes? Would they do that just on the off-chance that an Englishman might happen to wander past? And, if so, why? None of it made much sense, but I knew there was something going on here. Something

interesting. So I packed it up and sent it to a friend of mine, a professor at Edinburgh University. He has access to all the latest wizardry. Here's what he said . . . '

He reached for his computer, opened it up, fiddled around for a moment and turned the screen to face me. Then he pushed back his chair and stood up. 'I'm going to pack. My flight leaves at five-thirty this evening. Once I've got my stuff together, we'll talk about keys and I'll show you how to work the hot water.'

He sauntered out of the room, leaving me to read this email:

FROM: Professor Theodore Parker <theo.parker@ed.ac.uk>
TO: Harvey Trelawney <harvey.trelawney@gmail.com>
SUBJECT: Gold & silver

Hi Harv

I've read your parchment and sent it back registered post, but couldn't resist emailing you immediately to tell you my thoughts.

I'd love to know where you got it! But won't ask. Better not to know? Anyway, as promised, I've subjected it to a battery of tests and happy to report all seems kosher.

Not wanting to bore you with too much detail, I shall simply tell you that this paper was almost certainly written between 4 and 500 years ago. I could have a go at dating it more precisely, but that would be intuition/guesswork and you probably don't want that.

Of course there are a couple of provisos that any cautious scientist (i.e. me) should attach to this result.

1st – the tests could be wrong. However this is very, very unlikely. One test could certainly be wrong, maybe even two, but I've done all available and they won't all be duds.

2nd – someone might be fooling you. Improbable but not impossible. But let me tell you one thing: if this is a forgery, it's pretty much the most sophisticated I've ever seen.

I could make a few wild guesses about the writer. Young, male, educated. But that would not be scientific and so I'll leave all such speculation to you.

Hope this is useful.

Call me when you're next up here and we'll sink a few jars.

Theo

I closed the computer and put the piece of paper back in the blue folder and realised there was one terrible problem about my week of freedom in the big city. I didn't want it. If I stayed here I'd spend the whole time wishing I was somewhere else.

I went next door. A suitcase was open on the bed. Clothes were scattered everywhere. My uncle was kneeling on the floor, sorting through shoes.

'Uncle Harvey?' I said.

'Please don't call me that.'

'Why not?'

'Because it makes me sound like a character in an Enid Blyton novel.'

'Oh. Sorry. What shall I call you?'

'How about Harvey? That is my name, after all.'

'Um, Harvey, can I ask you a question?'

'You can ask me whatever you like.' He picked up a sandal and a tennis shoe, then discarded them both and threw a pair of flip-flops into his suitcase.

'Can I come with you?'

'Where?'

'Peru.'

Uncle Harvey shook his head. 'I'm sorry, Tom. That's just not possible.'

'Why not?'

'Because I'm going alone.'

'That's not a reason.'

'How about this then: I *want* to go alone.'

'You'd have more fun with me, Uncle Harvey.'

'Don't call me that.'

'Sorry. But it's true. Can't I come too? Please? I've always wanted to go to South America.'

'Even if I wanted you to come with me, which I don't, there's one very good reason why you can't. You don't have a ticket.'

'I could buy one.'

'Or a passport.'

'Yes I do. Dad made me bring it in case you weren't here and they had to take me to Corfu.'

Uncle Harvey sighed. 'Look, Tom, you seem like a very nice kid, and I'm sure we'd have a wonderful time

together. If I was going on holiday I'd take you. I really would. But this isn't a holiday. I have enemies in South America. Bad things might happen. Stay here, Tom. Explore London. You'll have a wild time. We'll go travelling together another year, all right?'

You might think I was dumb to argue. You might be saying to yourself, What's wrong with this guy? Who wouldn't want a week alone in a flat just off Portobello Road? Without parents. Without teachers. Without his irritating little brother or his know-it-all older sister. Why didn't he just shut up and take the keys and have the best week of his life?

Well I thought all that too. And then I thought: gold and silver. Buried. On an island. In Peru. That's where I want to be, that's what I want to see.

I pleaded and cajoled and begged but my uncle kept saying no.

I said I'd pay for the flight myself but he just laughed, which was fair enough. I only had twenty pounds in the world and that was what Dad had given me to last a whole week in London.

I promised to be helpful and useful and worth taking too, and he shook his head and said he was quite sure that he'd rather be alone.

