

PACO PRIVADO

IN 'FALSE FRIENDS'

BY *Larry Kovaks* P.I.

There's an unbelievable amount of lousiness in Barcelona. So many small timing yellow-bellied bastards it's a wonder the tourists keep coming. If they get wise, one day great capitalist bastions like Easyjet and Ryanair will sink like lead *pelotas*. I've had it with lousiness.

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Yeh I know this city like Sara Montiel's curvy bosom. Doesn't mean I don't get conned. Yeh. The birds even got to me.

Let me tell you about my false friends and their box of dirt.

The other day I'm walking on Aragón when, from my side, I hear:

"Eh. Amigo... Amigo."

I turn and see two individuals in a battered white Seat with a racing spoiler. These guys ooze shadiness with their Levantine looks; brilliantined black curls; sharp suits, wrinkled. It's a bad scene through and through.

The clown in the passenger seat, closest to me, nods his head towards his lap. From an open cardboard box I see the unmistakable form of a new digital camera. On the box I make out the brand. Panasonic.

"Tsss. Amigo. Dossiento ero."
"Qué?"

"Two uhndrid uro."
I need one of those babies for my investigative work. After getting handled by the metro crook last week I'm short on the *calés*. No way I could buy at retail. This guy's obviously thick with the local scum, but this camera isn't going back to its owner. Let's be realistic Larry. I can use it to investigate him and his disreputable ilk.

"One hundred euros, pal."
He grimaces and growls under his foul breath. "One uhndrid fitty."

"One hundred twenty five."
He lets out a long groan and says something in Arabic to the driver. As they drive off I see him closing the box.

I yell after them. One fifty it is. My wallet sure is going to be a lot thinner.

Their jalopy screeches to a halt about twenty feet up.

"I'll take it for one fifty."

"OK amigo. A-OK."

He pulls out a plastic garbage bag from under his seat and places the box in it. He starts winding the bag up real tight.

"Venga pal. I didn't ask for gift wrapping."

I thrust out wrinkled bills.

He winds the bag even tighter, hands the package to me as he paws back the payment. He grins a little too eagerly and nods to his partner in slime. They barely beat it through the yellow light leaving me in their stinky exhaust.

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I couldn't figure out why that guy wound that bag up so tight until I got to a trash can and pried the plastic loose.

Inside was the box for a beautiful Panasonic snapper, all right. But inside that was a bag of dirt and a couple stones. One fifty gone for good and nothing but a lousy bag of dirt. The deft switcharoo was made when I thought they were angrily driving off. He feigned irritation so he could foist his luxury dirt on me.

Gypmeisters everywhere. Kovaks is on to you.

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

SOME LIKE IT GROSS

YOU TALKIN' TO ME?

YOU DON'T NEED TO DON DE NIRO'S MOHAWK TO BE A PSYCHO TAXI DRIVER. BEING A CABBIE IN THIS TOWN IS SOMETIMES ENOUGH.

BY *Laurent Bompard*

HAVING BEEN RELATIVELY REASONABLE THIS WEEK, DON'T EXPECT ME TO RELISH YOU WITH MORE LOUD BARS AND DIRTY RESTAURANT TALES. STILL, I HAD TO DEAL WITH ONE OF THE FIERCEST, STRANGEST SPECIES THAT LURK IN BCN: THE OMINOUS, VORACIOUS TAXI DRIVER. I WON'T JUMP AS FAR AS SAYING THAT ALL CABBIES SHOULD BE LOCKED IN A PADDED ROOM, BUT THEY ARE WEIRDER THAN SOME ACID HEADS I HAVE MET, SO LET'S TAKE A RIDE DOWN MEMORY LANE (WITH THE METER ON, OF COURSE).


MURDER!... OF ALL THE CABBIES I HAVE HAD THE PLEASURE TO MEET, I STILL REMEMBER THIS ONE PICKING ME AND MY GIRLFRIEND UP FROM AN INDIAN RESTAURANT. OUR PLAN, AFTER HAVING HAD A FEW DRINKS, WAS TO GO TO PORT OLYMPIC AND FIND A SPOT WHERE WE COULD PRACTICE OUR REFINED ART OF SEX IN PUBLIC PLACES.

WE SPOTTED A CAB, CLIMBED IN AND INDICATED OUR DIRECTION. SO FAR, SO GOOD. THE DRIVER SAID THAT GOING TO THE PORT WAS OK, BUT THERE ARE AREAS WHERE HE DEFINITELY WOULDN'T GO, LIKE LA MINA OR SANTA COLOMA. HE THEN EXPLAINED THAT A COLLEAGUE GOT MUGGED THERE, AND SUDDENLY WENT TOTALLY BERSERK, FLASHED A KNIFE AT US WHILE SCREAMING, "YOU SEE? IF SOMEONE TRIES TO MUG ME, I'LL JUST RIP THE BASTARD OPEN! I SHOULDN'T RISK MY LIFE WHILE DOING MY JOB!" THE GUY THEN PROCEEDED TO EMIT JUDGEMENTS ON ALL THE PEOPLE WHO WERE CROSSING THE STREET ON THEIR WAY TO POBLE NOU'S NIGHT SPOTS. "SEE? THIS ONE LOOKS MORE OR LESS NORMAL, BUT THIS ONE WITH THE LONG HAIR, I DON'T KNOW, MUST BE SOME KIND OF *MARICÓN*." I LOOKED AT MY GIRLFRIEND AND UNDERSTOOD THAT WE FELT THE SAME MIX OF TERROR AND AMUSEMENT. WE FINALLY GOT TO THE PORT, SAFE AND SOUND, WHERE WE COULD FOLLOW OUR PLANS FOR THE NIGHT.

