



PACO PRIVADO

IN THE 'ELÁSTICO' CON

BY *Larry Kovaks* P.I.

The Track Suit Mafia. One of Barcelona's most nefarious elements. You can tell them by their sports trainers, bright Nikes and bad haircuts — buzzed to the skull with a tuft of hair in the front. They got this berg in their many mitts. The *abuelas* fear them. And the *guiris* get wise only after getting fleeced.

These guys. Let me tell you a little about them. How because of them and their pal "Ronaldinho light" I'm short one hat and in possession of a greasy toupee.

I had just paid Sr. Antonio a week's rent and had some scratch left over. I figured, let's get a drink at Kentucky Bar. Years ago, when I toiled as a merchant marine I was lead there by this Spanish kid. Met this *bonita señorita*. The beer was warm. So was she. I wonder what happened to her. Anyway, I decided to revisit the Kentucky.

So — not even 15 minutes ago — I was crossing the Ramblas. *Guiris*. Gypmeisters. I swear thousands. Just thinking of all the criminal activity made me nauseous. It's positively thick with it. The Track Suit Mafia rolls deepest. Dirty rat bastards.

I spotted a possible miscreant. A guy in washed out denim, tight bootleg Ronaldinho jersey. Long mane of curly black hair. Obviously some kind of hair piece. He was dribbling a soccer ball. Weaving in and out of the marching *guiris*. This gypmeister thought he could fool me. Uh uh, he ain't no Ronaldinho. That ain't no timbale beat, no tamborim snap. This lousy mugg. He was out to relieve *guiris* of their cash, in between his soccer tricks.

This was no Ronaldinho, this was "Ronaldinho light". He dribbled up to

a young tourist couple eyeballing a map. He pulled the "elástico" move and snaked his hand into the guy's pocket. He dribbled out, circled around. The tourist had his wallet dangling from a chain. Gawking at the would-be thief. He was lucky he had a chain rig. Damn lucky.

"Ronaldinho light" dribbled into the crowd again. Beguiling bobs, mesmerizing weaves. Preliminaries to his brazen pocket-picking. He dribbled towards me and tried the "sombbrero" move. He flipped the ball up and it nicked the top of my hat. He did this jerky twist. I snagged his greasy hair helmet. "Ronaldinho light" cried out. Suddenly I was surrounded by three members of the Track Suit Mafia.

"Ronaldinho light" circled back around. No, he didn't want to samba with me. He and his buddies started taunting me. Called me *ladrón*. Then "Ronaldinho light" did his "elástico" move, and — like that — I felt the summer breeze on my exposed dome. His Track Suit Mafia accomplices ran off, direction Raval. I spun around and "Ronaldinho light" melted into the crowd, with my hat on his filthy head. I tried to follow him. But it was useless. Louse was long gone.

So that's how I ended up here, in Bar Kentucky, minus my hat. All I got is a greasy hair piece lying in front of me, on the busted zinc counter. There's a midget dame in the corner. And a house cat on the bar. It slinks over, sniffs the wig. Paws it. Then bites into it and carries it off.

THE NAME'S LARRY KOVAKS, AKA PACO PRIVADO. I FIGHT VICE. IT'S ALL OVER BARCELONA. AND I GOT THE DOPE ON IT.

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