I said he couldn't leave me here, because I was too young. It was illegal. What if social services found out? They'd call the police, who would arrest Uncle Harvey and throw him in jail for child abuse.

That was when he started looking worried.

I spoke in the deep voice of a newsreader on the telly:

‘Now we’re going live to London where our correspondent can give us more details of the evil uncle who left his nephew to rot all alone in a top-floor flat.’

‘That’s not funny,’ said Uncle Harvey.

‘Look on the bright side,’ I said. ‘You’ll be famous.’

‘Don’t be ridiculous.’

‘You’ll be on the front page of every newspaper in the country.’

‘Oh, stop it.’

‘They’ll have your mug shot,’ I said. ‘You know, the one that the police take after you’ve spent a night in the cells, when you’re looking unshaven and dirty and very, very guilty.’

‘Don’t try to blackmail me,’ said Uncle Harvey. ‘There’s no point. You are not coming with me and that’s final.’

3

London to Lima is ten thousand kilometres. We did it in seventeen hours. A two-hour flight from England to Spain, a three-hour stop in Madrid airport and then twelve more hours flying across the Atlantic and the Andes.

Have you ever been on a twelve-hour flight?

If you haven't, don't bother. It's miserable from start to finish.

Sure, you get free meals, but they're gross, and you get a console attached to the seat with about five hundred different movies, but you don't want to watch any of them because you're so desperate to go to sleep, but you can't get to sleep because the seats are so uncomfortable, so you spend the whole night shuffling and groaning and twisting and turning, and then, when you finally drop off, they switch on the lights and wake you up, and you don't know where you are, or what time it is. Then you look at your uncle and you realise he's still snoozing like a baby, because he has a blanket over his knees and an inflatable pillow wrapped around his neck and earplugs in his ears

and a mask covering his eyes, and you think: *Why didn't he offer all that stuff to me?*

I sat beside him, crammed into my seat, wriggling and fiddling, trying to get comfortable. When I wasn't watching movies or attempting to sleep, I read the *Rough Guide to Peru*. I convinced Uncle Harvey to buy me a copy at Heathrow. He told me it wasn't worth it. He said guidebooks were for wimps. But I wanted to know some basic information about where we were going.

Peru is bigger than Britain and France added together. Did you know that? And it's one of the most diverse countries in the world. It has mountains, desert *and* tropical jungle. Plus a coastline that is almost 2500 kilometres long.

Today was Tuesday. We'd arrive in Lima on Wednesday morning. Our flights home left next Monday night, arriving in London on the Tuesday – giving me just enough time to race back to Uncle Harvey's flat, open the door to Mum and Dad and compliment them on their tans.

We had five full days in Peru. Five days to search 2500 kilometres of coastline and find the Island of Thieves. Oh, and we didn't have a plan.

Five days, 2500 kilometres and no plan. What could possibly go wrong?

Uncle Harvey finally woke up when the plane landed. He pulled off his eye mask, plucked out his earplugs and stretched his arms. 'Ahhhh! I'm ready for a huge breakfast. How about you, Tommy-boy? Are you hungry?'

'I've had breakfast already. They gave us some about an hour ago.'

'Was it disgusting?'

'Yes it was, actually.'

'Then you deserve another. We'll go to the Café Florés. It's one of the few places in Lima that serves a decent cup of coffee.'

'I don't like coffee.'

'Why not?'

'I don't know. I just don't like the taste.'

'How perverse. Oh, well. They do good toasted sandwiches too. Or maybe you'd like to try the national dish of Peru?'

'Sure,' I said. 'What is it?'

'Guinea pig and chips.'

'Yeah, right.'

'I'm not joking,' said Uncle Harvey. 'You can't leave Peru without tasting their national dish. They take a guinea pig, chop him in half, open him out and fry him on a griddle. Delicious! But I suppose it's not the best thing for breakfast. We'll try some tonight.'

'No way,' I said. 'I am not eating guinea pig.'

Uncle Harvey just smiled, that same irritating smile, the one that said: I know more than you do. I could see he was quite confident that, by the end of the week, I would have eaten a guinea pig. And asked for seconds.

We had to wait about an hour to go through passport control, then about another to collect our luggage. I said, 'Why is this taking so long?'

'Welcome to South America,' replied Uncle Harvey.

When we finally had both our bags, we wheeled them into the corridor marked NOTHING TO DECLARE. Uniformed guards watched us through dark glasses.

