



rob hunter ● a comedy of betrayal

# the runaway bungalow by rob hunter

## The Annunciation

The penis with the butterfly tattoo arrived in the mail that afternoon. A plain cardboard box, book rate. Inside a bubble-wrap cocoon was the plastic bottle, Sue Bee Honey. The norteamericano supermarkets displayed these in tidy rows near the peanut butter.

The eyebrows of Oswaldo Patricio Meléndez O'Rourke y Nuñez described a reddish-brown arch above his golden Inca eyes. "So, Pat's dick." Oswaldo held the plastic squeeze bottle to the light. "They killed him." He gently closed the book he had been reading and set it on the kitchen table. The butterfly's wings hung limp in a golden haze of honey as though it had only just left its chrysalis and paused in the sun to dry. That it was Patricio's manly part, Oswaldo was sure. It had appeared much bigger when Oswaldo was five years old. Patricio was at the time deep with Mama Coca and had raped his sister's son. "See the butterfly?" Tío Patricio had asked. That the flaccid organ of which his uncle was so proud arrived by mail and not FedEx ruled out self-mutilation. In life Patricio traveled first class.

"*Para no olvidar*, a forget-me-not." Oswaldo spoke to the cheery little bee on the label. Sue Bee smiled back. The artifact was intact albeit unattached. "*Nomeolvides*, that is the flower," Oswaldo explained to the bee, "the forget-me-not." Oswaldo unscrewed the plastic cap of the honey bottle and dumped its contents down the garbage disposal. The grinding went on no longer than for an apple core or a melon rind. As Tío Patricio had so often said, "There is no problem that cannot be resolved with a good solution." Tío Patricio was a specialist in good solutions. He turned off the garbage disposal. The removal of the penis had been a neat excision. Patricio had to have been dead when it was removed, dead or unconscious. There had been no struggle.

In the street, a powder blue Celebrity, a veteran of many Maine winters, coughed to life, a cloud of blue exhaust erupting from its tailpipe. Harriet's breath steamed as she emerged from the car to scrape at the layer of frost on her windshield with a small plastic rectangle—a credit card. She looked up at him as she scraped. Successful, she held her arms above her head and clapped her mittens together to demonstrate that she was entitled to a victory lap. A momentary halo of ice crystals fell and powdered her hair. Harriet waved as she drove away. He would not tell her of this.

Several thousand miles to the south, the butterflies hung, frozen stiff. Orange and black bodies of *Danaus Plexippus*, the common monarch, clung to the trees, then fell.

"Something in the milkweed," the norteamericanos said about the dying butterflies. With a wet winter, an unseasonable sleet and no blossoms of helianthus, aster and verbena to browse to keep up their strength on the long flight north, the butterflies died in their millions.

But here one butterfly had returned to North America. Someone must have survived the explosion—the other, the second explosion after that first explosion which had vaporized Oswaldo's parents. Oswaldo was not close to Don Paco and Doña Inez but mourned his parents appropriately for all his then five years. He had been especially fond of the golden cocker spaniel which perished with them. He speculated it was Tío Patricio who ordered the wiring of Don Paco Nuñez' Land Rover with the plastique that precipitated his orphanhood. He had received the gift in the honey jar, ¿de verdad? And that precluded that Tío Patricio, dead as he must be, had walked away from death one time again. He had come up short.

Oswaldo contemplated the empty honey bottle with its little smiling bee. He had made a joke. "So, a souvenir. For me. Patricio's butterfly is a memento signifying something beyond a card of condolence for the passing of a relative." He returned to the window to observe Harriet's departure from between the slats of her venetian blinds. There are too many explosions in my life, thought Oswaldo. One at least had been left alive from explosion number two.

Oswaldo flinched as a reverberation, a momentary figure, moved in the mirror over Harriet's dresser—himself, his reflection. "I am a frightened monkey, a furtive loiterer to no good purpose," he said the words aloud. He sprinted to the refrigerator to hide the honey bottle behind a container of last night's leftovers. "Someone feels I should know of this." Tío Patricio's monkey was Miguel the origami man, an analog of Mama Coca herself, meaning no disrespect. Miguel then, who played at being a monkey with his origami animals. Miguel who was dead.

Harriet threw him a kiss from the departing automobile. She was gone; he was alone.

In the first year the Monarch butterflies failed to migrate north, Amy Fisher shot Mary Jo Buttafuoco in the face. In New York a bewildered teenager stared from the front pages of the *Post*, *News* and *Times*. Mary Jo's husband, Joey Buttafuoco, was Amy's lover and worked on Ferraris. On the inside pages a Texas woman reported seeing a vision of Christ after a near-death experience, "He was radiant, a Spirit being," she said in an interview. After her return she had an encounter with a passerby's guardian angel. In El Rosario and the Sierra Chincua overwintering colonies of dead butterflies were free for the gathering by the shovelful, the bucket and the truckload.

## San Expedito intervenes

Oswaldo Patricio Meléndez O'Rourke y Nuñez had arrived in Harriet Hopwood's life unannounced and unforeseen. "I see you in the corners of my eyes, beloved," he had said. That eyes might have corners was *uno tropo*, a figure of speech. In return Harriet presented him with her love and a book, *The Runaway Bungalow*, to help with his language studies.

"This is your book. You are giving it to me."

"It's the library's. You know—the big red building with the soldier and the cannon? Keep it as long as you want."

"Querida, there will be an excise, a late fee." Money, always money.

Harriet kissed him. "I can slip it into the after-hours book return box—it's a regulation government mail box painted blue and welded shut. Vandals dump snow in the box in the winter, and in the summer, the few pensioners in the neighborhood who do check out books return them at the desk."

*The Runaway Bungalow* was a children's picture book printed on glossy paper. There were pictures of many colors, whimsically drawn. Randy Smith, a tow-headed little boy in the norteamericano heartland, dozed in the sunny summer sometime of his shaded front porch, *Treasure Island* on his lap. Theophrastus Bigelow, a pirate, had been called from his millennial slumbers by the boy's longing for adventure. The book had a shiny plasticized cover, librarian friendly; the smudges of small fingers would easily wipe away.

"Cuidado, little blond boy," said Oswaldo. "Everyone is young once and kids make mistakes. It's not that the guys in the stories don't make mistakes, too. It's that little blond boys who make mistakes don't live long enough to have stories written about them."

He had swum a river, an international boundary, dragged down by whirlpools in miniature tidal eddies. He was on his own, a refugee pledged to Mama Coca, the Andean Avon Lady, and covered with the welts of many insect bites. Strapped about his chest in a water-logged body pack he carried one hundred thousand dollars and the battered figurine of a neglected saint. Expedito, the gambler's saint, *Hodie* his motto—do it now, today, the saint of immediate gratification.

"If you want to take getting sucked to the ocean bottom by the weight of wet money as an allegory, feel free," said the saint.

"I prefer not to," said Oswaldo, gasping for breath.

## Money I

*Beepbeepbeepbeep.*

Harriet, eyes puffy and full of sleep, reached to silence the alarm clock. A dark young man, red-haired with a hint of freckles—a blending of transoceanic bloodlines—squirmed backwards onto the warm spot she had just vacated. He snored gently.

"You didn't have any idea where you were, Ozzie," Harriet whispered softly as she nibbled at an ear. The snoring stopped.

Oswaldo opened one eye and reached out to hold her. "I am here, mariposa," said Oswaldo, not yet awake.

"Butterfly, mariposa," Harriet recognized the Spanish word.

In El Rosario and Sierra Chincua scientists reported over two hundred million butterflies had perished in an unseasonable fall of sleet, casualties to the careless footfalls of los caballos apocalípticos, the great wild cattle of Armageddon usually accompanied by plague and locusts, not butterflies.

"A load of total crap, the butterfly business," San Expedito said from Harriet's bedside table. "You remember Saint Rose, don't you, Barney?"

"Cras, cras," suggested a large crow, at and under the saint's heel, "Tomorrow, tomorrow."

San Expedito was regularly represented as a painted bisque effigy in a metal-plated kilt, regular Roman army getup, with a sword and the corpse of a crow. A voodoo saint, Expedito was denied even circles of glue—those that dotted Chevy dashboards like neglected espressos when St. Christopher was shorn of his canon—to celebrate his clout.

Expedito replied, "Hodie," today, and ground his heel into the crow's windpipe.

"Mariposa," squawked the crow.

"Mariposa..." said Harriet. She snuggled closer, reaching beneath the sheets.

In the Mexican high country, Quechua speaking indigenes had other things on their minds. The Indians dodged bullets, bombs and the reciprocal stampedes of opposed insurgencies and paid no attention to their butterfly die-off. They were, after all, dead. Nobody bothered to remove the butterfly corpses.

San Expedito, fiel hasta la muerte, ruega por mi.

San Expedito, faithful to death, pray for me.

Money.

There was a balance achieved between being and not being, the living and the spirit world. Money was the bridge. Los Muertos were the walkers on that bridge. Los muertos—either seen and not acknowledged or invisible but for little signs—the bristling of a cat's tail, the secret messages in recurrent lottery numbers.

There was the thin threadbare money of the street dealers' women, suitcases of it—carry-on flight bags with puffy packets of bills that bulged, unable to lie flat. After many handlings the bills were laundered, starched and ironed as befitted the coupons of delight. The money had once been American, balled and grubby from foldings and stuffings into many pockets. It had cleaned fingernails, picked ears; rolled into tight tubes it sucked the snows of Mama Coca. *Nieves, nieves*. The Church and the shadow-church had complementary magics, on this the gullible and the wise agreed.

## Los Muertos, they are following me

Oswaldo Patricio Meléndez O'Rourke y Nuñez arrived in Harriet Hopwood's life with a backpack of laundry and a Mach-10 machine pistol. He was wet, ragged and hungry. The path from the rocky beach where he had scrambled ashore became a set of steps, then a gravel road, then a short street clustered with the mercantile establishments that decorated small town life. Oswaldo noticed that yellow lines had been painted to assist an inexperienced parker. In Bogotá, Barranquilla, Popayán and the barrios towns shaped themselves to the uses of custom. Big and small they were all the same and here was another one. Except that he was in it—a refugee. Hoping to be inconspicuous he paused to rest beside a vehicle that might look as though he and it belonged together. He was tired beyond exhaustion, gaunt and slumped over with the weight of his pack. He caught a motion, a threat, in a shop window. *Los Muertos, they are following me.* He straightened and tried to appear casual. It was a hardware store and the reflection was his.

He looked terrible. His reflection stared back at him, menacingly.

Oswaldo slipped from the harness of his backpack; there was a metallic clunk as it hit the pavement. He watched as a woman attacked the door of the supermarket across the street. She wore a natural gracelessness gracefully, and seemed to have a tendency to drop things. From the dropped backpack came a muffled protest. "Ouch!"

"Uh, Santo—that is you?"

"Sí, niño. And you are having an epiphany, a spiritual experience—these happen all the time "

"Not to me, Santo."

"Well, now one has. Go with the flow, niño. Furthermore you have chipped my bisque. What if the gun had gone off when you dropped me, what then? Think about it. And, if I am not mistaken, you are getting an erection."

"The woman..." As Oswaldo watched the woman kicked at the door, slipped and hit her head. "...she is not overly graceful, Santo."

"You do not get to choose. This is lo verdadero, the Big One. In the operating manual we are given at birth there is a hidden command. It tells the bearer: 'This is it. Put down your pencil, wrench or screwdriver, cease all superfluous activity.' Simple, really. Sorry it went by so fast. You are in love; go for it. Oye, chico, what's a patron saint for after all?"

Oswaldo looked more closely. He was captivated. The woman had a statuesque elegance with the supple lower back and slim waist of a devoted rider of horses although she had

probably never ridden a horse for fear of falling off. He checked himself again in the hardware store window. He wished he had bathed and shaved before their meeting.



## Ozzie meets Harriet

**H**arriet Hopwood was an intelligent woman, a good planner. It was just that small things went wrong more often for her than for anyone else she knew. Of all the encounters of day-to-day living the Pick 'N' Pay carried the greatest potential for humiliation. The weekly gathering-in of groceries had become a dreaded ordeal.

Harriet planned ahead, brought cash and a checkbook, and performed scrupulous mental arithmetic as she wheeled her cart along the aisles and, being sure she had the identity card the store issued before she left the house, compulsively fingered it again before queuing up at the register. People were always so polite. That was the worst, when the shopping carts backed up behind her and stalled shoppers reached for a National Enquirer or Today's Woman from the racks and chewed gum with a resigned sigh. Born under an unfavorable opposition of celestial signs—that was it.

