

Epilogue  
**LONG NIGHT'S JOURNEY INTO DAY**



ONLY 3 A.M.!



**T**HE SOUTH AMERICAN CONTINENT LIES DARK AND SOMBER BELOW US.

CLOUDS PREVENT THE SLIGHTEST WINK OF CITY LIGHTS FROM PEEKING THROUGH.

THERE'S NO MOON.



JULY 2005

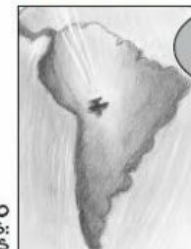


MOST OF THE PASSENGERS SLEEP.



NOT I.

IT'S MY FIRST TRIP BACK TO ARGENTINA SINCE WE IMMIGRATED. BEN, MY 21-YEAR-OLD SON, IS MY TRAVELING COMPANION.



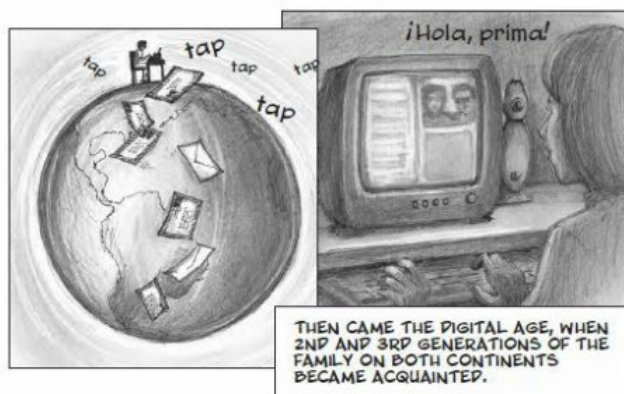
BUT WILL WE EVER GET THERE?

REPEATED GLANCES AT THE ROUTE MONITOR CONVINCE ME THAT WE'RE ONLY CRAWLING.

DALLAS, TX, TO BUENOS AIRES:  
 11 HOURS



FOR SO LONG, IT WAS HER ENDLESS STREAM OF CORRESPONDENCE THAT KEPT FAMILY TIES FROM DYING OUT.



THE ARC OF MY LIFE OWES ITS PRIMARY SHAPE TO A LONG-AGO DECISION TO IMMIGRATE NORTH. I THINK ABOUT THAT ON THIS SLEEPLESS NIGHT.



THEN MY MIND JUMPS TO ANOTHER WAKEFUL NIGHT.

IN 1992, WHEN DADDY HAD SURGERY, I STAYED OVERNIGHT WITH HIM IN THE HOSPITAL ROOM.



HE COULD NOT STOP TALKING.

HE COULD NOT STOP RECOUNTING THE HORRORS OF HIS BOYHOOD.

HE SUFFERED ANEW HIS MOTHER'S DEATH.



HE RELIVED THE MOMENT WHEN HIS STEP-GRANDMOTHER TURNED HIM AND HIS BROTHER OUT. AFTER THAT, THEY SLEPT IN A HAYSTACK AND DUG FOR SCRAPS IN HOTEL CARRIAGE BINS.



OF COURSE, I'D HEARD THESE STORIES BEFORE.

HE'D  
TOLD THEM AT  
CHURCHES,  
MOSTLY AROUND  
THE ALABAMA  
BLACK BELT.

I WENT ALONG ON  
A FEW OF THESE  
ENGAGEMENTS,  
BUT WITHOUT  
FULLY ENJOYING  
MYSELF.

ONCE, ON OUR WAY HOME  
FROM ONE OF THOSE  
SERVICES, PAPPY LET  
ME SIT ON HIS LAP  
AND BRIEFLY DRIVE  
THE COUNTRY ROAD.



THE HEADLIGHT  
BEAMS PASSED  
THROUGH A FLURRY  
OF MOTHS,

I FELT  
PEACEFUL.

MY FATHER HAD  
RETURNED TO  
HIS CUSTOMARY  
SELF, NOT THE  
VULNERABLE  
PERSON HE  
SEEMED TO BE  
BEHIND THE  
LECTERN.



HIS JOURNEY FROM PRIVATION TO  
OPPORTUNITY WAS LIKE THAT OF  
IMMIGRANTS THE WORLD OVER.  
I DIDN'T KNOW THAT YET.

I HAVE A  
SETTLED LIFE. I  
AM A BENEFCIARY  
OF MY IMMIGRANT  
ANCESTORS'  
COLLECTIVE  
COURAGE.



AT 18,  
I BECAME  
A NATURALIZED  
AMERICAN  
CITIZEN,  
AND IN 1976,  
I MARRIED.

WE HAVE  
THREE CHILDREN.



Ben

Jude



Caitlin

SUPPOSE MY  
FAMILY HAD NEVER  
LEFT ARGENTINA. THESE  
THREE HUMAN BEINGS  
WOULDN'T EXIST!

