

# An offer from Archie McLeish

THE WONDERS OF E-MAIL. OLD SCHOOL FRIENDS REUNITED  
AFTER ALL THESE YEARS – AND WITH SUCH AN ASTONISHING  
OFFER, BUT MAYBE IT IS NOT SUCH A FANTASTIC IDEA AFTER ALL.

My family bullied me into changing my PC a few months ago. There was nothing much wrong with my old PC. Admittedly, the keyboard was a shade grubby and it was slow and the internal fan hummed, but its worst feature was the mountain of junk e-mail it seemed to attract. First twenty, then forty, then sixty, then a hundred messages a week, and every Sunday morning I would have to scroll down the list and delete all the junk. My index finger got quite worn out from clicking on the delete box. All the usual offers. Cut-price Viagra. Ways to extend my dangly bits. Ways to cut my credit card bills. Exclusive videos of Paris Hilton indulging in unashamed naughtiness.

My new PC came with some new e-mail software. It now divides my incoming e-mails into My Messages, My Contacts and junk. It makes the junk disappear automatically after five days, but I still have to glance through the list of junk to make sure that it has not classed a vital My Message as junk. Computer software, I should warn you, is not that clever. When I was glancing down the list of junk last Sunday morning, amongst the senders I came across a solid Scottish name. I will give the sender the name of Archie McLeish. Maybe, I thought, an old school friend whose name I have forgotten. My reaction was that it was nice of Archie to send me an e-mail, although I wondered how he could have got my e-mail address and I called up his message on the screen.

Archie addressed me as 'Dear friend', and introduced himself as a merchant in Dubai, now suffering from incurable cancer. He admitted that he was now very rich, but, near to death, had come to realise that he had always been hostile to people and had led a selfish life. He had now begun to give his money away to charities in the United Arab Emirates, Algeria and Malaysia, but, with his health failing, had asked his family to give away the rest of his money to charities in Bulgaria and Pakistan. However, his family have refused that reasonable request and kept the money to themselves. Archie now claims that he still has a secret cash deposit of \$18,000,000 with a finance company, and he invites me to collect the money, and distribute it to charities. Archie says that he has set aside 20% for my time and trouble. The e-mail ends by asking me to contact him if I am willing to help. I thought hard about his request...

I decided that the Archie McLeish who once stuck my head down a toilet bowl in the first year of secondary school, cannot now be a rich merchant in Dubai. That Archie McLeish might have been a wicked, wee wean, but he showed no sign of growing up to be a selfish entrepreneur. It must be a different Archie McLeish, although I am flattered that he should have chosen me to carry out his dying wishes. It must be my trustworthy Scottish name that caught his eye. Maybe my membership of the ACT. I would like to help, but although it is perhaps insensitive to raise contractual quibbles with a Scot on his death bed, there are a few points that I really have to clear with Archie.

Firstly, it is an awesome responsibility that he is asking me to take over, and 20% of \$18 million seems a pretty puny reward for such a responsibility. At the current exchange rate, that amounts only to around £2 million.

To give me a proper incentive, I would really need 50% of the \$18 million.

Tony Soprano, after all, would have asked for 60%.

Secondly, I would need to establish what freedom I have in choosing the charities that will receive Archie's money (less my fee). If I had a free choice, I would give it all to the Retirement Home for Distressed and Indigent Corporate Treasurers. That would be the simplest form of distribution. If Archie has pre-selected the charities, there would be no particular difficulty, provided that Archie can give me their bank account numbers and sort codes. If he expects me to search out charities in Bulgaria and Pakistan, I have to tell him that the expense of doing that – the air fares, the language lessons, and so on – cannot be met from my fee, however much enlarged.

Thirdly, the business of collecting the \$18 million from the finance company sounds very difficult. I have been through all the business of producing a Power of Attorney when Brenda, my late mother-in-law, was in her dotage and I know how these are meant to be registered with the Court of Protection when the poor old soul becomes no longer capable, but I think that the Dubai legal system might have difficulty with a dodgy signature on a form bought from a firm of legal stationers. Besides, his ungrateful family might object to my Power of Attorney.

I think that the simplest thing is for me to e-mail Archie back, and tell him just to transfer his \$18 million to me. I can be trusted to use it wisely. J.F.