"Shit," said Harriet. Having successfully negotiated the checkout line, she now faced a door that would not open. As she stood on the rubber mat that held the trigger device for the door mechanism she could hear the straining of a servo and smell a vague electrical odor. Her hands latched together, arms encircling the week's grocery purchases, Harriet gave a rippling spasm that started at her knees and managed to work the bags to a firmer purchase. Something was on the fritz. Again. And something was leaking and her bags were going to tear. Plus there was a man, a young man, leaning against her car, watching her. His hair was cut square and thick at the base of his neck—styled—with just a hint of a moustache to suggest he hadn't started shaving yet, though at his age he had to be shaving regularly. He looked well, *foreign*. She swung her pelvic girdle and slammed the door a roundhouse right with her hip. The servomotor breathed a pneumatic wheeze and the door opened. Her car was less than twenty yards away on a straightaway. The perpetrator-in-waiting watched as she ran at him. Harriet did the distance in a crouch, her knees bent to favor her changing center of gravity. She made it to the hood of her car with a grateful thump.

"You are leaning on my car. I am trying to unlock the car. When I drive away you will most likely fall down." All of this made perfect sense as she said it: simple courtesy combined with basic physics. "And if you make me drop these bags I will scream bloody murder and a cop will come and pound you into a platter of yesterday's shit." The Hands-On Guide To Life Situations that hovered in Harriet's cerebral cortex was riddled with useful and instructive illustrations. None of them covered this. But she did not feel threatened. The man looked agile enough to run rings around the local cops and, well... nice.

The perpetrator-in-waiting brightened and smiled a million-dollar toothpaste smile, as seen on TV. He stooped to undo the drawstring securing the top of his backpack and pulled out what had to be a machine gun. He shrugged his shoulders. Harriet had seen guns like that in the movies. You didn't have to be a good shot; you just pushed the

button and washed the car. He let the gun swing from two fingers, a pendulum effect. "It is a Mach-10. I beg your indulgence." He flashed a pearly-white smile with row upon row of perfect teeth.

"Huh, show-and-tell," said Harriet. *Very good-looking*, she thought. *Continental, that's what*. He's wet—most likely fallen off a yacht. Too handsome to be a bum. A refugee, that's it—I am the first American he has met. Aggravation was the dish of tea meted out for Harriet Hopwood, and having lived thirty-seven years in a state of gracelessness, she had learned to cope. With the arrival of her very own asylum seeker things had begun to look up.

"Which way to the aerodrome?" he asked—obviously his best shot. He appeared younger than his years, maybe 18-20, olive-skinned with a bridgeless aquiline nose

"You are very beautiful..." said Oswald. The aerodrome had certainly gotten this woman's attention and, if he lived through this, he vowed to study further. They were eye-to-eye and their chemistries embraced one another.

"So are you." *If he asks me for the time of the next dirigible landing, we'll be doing it right here in the street*. "Uh, I mean you have freckles, too." Harriet acknowledged a fellow sufferer. "Are there any bullets in that thing?"

"I have never shot it. It may be empty."

"Good. My name is Harriet." Harriet dropped a remaining bag of groceries and held out her hand. The young man kissed it. From the pavement at their feet rose the bouquet of vinegar and spices. Pickles. "Shit," said Harriet.

Harriet's secret soul knew her by another name. In her covert yearnings she was the legendary Eleanora Duse, a nineteenth century diva. She had come upon a smeared thumbnail portrait of the Duse, her head mounded with perfectly arranged confectionary coils, in the notes for her part in the ecumenical Christmas pageant. "When I saw Eleanora Duse, I knew I wanted to be her," said Harriet. Harriet had gone on the Internet. There were no posters of Eleanora Duse. There was a poster of Sarah Bernhardt. Sarah Bernhardt wore a camellia in her hair and Harriet thought it would be nice if Sarah too were Eleanora Duse. Why not? Eleanora had panache, élan. Your name was who you were; Sarah was mild as mud.

In New York, in the first year the Monarch butterflies failed to return to North America, the butterflies got bumped to the inside pages. Amy Fisher, Lethal Lolita, had shot her boyfriend's wife; the wife survived and was mightily pissed. But the butterflies were dead and didn't care.

## The Recognitions

The Recognitions was what Oswaldo and Harriet called their lovemaking, the Recognitions of St. Rose. In the lore of the Church, the recognitions were rightly the Recognitions of Christ and preceded by the Imitation of Christ in all one's thoughts and deeds. St. Rose of Lima recognized the voice of God when a black and white butterfly settled on her shoulder. She was picking medicinal herbs at the time. St. Rose took the black and white habit of the Third Order of St. Dominic and lived austerely. Oswaldo told Harriet that the butterfly was a symbol for the soul.

"Does this have something to do with that little saint you keep on the night table?" Harriet asked.

"San Expedito." St. Rose of Lima slept alone on a bed of nails and mortified her flesh; St. Rose, who existed as a portrait on a prayer card. San Expedito sat between a pack of Marlboro Lights and the alarm clock on Harriet's bedside table, a reminder that the delights of tobacco and its potential tumors were to be weighed against the inevitability of the daily grind.

"He's cute. I don't think I ever heard of him."

"He wouldn't mind. San Expedito is a bogus saint, a voodoo saint. Voudun?"

"Sounds French. The way you say that."

"It is Creole, a patois."

"A magical language, then. A troubadour language for summoning spirits."

"Claro, Cara—voodoo, Santería. Expedito the saint is not recognized by the Holy Church as is St. Rose of Lima. The people love him and his image. They make him real."

"The language of the people." Harriet was progressive, politically.

"Sí, but not all the people and not all the time. The botánicas are full of tropical juju and Santería, the African magic of the blacks, their home shrines with plaster statues of fake saints."

"And you believe in a fake saint."

"Sí, querida. Santa Barbara, Mama Coca, voodoo lady, intercede for us."

"That is a voodoo prayer, a fake prayer."

"No, querida. The prayer is real."

"And a half-assed novena if you ask me," said the figurine of San Expedito.

"I beg your pardon," said Harriet for no discernable reason as Oswaldo reached to unpin her art nouveau coil. Harriet appeared not to have noticed the saint had spoken.

Sarah Bernhardt as Eleanora Duse smiled enigmatically on the wall, near the wardrobe.

*Santa Eleanora, intercede for us.*

Sarah Bernhardt offered no opinion.

Beside the poster of Sarah Bernhardt was a front page of a New York newspaper. "Amy Fisher—Lethal Lolita," said the banner headline. Flowing dark hair framed the face of a young girl who stared past, not into, the camera. Seeking a better place, perhaps. She wore a t-shirt with the logo, Complete Auto Body and Fender, Inc.

"Until Eleanora Duse, Amy Fisher was my lucky charm. She looks so lost," said Harriet.

Harriet told Oswaldo the Amy Fisher story. "...and she was lonely and misunderstood. Like me. Until I met you."

"Kids these days." From the bedside table, Expedito scratched his crotch, no small achievement for a plaster icon with a bronze kilt. "Lust, greed, obsession, low self-esteem – it's the old, old story. Lonely teen gets it on with a Ferrari mechanic. She promptly goes schlong-happy and blows away his missus. Believe me, Ozzie, I've seen it all before—cuchifritos con salsa picante in the grease pit, then Kaboom!" said San Expedito.

"Con perdón," said Oswaldo. "But I was unaware that you were listening."

"That is the least that you are unaware of," said Expedito. "Por ejemplo, the poster is of Sarah Bernhardt, not Eleanora Duse."

"She would have killed for love, then..." said Oswaldo, referring to Amy Fisher.

"Who knows what she meant to do," said Expedito. "Drew Barrymore played Amy in the movie version. She missed at point-blank range."

Sarah Bernhardt and St. Rose of Lima were both pictures Oswaldo had seen. Harriet he could touch. She lay back as Oswaldo stroked her unbound hair. One must keep a foot firmly in the court of reality, they agreed—they would move in together, but accept each day as it presented itself. One could never tell what sudden shoals and rocky prominences might lurk ahead on a voyage of bliss so recently begun. Ozzie's English now flowed like a mountain stream from the thesaurus of their desire.

"Mmmm..." said Harriet.

"Mmmm..." Oswaldo replied, stroking her hair, a post-coital homing tone much as Sue Bee had used to lure Patricio's manly part into her honey bottle. As far as Harriet was concerned, her lover's interlocutory with his false saint was but a contented stream of sweet nothings.

"Mmmm, mmmm, mmmm—must you do that? You sound like a browsing ungulate over a bale of silage," said the saint.

"You are a soldier, Santo. You have been taught not to think but to react to the choices on a list."

"I have honor; what have you got? A bag of money," replied the saint. "I make do with what God has set near to hand—the Yellow Pages, a dictionary. Any document in a storm; Missa Brevis don't live here no more."

"Eleanora Duse—your hair," said Oswaldo, ignoring Expedito. He consulted the poster, La Dame aux Camélias. He received dispensation from St. Rose, who smiled the smile of secret knowledge, for his lie. "In Europe the Duse is worshipped as Mama Coca is in Colombia. *Become as one with this holy soul, practice a recognition and you will see the visage of the worshipped in the eyes of your beloved,*" Oswaldo recited from memory. "This is the hagiografía of St. Rose of Lima."

"It's Sarah Bernhardt, not Eleanora Duse," said Expedito.

"Of this I am aware, but my beloved is not. They are both actresses, so what the harm? Harriet thinks it is the Duse."

"Decir la verdad, Eleanora is not the babe that Sarah was," said the saint.

"They are both dead and Sarah had a wooden leg," said Oswaldo.

"Picky, picky, picky," said the saint. Eleanora Duse had the face of Mama Coca; Sarah Bernhardt had Harriet's face. Expedito had an alarm clock.

"Willipaq, Maine," said Harriet. "As far as you can get from America and still be in it."

"¿Qué?"

"That is a figure of speech. It means we are the backside of beyond."

"Un otro tropo. And now I am here."

"Sí," said Harriet. "We are here—Ozzie and Harriet, just like in the old TV show. And if we're going to keep up with the non-stop sex, we should get some seafood in us. The WilCo, steamers and beer," said Harriet, slipping away from Oswaldo's arms.

"The diner?" asked Oswaldo. North American women were forward and liked to plan evenings out, he observed. The WilCo was the only restaurant in town.

"Sí, querido," said Harriet, rearranging her hair. Sarah Bernhardt looked down approvingly.

"And *steamers*?"

"Like oysters, clams. Good for your manly part."

Oswaldo considered the vial of honey that had come in the mail. "That is uno tropo, an idiom?"

"Correcto," said Harriet.

The next morning Ozzie and Harriet both awakened with a ringing in the ears which they ascribed to an allergy or whatever flu was going around.

"I told you so," said St. Expedito from between the Marlboro Lights and the alarm clock. "The clams were off."

"You did not. You never said a thing," said Oswaldo.

"Better late than never, Ozzie. St. Rose of Lima and I will offer some reflections on bad clams later on."

"You are seriously wanting as a guardian, Expedito."

"I could have let you drown, kid, dragged down by the weight of money. Think about it."

Harriet snuggled closer under the quilt and ignored the alarm. She shook her head to clear away a mild dysphoria. They celebrated the Recognitions one quick time before she had to be off to work.

With Harriet safely away, Ozzie went back to bed. He stretched to pick up *The Runaway Bungalow*. He knocked the alarm clock to the floor where it chirped dispiritedly; the book fell. Oswaldo caught it in mid-plummet and reached to recover the cigarettes. The tiny saint teetered then righted himself.

"Something brighter," said the saint. Expedito now shared his tabletop real estate with a lamp with a 40-watt bulb as well as the crow who cried Tomorrow.

"¿Qué? I surpassed myself at my studies, Santo. The Little Sisters..." Mama Coca had underwritten many novenas for the Little Sisters of the Third Order of St. Dominic. Oswaldo was placed at their lycée as a surety for good behavior. For whose good behavior Oswaldo could not, even now, be sure. Not his, surely. The sisters were wary, the staff deferential. Oswaldo had been made comfortable.

"Not you, you ninny. A bigger bulb. I mean, like, 60 watts perhaps, as might befit my station."

"I should have to ask Harriet," said Oswaldo. "They may be expensive."

"You have dropped my breviary," the saint pouted.

"It is not your breviary," said Oswaldo. He stroked the covers of *The Runaway Bungalow* absently, passionately, as he stroked Harriet when they celebrated the Recognitions. The book had large type and only a few sentences on each page. Randy, a blond boy approaching ten, defended his home with a determined jaw and a mop handle. Theophrastus Bigelow, a pirate—not unlike Captain Morgan on the whiskey bottle—had materialized waving a cutlass at the far end of the porch.

"That pirate looks like one tough customer," said Expedito. "Nice architectural detailing, though." The Victorian gingerbread cornices and fluted columns of the house spoke to the prosperity of the Smith family. The Smiths ran the hardware store here in Anytown, USA. From his expression in the illustration, Oswaldo knew little Randy was going to have trouble.

"Arrgh! See me neck, lad?" The pirate's head hung at a grotesque angle from where the long executioner's knot had settled at the base of his skull. Theophrastus Bigelow was a big man—the weight of his fall through the executioner's trap had broken his neck but had not killed him immediately. The pirate lifted a ten-kilo strand of gold chains to reveal his scars.