POLITICS!... I TOOK THIS OTHER CAB ONE DAY ON DIAGONAL AND THE DRIVER SPOTTING MY ACCENT ASKED: "AND WHY IS A FRENCHMAN IN THIS CRAZY COUNTRY?" "WELL, PARTLY BECAUSE IT'S A CRAZY COUNTRY." "OH, IT HAS CHANGED A LOT, AND NOT FOR BETTER." KNOWING HOW FRANQUISMO IS STILL POPULAR AMONG CABBIES, I TRIED TO GET THE GUY TO CONFESS SINCE "WHEN" HE THINKS IT HAS CHANGED SO MUCH. THE ANSWER WAS A MUMBLING, "YOU KNOW, WITH ALL THIS DEMOCRACY SHIT GOING ON, WHAT DO WE NEED DEMOCRACY FOR? ALL IT BRINGS IS MORE HOMOSEXUALS, MORE CRIME AND MORE IMMIGRANTS." I MUST BE LUCKY THAT HE TOOK ME TO MY DESTINATION INSTEAD OF THE IMMIGRATION OFFICE...

PASSION! I HAD THIS CLIENT FROM HOLLAND VISITING BCN FOR THE FIRST TIME AND, SINCE SHE NEITHER KNEW THE CITY NOR SPOKE THE LANGUAGE, WE DECIDED TO SHARE A TAXI SO I COULD DROP HER AT HER HOTEL AND THEN GO HOME. AS SOON AS HE STARTED DRIVING, THE CABBIE TOLD ME, "IF YOU ALLOW ME, PLEASE DON'T TOUCH YOUR GIRLFRIEND OR DON'T LET HER TOUCH YOU IN MY CAB, I JUST CLEANED IT BECAUSE OF SOME PEOPLE DOING DIRTY THINGS ON THE BACKSEAT." NATURALLY, MY CLIENT JUST OPENED BIG EYES AND ASKED ME TO TRANSLATE WHAT THE GUY JUST SAID...

MYSTERY!... THIS ONE WAS THE SWEETEST OF ALL. I TOOK A CAB ON MY WAY TO WORK AND THE DRIVER ASKED ABOUT MY JOB. WHEN I TOLD HIM THAT I DO ILLUSTRATIONS AND DESIGN, THE GUY GAVE ME HIS PORTFOLIO, WITH ALL SORT OF WEIRD DRAWINGS LIKE PIECES OF SKIN FLOATING IN THE WIND IN THE SHAPE OF TWISTED LETTERS THAT SPELLED JOSÉ, GIANT FAT LADIES ON THE BEACH AND SO ON. AS WE PASSED IN FRONT OF SAGRADA



EL NENG

WELL, YOU'RE HERE. SURE, YOU CAN HANG WITH YOUR GUIRI FRIENDS, BUY YOUR FOREIGN MUSIC OFF AMAZON, AND DOWNLOAD YOUR FAVORITE MOVIES - BUT, IF YOU PLAN TO STAY, IT'S TIME TO GET HIP TO WHAT THE SPANISH KIDS ARE DOING. YES, MUCH IS A PUZZLEMENT, BUT ROLL UP YOUR SLEEVES AND DIG IN. YOU'LL BE A GLEEFUL MASS CONSUMER IN NO TIME.

FIRST TASTE: BUENAFUENTE, THE LATE NIGHT TALK SHOW WITH A PRETTY MASSIVE AUDIENCE SHARE. I TURN IT ON IN THE MIDDLE, AND THERE'S THIS INEXPLICABLE CHARACTER DRESSED IN WARM-UP CLOTHES, WITH HORRIBLE SIDEBURNS, RANTING ABOUT SOMETHING. HE SEEMS MILDLY RETARDED, ACTUALLY, AND OVERBLOWN. *EL NENG*. WHAT HE'S TALKING ABOUT IS UNCLEAR, AND ALL OF A SUDDEN HE'S SWINGING A VIDEO CAMERA BY THE CORD, UNTIL IT FINALLY ARCS INTO THE AIR AND LANDS NEARBY WITH A CRINGE-INDUCING THUD. OH GOD. IS THIS SPANISH COMEDY?