On the other side of customs, we emerged in the main part of the airport. Taxi drivers surrounded us, waving their arms and shouting in a mixture of Spanish and English. Uncle Harvey shoved them aside and marched towards the car-hire desks. I hurried after him. No one tried to grab my bag or tempt me into their taxi. I suppose they knew I wasn't worth bothering with. It was obvious I didn't have any money.

Uncle Harvey hadn't booked a car in advance. He said they're cheaper if you just turn up and bargain. We joined the queue and shuffled slowly forward, watching people ahead of us hand over their passports and driving licences.

We were almost at the front of the queue – just one more couple between us and the desk – when a man in a dark suit sidled up to my uncle and said, 'Meester Arveee Trelawwneee?'

(He really did speak like that, but I'm not going to write down his crazy accent all the way through. You'll just have to imagine it for yourself.)

Uncle Harvey said, 'Who are you?'

'My name is Ricardo Cassinelli. Could you come with me, please? My car is waiting outside.'

'I'm not going anywhere with you,' said my uncle. 'I don't know who you are.'

'I am the representative of someone who wishes to speak with you.'

'Who?'

'I would rather not say. But I can tell you, Mr Trelawney, he is a good friend of yours.'

'You've got me confused with someone else,' said my uncle. 'I don't have any friends in Peru. Now, if you'll excuse me, I have to pick up my rental.'

Uncle Harvey tried to move away, but Ricardo gripped his arm. He leaned in and spoke quietly into my uncle's ear. I don't know what he said but his words had an obvious impact: for the first time since I'd been with him, my uncle looked worried. It didn't last long. A nervous expression flashed across his features for only a brief moment and then he was back to normal, smiling as if everything was fine. I was intrigued. What had Ricardo said? Had he whispered a threat? What was it?

The couple in front of us had signed their documents and collected the key for their car. It was our turn. I pushed my bag along the floor. Uncle Harvey tried to do the same, but Ricardo was still holding his arm in a firm grip.

I noticed a couple of other men lingering nearby. They had broad shoulders and enormous hairy hands. From the way they were watching us, I realised they were with Ricardo, providing him with some back up in case we tried to run away or fight.

'Can I help you?' said the guy behind the desk.

My uncle glanced at the car-rental guy, then at me, and then at the people behind us in the queue. He gave them one of his most charming smiles. 'I'm terribly sorry,' he said. 'Why don't you go ahead of us?'

They approached the desk and showed their passports to the clerk. Uncle Harvey stepped aside and I followed him. There was a muttered conversation between my uncle and Ricardo. I couldn't hear what either of them said, but Ricardo must have been very persuasive because my uncle turned to me and said in a low voice, 'I'm sorry about this, Tom. I've got to go and see someone. It won't take long. These guys will give me a lift into the centre of town and then I'll come back here and pick you up. You can look after yourself, can't you?'

I didn't like the idea of staying in the airport on my own, particularly since I only had twenty pounds and I didn't have a clue what that might be worth in Peruvian money, but I didn't want to complain. I just nodded. 'No problem.'

'Great. Thank you. Find a café. Read a book. I'll be back soon. If there's any problem, you've got my number, haven't you?'

'I don't know if my phone will work here.'

'Of course it will. You'll be fine. See you later.' Uncle Harvey turned to Ricardo. 'Let's go.'

'He comes too,' said Ricardo, pointing at me.

'No, he doesn't,' said Uncle Harvey. 'He's staying here.'

'He comes too,' repeated Ricardo.

'This is nothing to do with him. He's just a kid who I met on the flight. We were sitting next to one another. I said I'd give him a lift into Lima.'

Ricardo smiled. 'But he has the same name as you.'

'Does he? That's a coincidence.'

'I think he is your nephew.'

Now Uncle Harvey smiled too. There was no point pretending. Whoever they were, they already knew everything about us. 'You're right, he's my nephew, but he doesn't know the first thing about me or my business. There's no need for him to come with us.'

'Is no problem,' said Ricardo. He nodded to the two thugs, who relieved us of our bags.

I wanted to know who we were going to see and why, but there wasn't a chance to ask any questions. Ricardo led my uncle through the airport. I hurried after them. The thugs followed behind, bringing the bags.

I could have run away. I'm pretty sure I would have made it. Ricardo and the two thugs would have stayed with Uncle Harvey, making sure he didn't escape. They weren't really interested in me.

But if I ran away, I'd be all alone. A kid in a foreign country with no money, no friends and nowhere to go. I'd be much safer, I decided, if I stayed with my uncle.

Which shows how much I knew.