"Admirable, what-oh?" The mark of the hangman was stamped on Bigelow's throat. Lacerations glistened swollen and blue, the touch of the rope. "They give me a good twist, they did." Bigelow succumbed to gales of laughter. "I didn't die from the drop; I swung and strangled, me laddy-buck. Whadda ye think o' that?" The Pirate's great black beard, curly and perfumed, he wore tucked into the waistband of a deep-cuffed, red velvet coat. Whatever young Randy thought did not matter to the pirate. He seemed to think Randy was expecting him.

"I think it's rather nice that you didn't die all at once," Randy said. Randy held his mother's mop, set to dry in the sun, between himself and Bigelow. A tattered cravat of lace spilled past the pirate's stiff brocaded collar. The lace had yellowed with age, sweat and soil and was criss-crossed with dribbles of tobacco juice. Beneath Bigelow's galloping Adam's apple hung a medallion. On the medallion was the face of a woman. Randy stared.

Oswaldo stared, too. The illustrator had done good work.

"Ye likes me dingle-dangle then, lad?" The medallion was carved gold and the size of a small tureen, fit for a pirate to hide behind. The face was a woman—a young woman, Eastern, ancient, from the hoard of Midas, Knossos, Minos, Crete. Or somewhere—old beyond remembering, and depicted three-quarters front. Her long hair she wore braided into a beehive hairdo. Her features, an evocation of the familiar, furrowed in mock astonishment that Oswaldo might have recognized her.

"Likes the lady, do 'ee?" Bigelow thrust the medallion into Randy's face.

"Y-y-yes, I do, sir," said Randy.

"She's the Gypsy Princess herself, me lady-buck." As Oswaldo stared at Bigelow's ornament she appeared to wink at him.

The pirate tousled young Randy's hair and spat tobacco on the freshly mopped porch. "She's a genuine Historical Personage; took her off a Portagee merchantman. I caught him between vespers and compline. He 'eld his tureen of gazpacho over his gut to protect 'imself. Ruined his linen, 'e did. All that spilled soup and I shot 'im in the head. She stopped a musket ball for me off the Dry Tortugas. See the bullet hole?" Bigelow stuck his finger into the woman's eye. The woman winked again as he withdrew his finger. "Whoever she was, she won't hold no soup now."



## Money II

Money.

"It is time you joined the world of commerce," said Tío Patricio. Patricio Adolfo Ruiz y Martínez had arrived unannounced at the lycée of the Sisters of St. Dominic. "What is there in Lausanne for a man of the world?" said Patricio, "...Lake Geneva." His uncle made a grand gesture to what Oswaldo supposed was a distant shore. "Where the French make water." On the opposite side was Évian-les-Bains, where they bottled the mineral water. Patricio elbowed his nephew. "That was a joke, niño."

"Sí, tío."

They left that day. On the way to the airport, Miguel Santandrea drove. Miguel had traveled with the Illuminati as a child soldier before Patricio plucked him from the streets of Bogotá. As they idled at an intersection Miguel finished the final fold of an origami praying mantis, formerly the foil liner of a cigarette pack. When he pulled its tail its forelegs and head bobbed. A good one.

Patricio tapped on the glass partition. "Miguel."

"Sí, patrón."

"The light has changed."

"Sí, patrón."

"You have been thinking, my friend—an activity, you must realize, which is outside the parameters of your job description. Oswaldo, acknowledge your Tío Miguel," said Patricio. "Uncle Mike. We will be among the norteamericanos—these are their ways."

"Hola, Tío Miguel."

"Hola, pepito."

Miguel steered the limousine up a ramp marked Aérogare, Stationnement Illimité, the long term car park. As Oswaldo and Patricio waited he removed the license plates and slipped them inside the waistband of his trousers, at the small of the back where the natural drape of his jacket would hide them from the casually curious.

In his sparse baggage Oswaldo had an ivory and silver comb and brush set, his mother's, and the statue of San Expedito. San Expedito, pray for us. Expedito, the gambler's saint, *Hodie* his motto—do it now, today. From the tarmac of the long term car park Oswaldo offered up an appeal to Expedito. His faith was not wanting.

## Tomorrow, tomorrow

San Expedito was fussing with his military kilt. "This better not be birdlime, Barney. Or so help me..." Oswaldo pretended to read, pointedly ignoring his patron saint. "Nope, just some plaster peeking through. Didja notice, Ozzie?"

"I beg your pardon? Notice what?"

"In *The Runaway Bungalow*, the pirate has not a parrot as all proper pirates do, but a monkey. I believe Errol Flynn had a parrot in the *Crimson Pirate*." At his Swiss boarding school the little sisters, teaching tertiaries of the Order of St. Dominic, had been indulgent of celluloid scenes of rapine and plunder—shredded films with patches at torn sprocket holes, missing scenes disappeared in mid-sentence—films of forgotten warriors and forgotten wars. There Oswaldo witnessed the many films of the redoubtable Errol Flynn; these were favored by the nuns. Ah, the *Crimson Pirate*! If he allowed his moustache to grow, he might be a swashbuckler like Errol Flynn in *Dodge City*, *Objective Burma*, *Dive Bomber*, *Dawn Patrol*: a wanderer who roams where the winds of fancy take him.

"Cras, cras," uttered Expedito's crow, "Tomorrow, tomorrow," an expression of hope.

"I might have a parrot one day," said Expedito with a heavenward gaze.

"Come, Young Randy, me lad," said Theophrastus Bigelow. "'Tis the moon's first quarter. The neap tide will be running and the *Gypsy Princess* is bound for Rincón de las Flores in the Caribee."

As Randy looked back, his house sprouted a billow of sails that looked like backyards of laundry set to flutter on its lines. Randy's bungalow under sail reminded Oswaldo of the tenements of Bogotá on any washday.

"Make haste, lad, or we'll be caught in the muck and lie stranded at the dock."

Theophrastus Bigelow absently fingered his beard much as Patricio had. And the monkey? That the monkey was an allegory Oswaldo did not doubt. This children's book was rich with symbolism.

Money.

What strength would touching, feeling, holding it bestow?

Money would be his problem. The tale of Randy and Theophrastus Bigelow spoke to him of his own betrayal by Tío Patricio, who in his turn played at being his protector.

Money.

"Perceptions—these are the things that last," Tío Patricio had said. "You have to show you are a team player. But this is not enough. Distance yourself, while appearing close. Some condescension is expected, but bear in mind the street dealers are paying customers. They may guess you despise them but it is required that they have the perception that you care for them. Mingle, fraternize, but be bigger than life. They expect it of us; we must live up to their imaginings."

## Patricio is airborne

The corporate jet, its ownership written in a swirl of dubious identity, was about to dip from cruising altitude, commencing the 120 kilometer glide path that would bring it in under the coastal radar.

Patricio Adolfo Ruiz y Martinez, enveloped in the crushed velvet upholstery of a window seat, flared his nostrils and luxuriated in the connoisseurship that possession bestowed. This was a rich new airplane smell—a smell which, like the aromas of new and expensive automobiles, filled the surrounding air with a plasma of desire. His airplane. His smells. Fifteen-hundred dollar perfume, million-dollar horses, the pulse points of a liberated Saudi princess after an afternoon at tennis were nothing to it, but close.

He signaled Oswaldo to bring some coffee. The wonder of it! Fresh-brewed in the galley, his galley, of his airplane at twenty thousand feet. Does life get better than this? He shook the contents of a glassine envelope onto the surface of his steaming cup. It dusted the steam like confectioner's sugar, puddled out into rings, then dissolved and sank into the creamy latté depths. Patricio followed the larger crystals—nieves, nieves, Andean mountain snowfall—as they drifted downward. His eyes circled the surface of the coffee, following the concentric rings produced by the vibrations of the engines. His engines. Wiping the rim of the cup with a serviette, Patricio bolted down the scalding infusion of boiled milk, cocaine and coffee. Eyes watering, he accepted a six-ounce bottle of iced Perrier from Oswaldo. "Gracias."

"De nada, Tío."

His airplane.

His people.

His was a very expensive aircraft. When Patricio had seen her, he had loved her. With its double fuselage and jaunty red striping the little airplane looked streamlined despite its shape. A bulbous cargo compartment made it look like a flying egg. With twin jet engines aft of the cabin to hold down the noise and a separate pilot's compartment with its own dedicated access hatch, it sorted out the classes. Patricio liked that. He was a subtle man, and understated authority was no less authority, ¿no es verdad?

A rented limousine had brought Patricio, Miguel and Oswaldo to a factory airport in an otherwise featureless part of southwestern Illinois. They had driven from Chicago. Patricio dismissed the car, "Take care of the driver." A nod to Miguel who left to pay off the liveryman with large bills from a crocodile wallet that did not entirely account for the bulge in his Gucci suit. He watched the driver and Miguel through a panoramic glazing that filled one wall of the office. On the taxiway other representative products, the catalog, parked and polished, awaited their new owners. Why then was this man beside

him babbling on? Patricio caressed the little plane with his eyes. "I desire the airplane. Not any other, but this particular airplane."

The salesman seemed confused. He had not heard. The man parked his recitation of the aircraft's virtues, embarrassed by a lack of available words to extol to this rich foreign prospect the concept of happy landings. If some landings were happy, then by definition some were not. "And you're sure to have many happy and *productive* landings with the inboard retracting gangway—no waiting and you're ready to do business, you hit the ground running." He mopped his brow and collapsed into a nearby chair. "A million five, sir, and you will have purchased an aircraft that will enhance your corporate image while giving years of safe, dependable service with the minimum of maintenance."

"I will buy her. Now, please." He wanted the man to earn his commission. Patricio was satisfied; the amenities had been performed.

"A certified check and your pilot can fly you out of here today." Corporate financing was available, as was a leasing plan. "Very popular, keeps you liquid. Cash flow."

"I am already liquid, thank you." Patricio's attaché case was placed on the desk and moved reverentially forward as Patricio moved deferentially back, distancing himself from it. "Cash. You should find sufficient here for my airplane, plus perhaps something extra for you. I find paperwork tedious." The leather case opened to reveal new thousand-dollar banknotes crisply wrapped in lots of fifty. His principals in Cartagena would display a feudal ferocity over the chastity of their funds. Thoughts of mutilation and revenge brought a stab of pain from his ulcer, making his eyes water. Patricio would make good the borrowed money.

As the Andean mountain swirls of Mama Coca dissolved into the mists of morning coffee, the streaming tears of Patricio Adolfo Ruiz y Martinez were quenched with the icy draught from Source Perrier. "Tío?" Oswaldo was uneasy over his uncle's increasing consumption of the drug, their stock in trade. He would become sloppy and irrational, as the norteamericanos.

"Does it not resemble an insect?" Patricio contemplated the patented passenger gangway folded at rest above the galley. In its stowed position it resembled a mantis riding a bicycle, cryogenically sectioned and mounted on a slide for study. "Surely this was never thought up by the minds of the norteamericanos. The Japanese, yes?"

## Money III

"The Gypsy Princess, that is a fine name for a sailing ship," Oswaldo said, shaking loose a cigarette from the pack at the feet of San Expedito, patron of immediate gratification.

Theophrastus Bigelow's monkey was dressed up as a version of Bigelow, with knee breeches, silver buckled shoes and two miniature flintlock pistols tucked into a red silk sash. Both the monkey and the man dripped with gold chains and brocaded trimmings. Mama Coca loved boiled confections of sugary guava jelly and coconut and great lacy cakes colored white, blue, yellow and pink. Gaudy materialism drove out sophisticated taste. Tío Patricio was the monkey of Mama Coca.

Poor Miguel was himself the monkey of the monkey.

Money.

Money carries its magic just by being itself. Money asks no other being than its own. Sanctified by use, its passages through many hands color it with the souls of its handlers, passively, as a flower accepts a grain of pollen from a butterfly. The government of the Estados Unidos was pleased to substitute new, large bills for the authenticated worn money which smelled excessively of clove and lavender-scented brilliantine.

Money.

Oswaldo had seen Mama Coca in the street dealers' women, eyes big and bright, halogen cupcakes with sequined jeans, tank tops and stiletto heels. They bent over ironing boards singing to the radio as they pressed their crumpled currencies.

A woman who ironed the thin threadbare money of the addicts bent forward over her task, stiletto heels wrapped around the rungs of a high stool. She started as a patchouli-scented lace sleeve brushed her cheek. Bigelow, for indeed it was he, plucked at a shoulder strap of her tank top with one huge black, snagged fingernail. "That's a topjack rack o' tits ye got on 'ee, girlie. Meanin' no disrespect," said the pirate.

The woman screamed and jumped. A heel caught on a rung. She fell, the stool fell, Bigelow fell. His perfumed beard was pressed against her face as she lay trapped inside a cage of distressed oak rungs. Beneath layers of patchouli and aromatic resins, Theophrastus Bigelow reeked of haphazard filth.