NEXT OUT: PALOMINO, A RODENT-LIKE MAN WITH HUGE FAKE EARS AND AVIATOR GLASSES. HE'S COME TO MAKE AN ASS OF HIMSELF, EVIDENTLY, IN FRONT OF THE GUEST, A FRENCH AUTHOR WHO WRITES ABOUT SEX. HE'S GOT SOME HOMEMADE S&M DEVICES WHICH HE DEMONSTRATES. A LITTLE LEATHER HAND IS MOUNTED ON A JACK IN THE BOX AND HE, AS ORGAN GRINDER- CUM SUBMISSIVE, PROCEEDS TO INEFFECTUALLY SLAP HIS FACE WITH IT. MEANWHILE, BUENAFUENTE ALTERNATELY FEIGNS DETACHMENT, BEMUSEMENT, EMBARRASSMENT, BEFORE SHOOING THE RAT OFFSTAGE AND RETURNING TO HIS CONVERSATION ABOUT FELLATIO WITH THE AUTHOR.

BUENAFUENTE HIMSELF IS LOW-KEY CATALAN IN A SUIT, WHOSE GLASSES FRAMES ARE, I THINK, MEANT TO COMMUNICATE THAT HE IS SIMULTANEOUSLY HIP AND INTELLIGENT; EXCEPT IT TURNS OUT THAT APPARENTLY HE IS. BESIDES BEING A PRESENTER, HE'S ALSO AN AUTHOR, A JOURNALIST, AND A PRODUCER. HE'S WORKED FOR RADIO AND ON SEVERAL DIFFERENT TV PROGRAMS. HE'S BEEN AROUND THE BLOCK, AND HE KNOWS WHAT HE LIKES AND, MORE IMPORTANTLY, WHAT HE DOESN'T. THE STRUCTURE IS A LOT LIKE MOST OTHER TALK SHOWS, BUT IT DOESN'T PANDER TO THE CELEBRITY/SPONSOR ENGINE THAT MAKES MOST PROGRAMS STALE. THEY'VE KEPT THE BIZARRE CHARACTERS AND THE WEIRD SITUATIONAL COMEDY THAT SPANISH PEOPLE SEEM TO HAVE A TASTE FOR, BUT THEY'VE CHOPPED OUT THE SORDID SENSATIONALISM AND THE CRAZY PORNO STARS SHOUTING AT EACH OTHER ACROSS A TABLE (IF YOU DON'T KNOW WHAT I'M TALKING ABOUT, CLEARLY YOU HAVEN'T WATCHED ANY SPANISH LATE-NIGHT TV). BUENAFUENTE ACCEPTS THE FREAKSHOW, YET REMAINS THE LEVELHEADED ANCHOR, AND THIS JUXTAPOSITION SURPRISINGLY MAKES HIS WEIRDO COLLABORATORS PALATABLE.

THE REALLY NICE THING ABOUT THE SHOW IS THAT THE GUESTS AND CHARACTERS LOUNGE AROUND LIKE THEY HAVEN'T A CARE IN THE WORLD. BUENAFUENTE USUALLY BEGINS AT 12:30, AND DOESN'T END UNTIL 2:00, AND THIS LONGER FORMAT GIVES HIM TIME TO TROT OUT WRITERS, THEATER ACTORS, EXCERPTS FROM CURRENT PRODUCTIONS, AND OTHER CULTURAL PHENOMENA THAT USUALLY GET OVERLOOKED. IT ALSO HAS AN UNUSUALLY COLLOQUIAL ATMOSPHERE THAT MAKES YOU FEEL LIKE YOU'RE OUT WITH FRIENDS. ANOTHER RECURRENT GUEST IS "THE JOB GUY," WHO COMES IN ON THURSDAY NIGHTS TO BITCH ABOUT HIS WEEK AND HAVE A CAÑA. ON TV! MY REPRESSED AMERICAN SIDE LOVES THIS. IF YOU DON'T HAVE TO BE AT WORK AT 8:00, GIVE THE SHOW A SHOT. THE GUY'S PLUGGED IN, AND YOU JUST MIGHT LEARN SOMETHING.

NÚRIA FERRER IS AN AMERICAN/CATALAN HYBRID WITH A BRUTAL CASE OF INSOMNIA. SHE DID NOT VOTE FOR BUSH.

FAMILIA, THE DRIVER TOLD ME IN A CONFIDENTIAL TONE: "SINCE YOU HAVE AN INTEREST FOR ARTS, I WILL TELL YOU SOMETHING FEW PEOPLE KNOW: GAUDI KNEW THE MOLECULAR COMPOSITION OF STONE. HE DIDN'T SCULPT THOSE STONES, HE CREATED THEM FROM SCRATCH."

IT LOOKS LIKE VERY FEW PEOPLE KNOW THIS FACT INDEED.

MAYBE IT'S THE LONG SHIFTS, MAYBE IT'S THE SENSE OF FRAGILITY FROM NOT KNOWING THEIR DESTINATION, BUT CABBIES ARE TRULY PECULIAR. IF YOU TAKE TAXIS IN BCN AND YOU CAN SPEAK SPANISH, DON'T BE SHY AND STAY SILENT IN YOUR BACKSEAT. RIDE ON...

LAURENT BOMPARD IS A NATURAL BORN SOCIALIZER AND ADVOCATE OF LUNACY WHO WORKS A LOT, GOES OUT TOO LATE AND SHOULD DEFINITELY BE IN BED AT THIS TIME.