BEYOND THAT, IT'S  
IMPOSSIBLE TO SPECULATE  
JUST HOW THE FAMILY'S  
IMMIGRATION CHANGED THE  
ARC OF MY LIFE.





AT 19,  
I WAS A  
STUDIO  
ART MAJOR  
AT A STATE  
UNIVERSITY,  
BUT IT DIDN'T  
FEEL RIGHT.

IT GAVE ME  
NONE OF THE  
JOY I USED  
TO KNOW AT MY  
MOTHER'S KITCHEN  
TABLE.



I DROPPED OUT  
OF COLLEGE AND  
MARRIED YOUNG.

IN DISCARDING  
MY EDUCATION,  
I TOSSED THE  
PRIZED PEARL  
OF MY PARENTS'  
MIGRANT  
JOURNEY.

I PROMISED  
DADDY I'D  
GO BACK,  
AND I DID.  
MAMA LIVED  
TO SEE ME  
HONOR THE  
PROMISE.

NEITHER OF THEM EXTRACTED ANY  
PROMISES ABOUT MY GOING BACK  
TO ARGENTINA.

I JUST  
WANTED TO.



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IT'S  
BEEN  
YEARS.

EVERY IMAGE I HAVE OF ARGENTINA IS FADED,  
BORROWED, INHERITED, OUTDATED, OR IMAGINED.

MAMA PAINTED  
BUENOS AIRES  
IN LOVELY TONES.  
I WANT TO SEE  
IT FOR MYSELF.



AND INDEED, THIS  
HAPPENS.





I WILL ALSO SEE THE ARGENTINA THAT PAPPY EXPERIENCED.

HE WILL COME TO MIND WHEN I SPOT TRIGUENOS TOILING AT SOCIETY'S THANKLESS JOBS.



AMONG THESE ARE CARTONEROS, WHO ROAM THE STREETS COLLECTING DISCARDS TO RECYCLE.



I'LL CATCH REFLECTIONS OF HIS INCAN FOREBEARS IN BUENOS AIRES'S GROWING IMMIGRANT POPULATION.

THEY ARE MOSTLY BOLIVIANS AND PARAGUAYANS.

IN MY PARENTS' LONG ABSENCE, THE DEMOGRAPHICS HAVE SHIFTED. THE NEWEST ARRIVALS, WITH THEIR BRONZE COMPLEXIONS, OCCUPY THE LOWEST STATIONS, ONCE HELD CHIEFLY BY TRIGUENOS.

THEIR PRESENCE STIRS RESENTMENT IN SOME QUARTERS.

AT LEAST, THAT'S WHAT I OBSERVE. I USED TO THINK OF RACISM AS A SPECIALTY OF THE AMERICAN SOUTH. HOW WRONG I WAS.



IT'S STILL THE WEE HOURS WHEN BEN WAKES UP AND PEEKS OUT THE WINDOW.



A FERY RED EDGES THE HORIZON.

THE SILHOUETTED WING REMINDS ME OF A BLADE PEELING BACK THE YEARS.

MY LAST GLIMPSE OF ARGENTINA RUSHES BACK TO MEMORY.



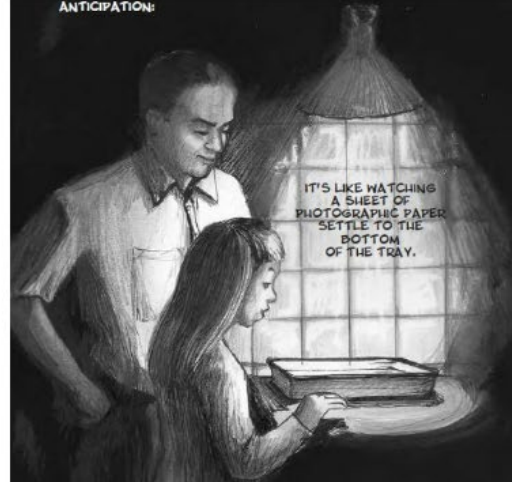
SOON, THOSE TINY PEOPLE,  
GRAINY AND OUT OF FOCUS,  
WILL BE MADE REAL AGAIN.

AS THE  
SOFT LIGHT OF  
DAWN ENTERS  
THE CABIN,  
THE BREAKFAST  
CARTS ROLL OUT.



WE ARE DESCENDING, AND WILL SOON  
PASS THROUGH THE CLOUD COVER, ONLY  
THEN WILL ARGENTINA COME INTO VIEW.

ANTICIPATION:



IT'S LIKE WATCHING  
A SHEET OF  
PHOTOGRAPHIC PAPER  
SETTLE TO THE  
BOTTOM  
OF THE TRAY.



AND THEN  
I SEE IT,  
WHAT I'VE  
BEEN LONGING  
FOR.

THE LATENT  
IMAGE  
FLOWERS.