"¡Aiee!" exclaimed Jenny Gutierrez, Juana to her compa, the woman who operated a heat-sealing machine for 5 gram bags. Her compa, as well as the other coca mamas, turned to stare and saw only Juana struggling with her shirt which appeared to be undressing her as it crept up over her ears. She was trapped, tangled up with her stool.

The coca mamas all had high blond oak stools—their employer, a Medellín émigré, got them wholesale at Ikea. Jenny jabbed Bigelow in the groin with one stiletto heel.

"Uh, 'pologies," said the pirate and withdrew.

These women were the keepers of the secret of *las nieves*, the snows of Mama Coca. Whose monkeys were they and did they have names? Mama Coca looked after her own. Whose monkey was he?

"Monkeys I am not conversant with," said San Expedito. "The naming of cats however is a popular pastime where there are backyards. Cats are dying all the time; might as well get a dead one the next time and save the trouble of coming up with a name. A newly dead cat as a replacement for a previously dead cat."

Tío Patricio's airplane had had no name. It had had a counterfeit registration number painted on its wing.

## Welcome to Canada

Miguel's voice came high and reedy through a plastic grill. "Allá... eso es, patrón. It is recommended to secure yourselves for the approach." A chime sounded; a light embedded in the fiberglass roof stowage flashed on. This was a design feature, a dedicated circuit, a perquisite of executive flight. The alert signal was hard-wired to the pilot's intercom button. While the light was lit conversations in the cabin were not necessarily private, and discretion was indicated.

"The norteamericanos, they seek a liberating influence. They can trade their mineral wealth for Mama Coca. You shall see, Miguel."

Miguel tried hard to see. El jefe was truly a schemer.

The plane banked to execute a turn of inspection. Handing his empty latté to Oswaldo, Patricio leaned to the window as he fumbled for his lap harness.

Below, a clear-cut through pine forest surrounded a slanting runic letter T executed in asphalt on the forest floor, a back country airstrip and taxiway built to lure wealthy gringo fishermen into the wilderness. The long leg of the T had been recently lengthened. The executive jet touched down where an additional quarter mile of raw flattened earth extended past the end of the asphalt to where a bulldozer was parked. A silver Mercedes sedan waited beside the bulldozer.

"Oswaldo, you will kindly exit by the baggage hatch to cover our rear... just in case. You have the auxiliary funds?"

Oswaldo slapped his body pack reassuringly, "Claro. Sí, Tío."

"Bueno, into the woods then. Observe us carefully. There is much you may learn of the fragile politesse of a deal going down."

Cradling lightweight machine pistols fitted with combat shoulder braces, Patricio and Miguel undogged the latch on the compartment door and let down the telescoping gangway. Almost as an afterthought Patricio scooped up a Hartmann leather overnight case and, tucking it under his free arm, clambered down the telescoping stairs. The entrepreneur and his pilot stood at the foot of the gangway, smoking. Let the business come to them. There was activity at the Mercedes. The driver's door opened and a gray-haired corduroy-suited man in his early 50s got out. Another man was beside him in the front; the Mercedes' polarized windows obscured who might be in the back. There was a flash of a fatigue blue sleeve from the passenger's side as the man said something to his companion, closed the door and, adjusting his suit, advanced smiling. He wore a neatly clipped mustache and was empty-handed.



There was a click as Miguel cocked his weapon.

"I agree, my friend," said Patricio. "We are dealing with the provincial police who are unaware of the protocols of such exchanges. Guardia Civil, surely these are what they are."

"They have disbanded the provincial forces for budgetary reasons, patrón."

"*Mirabile dictu*. They may as well have imitated the redoubtable Gene Hackman and have 'POLICE' stenciled across their jackets." Hypothesized uniforms behind the Mercedes' polarized window glazing swam in an astigmatic ocean. Patricio rubbed at his eyes. "Let us welcome them."

Straight backed, supple, with a military bearing and a spring to his knees, the gray-haired man in the suit advanced, confident, smiling. "An athlete, then, this Canadian policeman, he looks after himself." Patricio noticed leather elbow patches.

As he approached, the corduroy slowed. Patricio set down the overnight bag and opened his snuffbox. Thumbing a pinch of white powder into each nostril, he grew glassy-eyed in anticipation of the rush. Patricio savored the fragile eternity of graft about to be offered. His eyes became heavy-lidded. Seduction of a woman, suborning a corrupt official, these were the same.

The man seemed to want to shake hands. Patricio obviated this by having one hand full with the machine pistol while the other manipulated his snuffbox.

"Shall we?" The man nodded. Glad to be free of an awkward moment, he let his arm drop to his side. He turned to the Mercedes. Patricio picked up his bag and signaled Miguel to follow.

## Insects attack

Oswaldo turned the page. What must have been a two-month voyage in the sleekest of windjammers had been relegated to a single page of text with a drawing opposite of Randy high in the rigging, chasing a crow from the crow's-nest. The reader would have no cause to doubt the pirate's boast about the speed of his (probably) stolen craft. Conclusion: nothing had happened on their trip—no great storms, no windless drifting becalmed in the horse latitudes. Either nothing had happened or those adventures belonged to another story. They saw whales, they saw basking turtles in the Dry Tortugas, St. Elmo's fire pulsating at the mizzenmasts and schools of flying fish.

Then it was again time to turn the page.

The next picture showed Theophrastus Bigelow with Randy at the taffrail. It was a rear view with the two of them straining over the side, peering to see a landfall. Randy held a spyglass.



The corduroy led Patricio and Miguel back toward the Mercedes at the extended leg of the landing strip. As they approached the newly graded gravel, Patricio swung his overnighter like a bag of oranges. *See what I can do!* He was a carefree schoolboy, gone truant and off on an adventure. This was going to be an exemplary day. His arm described ever higher arcs. A moment of forgetfulness and confusion, then the soul-suffusing knowledge that he was in command. His nose was running, staining his beard.

Patricio set the leather overnighter on the Mercedes' roof. Dialing the combination release mechanism, he popped open two gold hasps and scooped out what appeared to be an amorphous lump of clay roughly the size of a bowling ball. This he slapped against the Mercedes' trunk compartment where it joined the opaque rear window. The clay deformed from the impact and resembled a child's mud pie, oversized and dejected. He held his hand before his face. Who am I?

Several hundred yards above and away, lying prone on a great boulder of pink granite, Oswaldo watched the tableau unfold below. Shitfuck. Slap! The norteamericano insects had discovered him. Madre de Dios, the accursed things were either up early or out late. He tried to concentrate on the Holy Family, then World Cup soccer players, a device for controlling untimely erections from his schooldays. But he was already limp and these were North American bugs raised on baseball and atheism. There was insect repellant on the plane.

Oswaldo stood, massaging the stiffness out of his legs. He doubled up with pain as a cramp—*charleyhorse*, as he was later to learn from Harriet—knotted his left leg. Putting

his full weight on that side, he leaned against a tree. Another bite. Would they never be satisfied?

He had observed Tío Patricio sample his own wares. Not an omen of good portent.

## A pirate and a fugitive think of money

"Have ye a jackknife, laddy-buck?"

Randy peeled back the Velcro latches of his cargo pockets. He came up with 50 feet of monofilament line with a lead sinker and a fishhook embedded in a piece of cork, as recommended by the Boy Scout handbook. There was an aspirin bottle with old-time kitchen matches, their heads dipped in paraffin to keep out the damp. And a three-bladed pocketknife.

"Aye, aye, sir."

Oswaldo was pleased to see that while he had been away from *The Runaway Bungalow*, the boy had picked up some of the sailorman's lingo.

"Good then. We'll be wanting to build a leeward shelter. By them clouds low on the horizon, there be a blow a-coming. Can ye climb a tree?"

Randy peered over the railing of the Gypsy Princess. There were no trees, only water in every direction.

"Tree, sir?"

"Trees, lad. Can't ye see 'em?" Theophrastus Bigelow pointed to a speck in the distance that Randy had missed. "Trees. And by the size of 'em we're but eight leagues off."

Randy had somehow expected the pirate's hideaway to be on a lush, green volcanic island with a snow-capped peak jutting far into the sky, like the ones he had seen on travel posters.

"'Tis a mighty short island she be, Mister Bigelow."

"Twenty-eight feet, lad. The trees are twice as tall as the island stands above mean high tide. Anegada is a coral reef."

As Oswaldo turned the page, the next picture had Randy shinnying up a giant palm tree.

"You chop us some fronds for a hut," said Theophrastus Bigelow. "And cut us some coconuts for sum'at to eat and drink, I be's abroad, hunting for the bones o' Whisperin' Dick."

"Whispering Dick, Mister Bigelow? How did he get that name?" called Randy from high in the tree.

"From when I cut his throat over a friendly game o' backgammon, lad. He escaped and healed up funny. Dick never was one who could take a joke. He Shanghaied the Gypsy Princess from under me nose and run here to Anegada with me treasure. He was buryin' it when I caught up with him and put a musketball 'tween his eyes."

Oswald closed the book, marking his place with a thumb. "Money."

"A starting point of evil," said San Expedito wisely.

"Sí, Santo. And Los Muertos, they want their money back," said Oswaldo. The money, *their* money, one hundred thousand dollars in the backpack. He had thought he was being clever, hiding the money away never to touch it except in the most extreme need, protecting both Harriet's safety and his own prolonged existence. Harriet's poster of Sarah Bernhardt as Eleanora Duse looked down and smiled on it.

."Expedito. Captain Bigelow has buried his money, whereas..."

"Whereas, my ass," said the saint. "The criminal mind at work—you all think things 'will be different this time.' Yaddita-yaddita. Ten Hail Marys and a lap around the beads and you hope to get off easy."

"I have no troubles with my soul, Santo." Oswaldo crossed himself nevertheless.

It had been a clever hiding place. The hundred thousand dollars was taped into a plastic cocoon wired in place between the springs of the sofa. He moved quietly, deliberately, operating by the light of the single bulb left on as a night light in the entryway. Harriet slept soundly, the keys to her car on the bureau. His toe brushed a neglected soda can left on the floor at the side of an easy chair. It went flying, caromed off the wall and skittered under an end table piled high with TV Guides.

"Someone knows who you are and where you are," said San Expedito. "Hide it where Los Muertos will never think to look. A cenotaph or something. Do I have to tell you everything?"

Oswaldo tipped the sofa onto its back and knelt before the exposed springs and webbing beneath the seat. There was the packet of money, undisturbed. He undid the doorbell wire holding the money in a sling between the springs, straightened it then rolled it up,

slipping the coil in his jacket pocket against future need, zipped the money into Harriet's backpack, righted the sofa and exited to the street.

Oswaldo had never really operated an automobile before, but at one in the morning the streets were free of competing traffic. He had often ridden a moped during the years with the Sisters of St. Dominic. The reflexes were different, true, but a car was easier to operate than a motorbike: with four wheels on the ground, when one's attention wandered one was not immediately in the ditch.

Oswaldo entered Harriet's car from the passenger's side, dropped the bag of money on the floor in the rear then, sliding into the driver's seat, eased the car into gear and steered it slowly down the hill to the waterfront. He drove by the light of the moon and the occasional streetlight. He had considered the chance of meeting the town's single police cruiser on patrol and thought it a negligible risk. He left his headlights turned off. And if he were stopped, what? What crime had he committed? The thought came and passed. At the very least they had him for operating a motor vehicle without proper certification. In the shadowy world of North American statute that might be enough to deport him—an unlicensed driver perpetrating some prosecutable offence under whatever currency regulations were broken with the importation of such a vast sum of undeclared money. Did they want the money for themselves? If policemen, his pursuers would not be following him because of a single-minded devotion to the motor vehicle code.

A few blocks later Oswaldo pocketed the keys, shouldered the backpack and, leaving the car unlocked in the lot, slipped into an alleyway and began to lay a maze to confound possible trackers. He left the engine running in the car, reasoning that a constant level of gentle, familiar sound from the street, an unchanging ambience, would be less likely to wake the neighbors. The early morning hours were a time of nightsweats and horrors, erotic visitations by incubi, succubi and solitary emissions, wet sheets and dry mouths.

Money. Was the money not enough? But what plan beyond the money?

Whoever they were, he could feel them. The aura of intent was thick upon the night air. He was being watched. He was quarry.

The feeling—an intuition—was a queasy uncomfortableness he had at times felt as a boy when he had been a target of the attentions of sexually anomalous persons. He had not seen the searchers, the shadowers. He had felt their presence, a loiterer's lingering glance in a crowded bus depot. Oswaldo's sortie as an unlicensed motorist passed uneventfully. There were no signs of pursuit, but yet that feeling. He hid the money and returned home.

## A finicky device

"This is plastique," Patricio explained, as though lecturing a museum tour. "In it is a radio detonator controlled by my associate in our airplane. If your associates inside..." he tapped the Mercedes, "...have any transmitting equipment with them, I should caution them against using it. This is a finicky device." Patricio held his fingers to his nostrils—the neutral, clayey smell of plastique. He was irascible that he had lost his place in the sequence of events. Everyone waited as he played a finger delicately back and forth across his lower lip, ever so gently disturbing the hairs of his mustache.

