

Patagonia

by Sheila Luecht

The crispness of the linens held no romance for the man. The air, well, the air was another story. He got a huge gulp of fresh air into his lungs and it made him wish for his favorite place. Patagonia. He was never without a good feeling when he thought of this place. He would sit on the porch and drink in the morning tea, witnessed by the Andes Mountains. He would go there today.

Carefully, deliberately he made his preparations. While it seemed to take a while, in reality it was only an hour or so. He packed his kit and moved with all the grace his present state would allow. As he organized himself for the journey, he remembered details that would be necessary for a safe and successful trip. As all seasoned travelers know, the devil is in the details. It is the unexpected which must be accounted for to make the best time in such travels.

When he was certain he was ready, he set out. The journey was arduous for a man of his years. Yet, he seemed to spring to it, like a dog to a bone. Maybe like a lion to it's prey; mostly in the best way possible for a man such as he.

It was not long before he was on the road, conveyed past pastures and steppes, brackish pools and fresh waters, over and over paths so well traveled, he recognized the way intimately.

Soon he was there, in his beautiful South America, in the place that only those who know it can know. Here, cool and dry, the air would be good for his lungs, his only real concern, nothing physical. Gone would be the harshness of bad weather, there would be none in sublime Patagonia.

He would enjoy again, the lamb, plenty of fish and drink all that he would like to of Mate, in anyway he would like, sweet or bitter, the taste would make him soar.

It was late afternoon, with the sun crossing the trees and the birds silent. The nurse came down the corridor, looking into the communal room for Mr. Farkos. She did not find him there. She followed the narrow corridor to the side door, she knew he must be there. He was a special patient. An elderly man who had spent his youth in South America. He had been in the Air Corp then; during WWII. No one thought there were Nazis in South America, but indeed there were and so it was necessary to send someone to keep an eye on them. That is what he did. In so doing he developed a relationship with the land and he always talked about it, especially now.

When he aged, his memory put him lock step on a path going farther and farther into the past. He often amused the nurses and doctors with stories that you might tell at a military canteen on leave. He seemed to be on leave there, recovering from something and soon to go back to Patagonia. He always talked about it. Often they would find him in the fenced gardens, in his wheel chair, sunning himself in the shadow of the Andes, or so he said to them. Of course, this was not South America, it was Carlsbad California.

She patiently scanned the garden, she knew he would be there. As she approached the farthest point, she noticed his distinct wheel chair. It was empty. She knew he would not have gone far, he could not walk; yet she did not see him at all, anywhere. There was no one else in the garden except Rosalinda, an elderly resident of the facility. Seated in her wheel chair she related an interesting tale.

"Oh yes, he was here. We were talking about his journey to Patagonia. He said he was almost there and wished me a beautiful day, that he would not be seeing me again. He would not be back. I wished him well, then the sun made me sleepy. I closed my eyes, for only a moment. When I awoke, he was gone. Yes, he went to Patagonia."