"Bueno. I am a humble South American and I would like to go home. I assume you have brought many packets of money to decorate your masquerade; I should like to have it, please. Where is your backup?"

"¿Qué, jefe?" Miguel looked about for a threat, sweeping the area with his machine pistol.

The corduroy's hand was very still on the door handle.

"You are quite pale. This is a difficult time for both of us, I understand. Are you breathing? Yes, I see that you are. Let us understand one another, eh? We shall reason together like adults, eh?" A disappointment, that these men would come free of charge. They would be his without the money.

The man nodded.

"Ah, your wonderful tan, it is returning. I had feared a heart attack."

Patricio allowed the muscles of his face to relax to what he trusted was unconcerned, delinquent attention. One of the jump-suited policemen edged out of the Mercedes. Slowly, very slowly, he laid his hands flat on the surface of the car's saloon roof. "How many are left in the back seat, eh, corduroy? It is a sedan—three, then. Fine. They shall stay where they are. Tell them to lock themselves in."

Miguel backed off, his weapon commanding a larger arc. El jefe was deep with Mama Coca. These policemen would not understand.

Patricio indicated the GRC lettered on the new man's shoulder patch. "A gendarmerie? You are French? Quién es?—Français? Anglais?"

The man with his hands on the car's roof was motionless; his eyes bulged with terror. The crisp corduroy with the trimmed mustache spoke. "He means your uniform patch, Steve." Turning to Patricio, "Gendarmerie Royale du Canada. GRC—Gravel Road Cop. The Mounties." The corduroy smiled.

Patricio smiled. Oh, a joke. Everyone relaxed. "Your backup. I believe you have yet to answer me. Por favor, if we are to have more guests we should know how many places to set."

The corduroy became grimly silent.

"Your stoic courage allows only one conclusion. You are bluffing me with a brave façade. There is no backup." The man didn't move a muscle but his healthy tan again disappeared.

Patricio grew intimate and consoling. "Ah, I sympathize. Budget cuts. Well, times are hard all over." Taking two paces backward, he gestured with his machine pistol. "Tell your men they may now leave the automobile. Unarmed, if you please." He fondled the plastique as the three from the back seat lined up with their commanding officer. The explosive was warm. He felt it move ever so slightly, bulging under his hand. Patricio threw himself to the ground, the corduroy and his constables following suit. Miguel filled the air where they had stood with rapid fire semi-automatic bursts. When the explosion hit Miguel was knocked flat, still firing.



So be it, then. They are dead.

Slap! ¡Mierda!

Oswaldo's Indian blood should have brought with it an endurance. When his Quechua speaking ancestors first ventured down tortuous mountain paths to the thick, wet air of the jungle floor with its trypanosome fevers and swarming clouds of biting insects, they were impervious. They chewed the leaves of Mama Coca and what care they for the bugs? Slap! Another bite. From the biting hordes of ill fortune Oswaldo turned to check on the clearing below.

The Mercedes exploded. When the blast struck he was knocked sideways. There was a sharp pain in his arm. He pulled out a splinter of aluminum. The car's rear end had disappeared from the face of the earth, leaving not even an appreciable crater. Flying debris pitted the windscreen of the executive jet. Seen at a distance, the explosion lifted the near wing of the egg-shaped airplane a few inches off the ground, knocking it sideways. Its far landing gear collapsed as it settled gracelessly on the tip of one wing. Viewed upside-down and through a rising screen of dust, a machined aluminum espresso maker rattled down the telescoping steps of airplane's open cargo bay. The plane lurched, one side dropping at an angle like a camel kneeling at the children's zoo, and the steps deformed into a barricade.

Oswaldo scrambled down the rocks to the crippled plane.

He reached into the pilot's glove box and rummaged through an excelsior of giraffes, swans and insect shapes. During the long flight from Cartagena Miguel had cut and folded an origami zoo from the maps of North America. The paper animals had been fastidiously pressed together and bound with a red elastic band. The leftover pieces of the former maps were a fever of blue and red lines wadded together and stuffed to one side. Ah, there was the insect repellent. He fingered the swirl of his cowlick where an accumulation of blisters was festering from insect venom.

So be it, then. They were dead—the strangers, Patricio and Miguel likewise. He would endow novenas for the repose of their souls. What, then, were these feelings? He felt not grief but relief and an irrepressible joy. Nothing in his proper Catholic education had prepared him for this release. Oswaldo mumbled a prayer to appease San Expedito lest he be held answerable at a later date. He had a bag of money, thousands upon thousands of ironed, pressed fresh flat dollars. Oswaldo felt the urge to tip somebody. He laughed quietly and made an elaborate bow to a hackmatack tree. "Change? Keep the change."

He hitched his pack and started walking. Miguel's origami project had destroyed the maps. He would be directionless and alone. He patted the body pack full of cash and adjusted the sling of his automatic pistol.

## Tea and Fig Newtons

Oswaldo went to the kitchen to make himself a cup of strong tea with marmalade instead of honey. He gazed thoughtfully out the window while he waited for the kettle to whistle then returned to bed with his tea and a box of Fig Newtons. He picked up *The Runaway Bungalow*. "Now where were we?"

"Theophrastus Bigelow has just murdered Whispering Dick," said San Expedito. "Barney was fixing to crap all over it, the book," said Expedito. "I shooped him away."

"Thank you."

"As it turned out, the shot that finished off Whisperin' Dick finished me," said Bigelow. "His Britannic Majesty's frigate was lolling about the way they does—poking their official beaks into businesses that don't rightly concern 'em. The governor heard the report of me musket. He sent a cutter ashore and nabbed me red-handed." The memory of his capture tickled the pirate. "If they had caught me asea, I coulda outrun 'em. The Gypsy Princess is a jib-headed sloop, and slick as a taproom floozy."

Randy felt that piracy was exactly the proper business of the governor, but he decided not to point this out to Theophrastus Bigelow.

Oswaldo agreed with Randy, "Don't trust him, kid." It would be better for el pequeño to err on the side of discretion. Freed from the pressure of the saint's instep, the saint's crow had flapped up to the headboard of the bed where it cawed, "Cras, cras." The saint drew his sword and slapped it alongside the head. "No, Barney, godammit, 'Hodie,' you feathered affliction. Now, today. Damn crow," he muttered, returning the sword to its sheath. "Oh, yes, I have been reading over your shoulder. A riveting tale, this Bungalow business."

"And then, sir? What happened then?" asked Randy Smith of Theophrastus Bigelow.

"Well, they did not realize there was a million in Spanish gold fresh buried under their feet. They put me in irons and transported me back to Devon. A year later I stretched the rope at Execution Dock."

"For killing Whispering Dick?"

"Nah! For piracy, me bucko—stealing without a license. Me letter of marque had run out with the war. And, if they twigged to the killin' of Whisperin' Dick, they didn't care. Saved 'em the cost of a second trial at the next assizes." Cautioning the boy not to wander away, Bigelow went off about his piratical businesses.

Randy Smith squatted to peel a coconut on the spotless white sand of the beach when Bigelow's monkey came scampering up to him, paw extended.

"Oh, you want a treat. Well, let's see what I have." Randy again explored the cargo pockets of the pants his mom had bought for him at the mall and came up with a Mars bar. The monkey was immediately interested. The candy felt squishy inside its wrapper.

"It's all I have, fella," said Randy and peeled back the wrapper. The wilted Mars bar was a hit. The monkey grabbed it, wrapper and all, and bounded up a nearby palm.

"So, the monkey wants more but will settle for a candy bar," said San Expedito. "Bueno. Monkeys come cheap, then."

Oswaldo thought of Miguel—Uncle Mike, Tío Miguel. "Monkeys come cheap," Tío Patricio had liked to say that.

Blam! A coconut cannonaded to the sand. Randy felt the breeze of its passage. A close call. "Hey!" he shouted up to the monkey, "You don't have to kill me. There isn't any more."

Randy was worn out. He curled up for a nap behind a dune covered by tall grass with huge tassels swaying in the Caribbean breeze like lazy heads of ripe wheat. Randy dreamed of a young man, an Incan prince in peril. The young man had Indian features but red hair and freckles. The young man was reading a book and wishing he was home. Randy wished he was home on his sunny summer porch, an open adventure tale across his sunburned knees.

## Randy meets Whisperin' Dick Drinkwater

**R**andy Smith awakened from his nap as Oswaldo Patricio Meléndez O'Rourke y Nuñez turned to the next page of *The Runaway Bungalow*.

Theophrastus Bigelow came staggering over a line of dunes. He was dragging two very heavy sacks. "Hoy, laddie, give us a hand then."

"Mister Bigelow, have you found your treasure?"

"Aye, boy, and with it the skeleton of Whisperin' Dick Drinkwater, retired scalawag. Follow me."

Randy and the monkey followed the pirate through a wall of palmetto scrub to a mound of freshly turned earth. Atop the mound was propped the desiccated remains of what Randy assumed to be Whisperin' Dick. A deep scar disfigured the shrunken skin of the man's throat. Whisperin' Dick's eye sockets were empty; brown teeth gaped in a ghastly leer. Bigelow had propped him up in a saucy pose, one hand on his hip.

"I'll get out the Good Book, Randy-me-lad. It's only fitting we give 'im a Christian burial."

The pirate pulled a Gospel from his silken waistband. "Stand over by the hole, lad, whilst I says a few words."

Randy obeyed.

"Ah, 'tis a sad thing I have to do, Randy, but I figure ye understands." Bigelow drew a huge pistol from his sash and took dead aim at Randy's chest. As he squeezed the trigger, the monkey sensed the situation and, protecting the source of the paradisaical Mars bars on his tiny mind, jumped upon the pirate's arm just as he fired his weapon. The shot flew harmlessly off into the palmettos.

Cursing foully, Bigelow brushed away the monkey and drew his second pistol.

"Go, kid, go," whispered Oswaldo. "You can make it. Run for it."

Randy did not run; he prayed hard and dived deep into his cargo pockets. The pockets seemed to know what he needed each time he looked before. There! The roll of monofilament line with the fishhook and sinker. As the pirate cocked his pistol, Randy swung the fishing line around his head like a lariat. All he was aware of was the pounding of his heart and the slow, slow hum of the transparent fishing line as it gathered speed in ever widening circles. He let it go. Randy stopped breathing and time paused. Oswaldo noticed that his palms were sweating. San Expedito and Barney teetered on the edge of

Harriet's bedside table. While the line was in the air, it whirred with a sound effect as in the Saturday matinee ninja warrior movies.

The lead sinker caught on the upraised hammer of the pistol, locking it open, while the hook embedded itself in the meaty part of Bigelow's thumb. Randy's cast had wrapped a few turns around the pistol's trigger guard for good measure.

"God curse ye!" growled the pirate.

Bigelow could not fire the gun or even let go of it until he broke the line or dislodged the fishhook's barb. He tore at the line with his jagged yellow teeth, but the artificial fiber was too strong for him.

"Go, Randy. Go, go, go..." Oswaldo reached to turn the page.

## Whiskey, por favor

"Miguel, whiskey, por favor. I trust the Johnnie Walker has survived our most excellent explosion. Two glasses." Don Patricio was in an expansive mood but Miguel noticed he was excluded from the invitation to drink; he was to fetch only. Had he not fought side by side in the jungles with the Illuminati guerrillas? Was he, Miguel Santandrea, to play Don Patricio's loyal dog, lolling and panting for its reward? Lick my hand. Now, simplón. The corduroy had entered their business and he now became the waiter. He thrust his weapon into his waistband and headed to the kneeling airplane. Better for now to get the whiskey for the policeman and Patricio to toast their miraculous survival. If the corduroy felt any distress over his fallen comrades he did not show it.

When he returned with two tumblers left unbroken from the explosion neither man appeared to have moved. Their attitude was stiff, formal. Miguel sensed an anomaly—the corduroy was too at ease for one who had just given over his honor into the hands of a stranger.

"Then we have an arrangement?" Patricio queried the corduroy.

"It would appear that we have an arrangement." The corduroy turned and smiled at Miguel. The corduroy's smile was brittle.

What was different with this exchange? These were not two about to partake the fellowship of alcohol after not being blown to pieces. The corduroy, this Canadian policeman, had been bribed. He could see it in the light of shame and avarice in his eyes. But there was more. He had been bought with much money. Money plus a small quantity of drugs and a corpse, perhaps—to be taken back for show. Miguel perhaps.

"Patrón." Miguel set the tumblers down gently, testing his balance, foot-to-foot.

"¿Qué?" Patricio turned to Miguel. He registered mild irritation, as though a household appliance had spoken without first having been given permission. Patricio nodded. "Now, corduroy. Kill him."

The corduroy was slow getting his gun up from an ankle holster. Miguel fired without conscious aim, a single liquid motion as he had learned in the jungles of the Illuminati. Patricio half-rose from where he sat cross-legged on the ground. Miguel shot him and the policeman both neatly through the forehead.

Miguel bent over Patricio's corpse. He stripped the body and went to work. Surely the boy would like a memento and remember him fondly by it. Had he not studied the manipulations of the exploitative classes? It would be from one liberated slave to another. "¿Qué tal, mariposa? Ahh, Patrón, the little wanderer—your butterfly."

After he made certain that all who had been killed by the explosion were truly dead, he counted up the policemen's bait money. A million dollars. Canadian, true—but even with the exchange rate he could live well in America. He stuffed the cash into a backpack and walked away into the woods. He reached the river that delineated Canada's border with the United States and a motorboat someone had left carelessly moored.

"Ah, we are all so far from home." The chico would most likely not have the presence of mind to change his name. Everyone would know him. And to make sure the butterfly reached its destination, that it was not misunderstood, he would follow. The afternoon was sunny and he was content with life as it had presented itself. Miguel put the smiling Sue Bee with its nest of plastic bubble wrap into the mail soon after he scuttled the stolen boat. "Enjoy the honey. Disfrútelo, pepito."

## A dream of running

On the next page of *The Runaway Bungalow* was a picture of Randy's heels disappearing over the top of a giant sand dune. Behind him the enraged Theophrastus Bigelow and his great flintlock pistol were tied up tight in a snarl of monofilament fishing line. With his free hand the pirate drew his cutlass to chop away the line. Under the force of his blow the pistol exploded, driving a leaden ball backwards into the pirate's heart. By this time, Randy Smith was out of sight and running full tilt through the rough palmetto scrub.

Oswaldo closed *The Runaway Bungalow*. He identified Randy's problems as his own. "Now how does pequeño Randy get off the island? It is a coral reef." The boy had destroyed his tormentor, escaped certain death, only to be marooned on a Caribbean atoll. "He will have to row out to the Gypsy Princess and sail her single-handed back to England." But wait! The boy had started with a daydream, reading on his porch in Anytown, USA.

"Santa Maria!" He had tried to stand but the room closed in on him. *The Runaway Bungalow* slipped from his fingers and lay open on the floor. He steadied himself by grabbing at the dresser. A silk tasseled throw and the contents of Harriet's bureau top scattered as he collapsed back to the bed. His head was stuffed, too full, his balance all wrong. He was sick—dizzy and disoriented. Perhaps if he could close his eyes and rest for a moment.

Oswaldo Patricio Meléndez O'Rourke y Nuñez was in a dream of running, fleeing a pursuit from which there was no escape. They were after him—after us, for Harriet ran beside him. San Expedito smiled beatifically down. *San Expedito, pray for us.*

"This is a bad year for clams, what with paralytic shellfish toxins and all," said the saint. "Ever read A Christmas Carol? Dickens?"

"Uh, no."

"Too bad, you might have found me there. It's the clams, believe-you-me. Old Scrooge recognized the old tainted shellfish number right off when he confronted the ghost of Jacob Marley—'There's more of gravy than of the grave about you, whatever you are.' Next time take a pass on the clams."

Miguel, Patricio, the corduroy, Harriet, Amy Fisher and he ran together. Five runners not counting himself—play fives, lucky numbers in the voodoo dream books. Miguel Santandrea played the Bolita, la lotería, passionately. He had filled many arks with losers, folding his losing tickets into origami animals. In the numbers, any combination of fives, the numbers of Mama Coca.



"They are after you," San Expedito jogged alongside.

"Who is after me? Surely they are all here, running with us, Santo."

"Ah-ah-ah-ah-ah. Count 'em, kid.

Oswaldo turned to count his fellow runners. The figures swam into and out of focus; his vision had the fish-eye distortion of a fever dream. "Miguel," Patricio waved and tried to catch up. "Surely I am not Miguel, patrón," said Oswaldo over his shoulder. "You are mistaken. Besides, you are dead." Patricio directed a wolfish leer at Amy Fisher. He unzipped his fly. He appeared surprised as he reached inside and pulled out a plastic honey bottle. "You would turn your back on Mama Coca, and couple with some gringo virago in whose veins flows none of the blood of los indios? ¡Madre de Dios! Have I not raised you as my own son and here you would marry an aging waitress who will make you wash your own socks, like a faggot guitar player." He spoke in unaccented, but syntactically bizarre English. Right off the Berlitz language tapes. In life, Tío Patricio's English was flawless. Tío Patricio threw the Sue Bee honey bottle at him. Oswaldo ducked and the bottle bounced then rolled, spilling a golden stream of honey in a zigzag pattern on the pavement. "Miguel!" Patricio screamed.

San Expedito paused to retie a sneaker. "I could have told you so, niño—but no, you wouldn't have listened if I had. Miguel knows where you are." Oswaldo put on a burst of speed to get away from his saint.

The careened airplane, the Sue Bee in the mail, dying butterflies, Harriet and Amy Fisher—all were zooming. It took the whole of Oswaldo's determination to hold back the contents of his stomach. "So, he wants the money. Gracias for the sending, Santo. I shall be better aware of my surroundings in the future."

"Better ditch the money, kid," said San Expedito.

Oswaldo sighed, "Claro, Santo..." He must hide the money in a safer place and then play innocent, for indeed, he was. Oswaldo's first thought was to flush it away, an operation he had often seen nervous traffickers perform at an unexpected knock at the door. To wantonly destroy so much money would surely be an affront to the poverty of the Sisters of St. Dominic who had so tenderly nurtured his infancy. "A waste," said the saint. "Besides, so many bills would surely clog the toilet." Money. The revenge of money would be pitiless.

San Expedito jogged in place as he whispered to Oswaldo, "Pitilessness. It musical, is it not? Pitilessness requires practice, like playing the mandolin. Much as a tattoo, when you've got it, it's there for good. Except that the mandolins will wash off later. At pitilessness, Tío Patricio had much practice. Venality is such a comfort to me. You have hidden the money but you can't keep away."

## Money IV—the visit

Oswaldo shivered in the pre-dawn chill, his knees growing stiff. Eyes running, throat sore, head pounding, he had found an ideal place of concealment on the grounds of Willipaq's Memorial Library. The red brick façade and Gothic Revival casements of the library building loomed menacingly in the half-light. A bronze statue of a Union corporal stood gun at the ready on its cement pediment. The statue's footing had been hollow, entrance secured by removing four bronze screws of a commemorative plaque. There he waited, thinking. Oswaldo felt hunted rather than hunter, the pursued, not the pursuer. The tiny nickering of an ancestral memory nudged at his forebrain telling him that this was not right. His was a bloodline that climbed from the jungle of mangrove and liana, privy to the cougar's admonitory cough, to seek the sun and to pile the blocks, raise the temples, hone knives of copper, obsidian and gold to thrust deep into the hearts of victims—souls sent winging sunwards as rivulets of blood soaked an altar's stone channels, darkening the spillways where the earth waited, quickening and thirsty. Entrails told their tales.

A mourning dove gave call as the night mists settled—first light was approaching. He had maintained his position behind a hedge for three hours now. He jumped at a cough out on the manicured lawn a few yards distant: a fox homeward bound with a dead rat twitching in its jaws. A yellow striped tomcat stood motionless where it had blundered across the fox's path, its tail the size of a softball bat, a low glottal warning in its throat. The fox dropped its prey and coughed again, its tail up and bristling. The cat continued its stream of consonants, retreated perhaps a foot and settled itself, conceding enough for safety but holding honor intact. The fox picked up the rat and continued to its earth, and Oswaldo breathed again. His ears were ringing and his mouth was dry with the aftertaste of cold coffee that had washed down a handful of Dristan, a bottle from Harriet's medicine chest. Oswaldo choked down another Dristan, swallowing it dry. The tintinnary jangling in his ears rose in a crescendo. Maybe he and Harriet would relocate—Taos, Santa Fe perhaps.

Oswaldo awoke with a startled snap. He heard a sound, small but significant in the pre-dawn stillness. He had fallen asleep sitting on his heels. But for how long? Half an hour at least by the kink in his neck. The gray half light seemed brighter although the street light at the corner was on, the photovoltaic sensor atop the wooden pole not yet receiving enough light to key its relay out and dim the lamp. He rearranged his legs, working out the stiffness. Everything was going to be all right. He had needed the sleep, just a cat nap. The panic brought on by an over-dose of cold medication gone, he stifled a yawn and surrendered to a feeling of sleepy well-being.

There was a bird's song and a robin hopped across the lawn cocking his head as he stopped every couple of feet, alert for breakfast. Through the hedge Oswaldo could make out the figure of a man on the library steps. The man was smoking a cigarette.

An automobile slowly turned the corner at the distant end of the library's tiny campus. As it approached, the man rose and walked down the steps to the curb to meet it. The car approached to a stop, the man shrugged, crushed out his cigarette underfoot and got inside. A cold line of dread crawled up his spine. ¡Madre de Dios! It was Miguel. The driver reached out to some apparatus on his dashboard and a light bloomed to inflorescence on the roof. Taxi.

"So, kid, got yourself in a pickle, eh? He saw you buying cigarettes at the Seven-Eleven. Sheila, remember?"

"Si, Santo. Cigarettes would have been Miguel's first thought, after revenge. He was probably out of the slim brown mentholated ones, the American brand that he favors."

It had been a warm night in April and he was out after smokes. There was one other at the convenience store but he paid no attention.

"You got anything on the pumps?" The girl at the register was friendly, perhaps over-friendly. Oswaldo had not looked around; his golden eyes, night hunters, reflected the blue neon of a flashing Budweiser sign. He leaned forward on his elbows. "Hi Sheila." He flashed a winning smile. The woman grinned from ear to ear.

"Hi Ozzie."

"Just cigarettes today." The woman produced a pack of Marlboros and Oswaldo left without looking around. Miguel felt the pequeño should have sensed the pressure of his stare, but he was preoccupied with charming the cashier.

"You..." the woman swiveled to Miguel's carton of mentholated cigarettes and the pile of bills on the counter, "Got gas?" She pointed to flashing LEDs on the self-service monitor. Through the plate glass window with its pyramids of stacked beer and soda, Oswaldo's departing gait suggested a young man in love.

"You will excuse me, I have little English." Miguel fumbled in his pockets and came up with a wad of crisp hundred-dollar bills. The woman—Sheila—looked at him strangely. "You a drug dealer or something?"

"Yes, of course." Miguel smiled brightly and held eye contact.

"Yeah, sure." She rang up the sale and made change.

A close call. And if they had spoken, if the niño recognized him—what then? What to say?—What an admirable explosion? It was I who placed the wire across the ignition terminals of your parents' Land Rover? That I tried to save them, had told Don Paco and Doña Inez it was too early to leave, but no, they were hot for the bedroom and they would have enjoyed so the antipasto. And now you are a poor orphan left behind by the careless footfall of the passing Caballo Apocalíptico?

"Gracias. Thank you." Miguel departed with his purchase.

The saint's crow cawed, "Bogus saint, bogus saint," and got slapped for its trouble.

"Put a sock in it, Barney," said Expedito. The saint stepped down from his tiny pedestal. "Dream over. You may wake up now."

"Enough of these revelations," said Oswaldo. "You are a disaccommodation of my senses for having engaged in self abuse." He doubled over with a sudden spasm. He had to throw up.

"And you waxed the old carrot a lot, too, I'll just bet," said the San Expedito, unconsoling. "Those single-sex religious schools. Tsk, tsk. Don Patricio's assassin is on your trail. And you thought little Randy had a problem with that monkey of Bigelow's." The saint stooped on one knee to peer into Oswaldo's eyes. "So you really believe in me. Really?"

"It would seem I was wrong," said Oswaldo. "You are the real thing. Covetousness, envy, sloth, surely you are one of these. Or the revenge appertaining to their exercise."

"So? And what if I am a figment? Beatification is bullshit. And the butterflies, are they really lost souls? Or just Pat's weenie in a bottle. These are the imponderables. I myself went straight from the fevered imaginings of a hyperthyroid deacon directly to the company of the blessed, thence to the botánicas. St. Rose is the real thing but, believe me, she's bad news, all that S and M. Santa Barbara, Santería, Expedito—a jolly company we are."

Oswaldo rubbed his eyes and gagged back a flow of acid magma rising in his esophagus. The saint was back between the Marlboro Lights and the alarm clock. Barney the crow was in place, crushed underfoot. But San Expedito was still speaking.

"I am figment, like I told you. Don't fight it, kid; you are delirious." The saint stepped aside with the gesture of a game show host bringing on a fresh contestant. "And now, St. Rose of Lima to say I told you so. Amy, please." Amy Fisher in skintight spangles, high heels and fishnet hose came forward to pull back a velvet curtain. Amy wore a satin team jacket much as those favored by the Dominican baseball clubs. The jacket said "Mama Coca" across the back in chenille letters.

Behind the curtain a wizened woman with empty eye sockets gestured for him to join her on her bed of nails, "Mortification of the flesh," she explained. "Go drive the porcelain bus, querido. Upchuck to your heart's delight. It's good for what ails you." Oswaldo ran to the bathroom. He vomited up an almanac of groceries past, traveling back in time through dinners, lunches and breakfasts.

He could not feel his legs and passed out with his head in the toilet.

## Long Island Lolita

Oswaldo lay on the tile of the bathroom floor. One arm was crooked over the side of the toilet; his fingers dangled into the empty bowl. The contents of his stomach and beyond had been exhausted. A dappled rainbow of bodily fluids caked the sides of the basin. Green, liver bile; red, blood. He pulled the flush handle. It was refreshing to feel the cold, cold running water on his hands. He splashed water from the toilet on his face and dried off with the bathmat.

Oswaldo reentered the kaleidoscope of his fever dream. The room began to spin and he tried to throw up but without success. He had been emptied. The bathmat became a yellowed newspaper, crumpled and discarded. A bewildered-looking girl looked out at him from a story on the front page:

*Amy Fisher, whose shooting of the wife of her lover, Joey Buttafuoco, when she was 17 earned her the tabloid nickname "Long Island Lolita," has tied the knot. Fisher, who became a newspaper columnist last year, was married this week, according to her employer, the Long Island Press.*

He dropped the newspaper and it flew away down a cobbled street. Was that Mama Coca, the Duse, Sarah Bernhardt hidden in the shadows of a doorway? No, a pretty young woman, just a girl. Her breasts were bare, as were her feet, and she wore a pleated kilt. "The butterflies," she said. She pulled at his sleeve. "I am Amy Fisher and I have just shot Mary Jo Buttafuoco. The butterflies are all dead."

"Santo—Expedito. You have said I was awake, that the dream-sending was ended."

"And so I did," said San Expedito. "Go figure. Never underestimate the revelatory components of shellfish toxins. It's their turn now. Have fun—go with the flow, Ozzie. I get to watch too, right?"

"Claro. Sí, Santo. Amy Fisher, she is the face from Theophrastus Bigelow's medallion?"

"Sí, niño."

Amy held a smoking pistol. Oswaldo tried to imagine this face rising from the bottom of Bigelow's tureen amidst floating vegetables and bits of stewed fish. Her long strawberry-red hair she wore braided into a beehive that extended to an aerial climax, and she swung her hips with the steady determination of someone who knew what she was about.

"¿Mama Coca? ¿Eres tu?"

"Sí. Soy la Mama," said Amy. She pulled him along a winding passageway, her bare feet slapping shivery echoes from narrow walls. A restaurant appeared beneath a guttering blue neon sign: EAT.

Oswaldo and Amy Fisher slid into a booth. They ordered the steamer clams.

"I am expecting company," said Amy Fisher.

Enter the heavy, looking confused, like Patricio only meaner. It was Captain Bigelow. A rumbled daypack dangled from a nylon shoulder strap. The pack was stuffed so full of laundry Bigelow hadn't been able to zip it shut and one sock and most of a very soiled sweater drooped to the floor. His other possession was a boxy-looking machine pistol. Armed and confused, a dangerous combination. Oswaldo wondered if the pirate's gun had any bullets in it.

How did Theophrastus Bigelow get out of *The Runaway Bungalow*? Oswaldo must ask Amy Fisher if they lived. The muzzle of his weapon swept arcs back and forth across the room. He shrugged off the daypack and let it fall.

"I am a refugee. I claim political asylum. Could you show me the way to the men's room please?"

"Hello there and welcome to America," said Amy, rising to the occasion. "It's in the back."

"You are very beautiful, Mama Coca," said Bigelow as he passed their booth, "But perhaps you should cover yourself up." He patted an exposed breast. "Modesty, modesty." He flashed a smile of strong, yellowed teeth. "And some sensible shoes, perhaps." Shark's teeth, a crocodile smile.

"You are a fool, Captain Bigelow," said Amy.

Oswaldo thought, He is a fool. He has a gun. And he has to pee. People do not have to pee in dreams.

Click! A weapon being cocked.

"Amy, DOWN!" cried Oswaldo. A cigarette machine and the cash register exploded in a hail of bullets.

A second man strolled in, a smoking gun in his hands. Miguel Santandrea. He carried a Nikon camera. Oswaldo wondered if Randy Smith had brought along his camera to his island. Of their fellow diners only one couple seemed to notice the gunfire. They left a pile of bills on their table and began edging nervously to the door. Miguel stood back and cradled his weapon as he took everyone's picture with his camera.

Amy Fisher leaned out of her booth, blinking at the strobe flash. Amy now wore the medallion with which Theophrastus Bigelow tried to hide the tracks of the hangman's rope. And on the medallion was her own face. Mama Coca, she was delivering this

dream-sending. He could not wake up. What the hell, go with the flow. San Expedito, pray for us.

"Fuck you, motherfucker," Amy smiled.

"Thankee kindly." Bigelow gave her a courtly bow. "...for the good wishes. Ladies and gentlemen," he said, bowing to the remaining diners. They ignored him. "We are here today to present you with an unparalleled opportunity to selflessly aid two poor wanderers from a distant land to complete their business and return to their homes before their dinners get cold.

"This is possible," he went on, "for we have a boat waiting. My associate is Miguel. He is a surly South American; he used to be a monkey. You will please notice that he is armed and, while my attention may waver, his does not. I thus sincerely caution you against any abrupt motions, which Miguel may misconstrue. We hope to inconvenience you for only a brief time. You will help us to apprehend our missing associate who has, alas, absconded with an item of great sentimental value..."

Money, money, money.

These men were after the money.

Here Captain Bigelow paused to extract a pinch of white powder from a silver snuffbox. A tiny cloud wafted toward the floor and dusted the toe of one Prada boot, leaving an outline on the linoleum. Oswaldo thought Randy Smith should surely be here by now to save the day. He would pull some wondrous device from his bottomless pocket of Boy Scout implements. Where was Randy?

The Captain wiped his nose on his sleeve.

"Manners, manners. You need a finger bowl, Theophrastus." Amy removed the Gypsy Princess medallion from about her throat and, winking to Oswaldo, let it fall. He expected to hear the rich thrill of the genuine article, the winds of time caressing trinkets at a dead queen's throat.

Clunk. The medallion hit the floor with the leaden thud of a dropped hubcap.

"You expected maybe the tinkle of fairy bells? Pure gold dinnerware, 60 troy ounces, the good stuff goes clunk," said Amy. "Don't anyone move!" she shouted and reached down to spin the medallion. "What fools these mortals be," she quoted Puck, the Comics Weekly Man and leaned back to watch the fun. "It's the human condition, Ozzie. The trick is to get it spinning in place, standing still and spinning."

"God damn 'ee for a whore!" Bigelow spun around and emptied his clip of bullets into Amy Fisher. The bullets passed harmlessly through her.

"Bugger me Ned!" Captain Bigelow was having trouble fitting another clip into the pistol's magazine.



## Oswaldo feels cheated

**B**eepbeepbeepbeep. Saved by Harriet's alarm clock. Where was his book? The book had moved. Oswaldo wobbled over to pick it up, sweaty and unshaven; he had slept in his clothes. An unlit cigarette dangled at his lips. San Expedito smiled his ironic smile. Sarah Bernhardt was haughty and unapproachable. In the Mexican high country, in El Rosario and Sierra Chincua, almond eyes pouchy with sleep denied by fever dreams of avarice and the night sweats of free trade, the land-rich and tin shanty dwellers alike did not waste their prayers on the butterflies, a legion of lost souls.

Oswaldo pondered and rubbed his stubbled chin. He felt better—better get showered and shaved. There were many mysteries to *The Runaway Bungalow*. The butterflies would eventually return; Amy Fisher had assured him of this. "So, Tío Patricio was the murderer of my parents. Or his monkey was. That is the sending of Mama Coca and Amy Fisher." Oswaldo could again feel his legs. He wiggled his toes and reopened the book to the last page. There was a picture of a pretty matron pulling her mop handle away from the grip of her sleeping child.

"Honey, Randy? Wake up. You must have fallen asleep in the sun. What's that you're reading. Oh, *Treasure Island*. A good book. Any adventures in your dreams?"

"Uhn. No, mom."

Oswaldo felt cheated. The boy was saved by his mother. What had San Expedito done for him lately?

The next morning an origami animal, a dove, was slipped under Harriet's door. He unfolded the dove. *Esta noche* was written on a receipt slip from the Pick 'N' Pay. As must happen, jackal and capybara, the tracker and the tricker, were to meet.

## A futile prayer to a bogus saint

Oswaldo Patricio Melendez O'Rourke y Nunez prowled the night by the light of a moon three quarters full. He dressed in black. Many wore black—priests, hippies, country and western singers—but the blackening of the face was surely a mark of perpetration. Commando warriors blackened their faces and wore black balaclavas; he had seen Errol Flynn smear lampblack on his face in Objective Burma. Still unsteady from the tainted clams, Ozzie crouched to pray behind the big green dumpster in back of the Pick 'N' Pay.

"San Expedito, auxilio de los que pierden cosas, ruega por mí. '...lost causes, the young, dead by the sword.' A futile prayer to a bogus saint, San Expedito." There had to be at least two of them; the origami dove was meant as a warning sign. But signifying what? He was sure that Miguel would not have the initiative to carry out any complex plan by himself.

Headlights jounced and flashed against the reflections of a watery, pale moon. A truck. Hard, high suspension.

There was a ratcheting, the truck's hand brake, and a man swung down from the cab, leaving the engine running. The two stood together in the full glare of the headlights, their bodies illuminated. Their heads spoke in a warm summer dark of engine smells above a nimbus of frantic insects. In spite of the moths and mosquitoes, Oswaldo felt the joy of an epiphany.

"Oswaldo. It is I, Miguel. Forget the hundred thousand dollars; it is my gift. I prayed for you, Chico. This is the Jesus curse—a prayer answered. I am truly sorry for the killing of Don Paco and Doña Inez. But it was business, ¿comprendes? No hard feelings."

Miguel noted a change of expression. "You, my friend, are volunteering a judgment on my behalf..." An exhausted moth rested on Miguel's chest. He gently stroked its wings. "...in your soul."

"They will catch you eventually, you know."

Miguel smiled a thin smile. "Every deed has its aura. What I have done is a positive thing, sending you Don Patricio's butterfly. I wish it to bring you joy. Your unhappiness would spoil my escape. Freedom is a happy thing. If you are not going to be happy, I would rather stay where I was."

"Wait. You walk back into Canada and we are both caught."

"Bueno. But I am already dead, ¿verdad? My passport will have been found on the corpse of Don Patricio. I am invisible and you are yet not. I am a man of the habit of honor, a good soldier. I simply acknowledge when my price has been reached and get on with it. If

you were to see me, recognize me, then would I not be a fool to let you go free?" He placed a reassuring arm around Oswald's shoulders. "We understand each other. I am not above a little blackmail. You are corruptible and I am corrupt; then let us not cloud with doubt what should be an occasion of joyous affirmation. The line between the keeper and the kept, the poacher and the hare, we have not violated that. It is important our dance continue. To this end you will assist in my escape."

## The Gypsy Princess

The creak of a spring. The screen door. "¿Corazón?"

"Honey?" The screen door slammed, Harriet home from work.

"You can find true, bona fide love and still not beat your karma," said Harriet. She struggled in with an armload of squirming groceries. Her mental arithmetic gave her twenty seconds before the brown paper bags turned to papier-mâché. "Ozzie? I could use a hand here."

"I'm in here, chica."

Harriet followed the sound of his voice. "You have been reading. Did I wake you up?" Something was leaking. "Can't stop now." She made a U-turn and headed for the kitchen.

Ozzie put his head around the kitchen door. "I have finished the book." His eyelids were puffy and lightly tinged with blue. "I think the fever has broken." *The Runaway Bungalow* hung from his fingertips. He dropped the book and followed. "I know pequeño Randy's secret, the secret of *The Runaway Bungalow*. It is in the butterflies."

Harriet brushed back a dislocated wisp of hair that had fallen to cover her eyes. "You still look sick. I threw up at work today, too." She swept past him and made it to the sink. The bags disintegrated.

"Sorry, Chica," said Ozzie, catching the contents as the bags' bottoms dropped out. A runnel flecked yellow and green ran down his thighs. The plasticized covers of *The Runaway Bungalow* were smeared with egg yolk and broccoli florets.

Harriet radiated motherly concern. She threw her arms around his neck and kissed his ear. "Christ, but you're cute when you stop barfing." In the bedroom Expedito and Sarah, the Duse, exchanged ambiguous glances. This was love then, ¿De verdad?

"Let's go out tonight," Oswaldo swept her off her feet, hugging and kissing her, as they spun around the linoleum.

"Ozzie!"

"You, Corazón, are who Mama Coca has sent for me. Gracias, Amy Fisher. Gracias, San Expedito."

Along the federal fish pier where home-docked scallop draggers and tugs lay pilotless and covered with tarps, Oswaldo bent to kiss the forehead of his beloved. "Your hair," whispered Oswaldo as he twirled a finger in Harriet's auburn locks.

"Sarah Bernhardt's hair." Harriet presented with a coy curtsy.

"She is then no longer Eleanora the Duse?"

"She is a picture I admired once. Things are not always as they seem, querido."

"I meant to say I love your hair."

"It is my hair."

"And so I love it." They stood together and listened to the slap of an incoming tide as it washed against the pilings beneath their feet.

"Ozzie?" There was no answer. "Ozzie." She placed a hand on his arm.

Oswaldo Patricio Meléndez O'Rourke y Nuñez woke from a reverie of money and the strength of touching, feeling, holding it. "Nothing, corazón. Just a dream." Oswaldo stared into Harriet's eyes. "Your face is a holy face," he said. She did not need to know everything and all at once. They were, after all, one hundred thousand dollars richer. Small deceptions between lovers were venial sins and to be expected. St. Rose of Lima had reveled in a sinless life, slept on a bed of nails and mortified her flesh.

A jib-headed sloop bobbed on short swells beside a Coast Guard buoy tender. "There was a butterfly. It came in the mail last week..." The boat was named the Gypsy Princess.

The Gypsy Princess.

Oswaldo jumped to the deck of the boat, "Hoy! Hoy there! Captain Bigelow." Below decks, where the mast's shank thrust through the upper deck, the ship's papers were posted. Thumbtacked inside protective plastic covers were faded color snapshots of a smiling middle-aged couple with what must be their grown children. *Gypsy Princess, Long Island, New York*. Summer people, a coincidence. There seemed to be no one on board.

As he turned to go back above deck Oswaldo saw an origami giraffe on its side, abruptly abandoned, and a scattering of graham cracker crumbs that led to the door of a rope locker. A slim brown mentholated cigarette smoldered in a saucer, hastily snuffed out. Oswaldo set the giraffe on its legs and climbed up the companionway ladder. "Adios, Tío Miguel." The summer people had money; they could get another boat. For Miguel Santandrea, the origami man, a new frontier beckoned. Oswaldo foresaw Miguel living happily on roots and berries with an aboriginal wife and many round-faced children to gladden his declining years.

Back on the fish pier Oswaldo Patricio Meléndez O'Rourke y Nuñez stood silently. Then, "Harriet, I love you."

"Ozzie?"

"I have a story to tell you. It will be a long time in the telling." Oswaldo wondered about Randy's future. Would he remember the lessons he learned from Theophrastus Bigelow and Bigelow's monkey? In an endless stream of eventualities would Randy Smith would grow up and discover girls? Would there be good times for the hardware business in Anytown, USA? Would he take his family north where the butterflies flew, lost souls headed on a vacation?

"Time we have," said Harriet.

The lovers strolled hand in hand to the WilCo diner. There they spoke of pizza and love, the everyday currency of unremarkable people.

"Ain't that just sweet, Barney?" uttered Saint Expedito.

"Tomorrow," said the crow.

"How often do I have to explain it to you, crow, that love is the human condition, their orphan's portion? It sets them apart from lower animals. Like you."

"Cras, cras," uttered Expedito's crow, "Tomorrow, tomorrow," which the saint should by now have known was only an expression of faith for the future.

Expedito checked his reflection in the bureau mirror. There was something about a man in uniform. A lovely tableau except for the crow. "Dumb crow." Expedito tried holding his sword at port arms. It gave him a genuine air of spontaneity. "With faith all things are possible," said Expedito. "Matthew 17:19, 'nihil impossibile erit vobis si habueritis fidem sicut granum sinapis,' in the Vulgate."

Eleanora Duse smiled down on San Expedito.

In the book *The Runaway Bungalow*, at home between the Marlboro Lights and the alarm clock, Randy Smith stayed on past the story's end. "And I may one day meet the red-haired Incan prince, Oswaldo," said Randy. His mother nodded wisely. "And Amy Fisher, that's what he called the princess who helped him escape from the pirates. And Mama Coca. And the beautiful Harriet."

"Good luck, kid," said Saint Expedito, grinding Barney, the crow who cried tomorrow, under his heel.

In New York, Amy Fisher, Lethal Lolita, now a personal advice columnist for the *Long Island Press*, noted the return of the butterflies to North America. She had had plastic surgery and had changed her name, so the butterflies didn't stop on Long Island.

"I believe I've matured," said Amy in an interview with her own newspaper, "I believe my happiness now is a result of being a kinder person."

the End

## The Parts and Parsings of *The Runaway Bungalow*

- The Annunciation  
One butterfly returns to North America.
- San Expedito intervenes  
"If you want to take getting sucked to the ocean bottom by the weight of wet money as an allegory, feel free," said the saint.
- Money I  
There was a balance achieved between being and not being, the living and the spirit world. Money was the bridge.
- Los Muertos, they are following me  
He looked terrible. His reflection stared back at him, menacingly.
- Ozzie meets Harriet  
They were eye-to-eye and their chemistries embraced one another.
- The Recognitions  
St. Rose of Lima recognized the voice of God when a black and white butterfly settled on her shoulder.
- Money II  
...some years after Amy Fisher shot Mary Jo Buttafuoco.
- San Expedito fusses  
"This better not be birdlime, Barney. Or so help me..."
- Patricio is airborne  
"I desire the airplane. Not any other, but this particular airplane."
- Money III  
"The Gypsy Princess, that is a fine name for a sailing ship."
- Welcome to Canada  
"The norteamericanos, they seek a liberating influence."
- Insects attack  
...these were North American bugs raised on baseball and atheism.



- Theophrastus Bigelow and Oswaldo Patricio Meléndez O'Rourke y Nuñez  
...think of money. Randy climbs a tree.
- A finicky device  
"This is plastique," Patricio explained, as though lecturing a museum tour.
- So be it, then. They were dead  
What, then, were these feelings?
- Tea and Fig Newtons  
"Theophrastus Bigelow has just murdered Whispering Dick," said San Expedito.
- Randy meets Whisperin' Dick  
Whisperin' Dick's eye sockets were empty; brown teeth gaped in a ghastly leer.
- Whiskey, por favor  
"It would appear that we have an arrangement."
- A dream of running  
"They are after you," San Expedito jogged alongside.
- Money IV—a visit  
The fox dropped its prey and coughed again, its tail up and bristling.
- Long Island Lolita  
"I am expecting company," said Amy Fisher.
- Oswaldo feels cheated  
What had San Expedito done for him lately?
- A futile prayer to a bogus saint  
"...lost causes, the young, dead by the sword."
- The Gypsy Princess  
"There was a butterfly. It came in the mail last week..."
- Acknowledgements  
Wherein the blame is parceled out—brickbats, accolades, etc...
- About the Setting  
The times and the places of this book are largely the product of the author's imagination. However, there is a place, set somewhere out of time...

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# About the setting of *The Runaway Bungalow*



"I could be picking blueberries..." The man on the next treadmill over was working hard and glowed an apoplectic pink. He had put in his Levitical twenty minutes but kept on moving. We were in the only gym between Bangor and the Canadian Maritimes. Willipaq, ahh... well, Willipaq lies way Downeast. The times and the places of this book are largely the product of the author's imagination. However, there is a place, set somewhere out of time...

At a reduced pace my neighbor spoke of blasting yellow birch with black powder and a fuse: "The 4-foot lengths came skidded and yarded—we just had to cut and split. That yellow birch was standing green and tight as a weasel." This was in the nineteen-forties—he was in high school then: "Remember when there was that lumber yard there? On Garfield Street? No, you wouldn't remember. I'm going to be 86 next month and that puts me way out front in the remembering department. So we were making a dollar a cord. Cutting and splitting? Stacking, too. We'd drill a hole and tamp in black powder and a fuse. At a dollar a cord—for the muscle work—we spent most of the money for powder and fuse. It was a good summer. There was a war on so what the hell?"

Willipaq is remote even to a born Mainer. The bumper sticker: "I live in the Other State of Maine," beckons from rusting pickups that litter the ditches of Willipaq—roadside memorabilia of a lost war with time.



The first settlers named the county Willipaq for its indigenes, a leisurely crowd who seemed possessed of no sense of urgency.

The native people strolled the beaches at low tide collecting mussels, trapped the occasional fish in their weir corrals, picked berries, made love and squatted to their need beholden to no clock. Although the Indians—the easternmost band of the Algonquian nation—and the English had no common language, example proved too powerful to resist and soon floggings were administered to pilgrims caught wading out of the shallow pool

of purpose. Berry picking and lollygagging on the beach drew an application of the knout. The settlers sported the starched underwear and stiff black broadcloth of the followers of John Calvin.

That these children of nature were a lost tribe of Israel was a popular fancy of Calvinist lore. The Willipaqs' aimless pursuit of pleasure inspired backsliding among the settlers—protestant vigor was not proof to mixed bathing and sweaty labors under a strange sun. Shapely ankles were exposed while bending over berries and many a maiden found it pleasant to hold her pose. Fornication brought a hundred strokes with the rope's end; discipline was maintained against deteriorating standards of social comportment. It was the good fight, but futile. Many were the righteous arms grown weary with flogging and surreptitious self-manipulation. Strange diseases thinned the Europeans' numbers; crops failed. They ate gruel made from acorns and the few sacks of seed remaining, and died.

While those Willipaqs released from the relentless summer toil of hunting and gathering holidayed at the shore, the pale-skinned visitors to whom all Indians looked alike made no preparations for the coming of the snows. They covered themselves all in black and took turns hitting each other as they knelt on the sand. The indigenes looked on, astonished.

The fierce coastal winter came and the Willipaqs moved inland to winter over in cozy tunnels dug out of the hillsides, subsisting on unsuspected supplies of dried meat, fish and vegetables. Over the council fires of the Willipaqs that winter, puzzled shamans strove for an intuition to explain the strange behavior of their summer visitors. When the Willipaqs returned to their seaside encampments, they gave a decent burial to what the wolves and foxes had left of the white settlers.

Willipaq County was yet again unimaginatively so named by the next batch of transoceanic intruders who falsely felt that by so doing they would be free from threat of Indian attack. The emigrants were warned of bloody battles sure to follow a collision of cultures. They were easy prey to the scare tales of the old America hands who waffled on, but never left, the docks of Liverpool.

Roving bands of savages were seen at a distance where acres of wild berries had been ravaged by the goats the first white men brought. Undaunted by the disappearance of the first colony, the newcomers dug right in clearing the land for agriculture—plowing, sowing, nurturing, husbanding, drying and salting. While their livestock roamed at will, toil was the portion of the latest wave of homesteaders.

The Willipaqs quietly moved to a more salubrious neighborhood that year; their berrying grounds had been turned to goat forage. The Willipaqs viewed the European tourist hordes, when they thought about them at all, as a natural phenomenon not unlike the suicidal flotillas of squid that beached themselves in quintennial cycles, causing a horrible stink.

## acknowledgements



Slipstream? Magical realism? Science Fiction, Fantasy? Sure, why not? All of these are fine names, sensible everyday names, and the venues I submit to. But here is just a story, albeit not quite what you heard from the Library Lady in grade five. Here is love and redemption, scoundrels and scalawags, a saint or two to leaven the hero's bread of affliction—all the good stuff that makes a tale.

While the setting is in Downeast Maine, *The Runaway Bungalow's* scope is worldwide. Thus the author is indebted to Toni Scribner for vetting the manuscript, particularly his uses of Spanish reflexive verbs.

*The Runaway Bungalow's* cover image is by Alphonse Mucha (1860-1939), a cultural refugee who is most widely known for the posters he executed for Sarah Bernhardt. In December 1894, he created a poster for her, one of the greatest actresses of his time. Bernhardt loved it and so did the public. Mucha returned to Czechoslovakia in 1910. A Mucha Museum is housed in the Kaunický Palace in the very heart of Prague.

## the rob hunter bio

With the onset of late middle age Rob Hunter is the sole support of a 1993 Geo Metro and the despair of his young wife. He does dishes, mows the lawn and keeps their coastal Maine cottage spotless by moving as little as possible. In a former life he was a newspaper copy boy, railroad telegraph operator, recording engineer and film editor. He spent the 70s and 80s as a Top-40 disc jockey. Rob's wife, Bonnie, is the secretary at a nearby rural elementary school. She is a gifted quilter who beguiled her new husband with the kaleidoscope of patchwork geometry.

The nearest town to the Hunters that anybody is likely to have ever heard of—because of Stephen King's *The Langoliers*—is Bangor, Maine where there are real parking meters and a traffic light. They drive down every six months or so to watch the light change and see the trains come in.

contact [Rob Hunter](#)

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No creatures real or imagined were injured in the production of The Runaway Bungalow as an eBook.

