

LEVELED BOOK • W

A Place for Wild Things



MULTI
level
T•W•Z

Written by Marvin Bird and Rus Buyok
Illustrated by Carol Heyer

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Focus Question

What is Alejandro's problem, and how does he hope to solve it?

Words to Know

bombacha

pantaloons

estancia

facón

gauchos

guanaco

mate

overgrazed

pasture

Patagonia

porcelain orchid

sheathed

tradition

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Level W Leveled Book
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Correlation

LEVEL W	
Fountas & Pinnell	S
Reading Recovery	40
DRA	40



After a long day riding the **estancia** with the **gauchos**, Alejandro spotted an SUV parked in front of the main house. His mother, Melissa, appeared at the door next to a tall, fair-skinned man Alejandro didn't recognize.

"Please consider the offer, Señora Ortega. I'll return in two weeks to discuss our future plans," the man said with a broad smile. "Together we can save this beautiful place."

"Who was that?" Alejandro asked his mother as the SUV sped away in a cloud of dust.



“Someone with an idea,” his mother replied as she turned to go inside. “Please go find Martín—we all need to have a talk.”

She had never spoken to him in that tone before, and Alejandro had an uneasy feeling.

“What is it?” Martín asked when Alejandro found him, but the boy could only shrug. When they returned to the house, his mother was sitting at the dining table. Martín leaned against a post and sharpened the long blade of his *facón*.

“I have received an offer from Mr. Somerset to sell the estancia to Eco-Tours International,” Melissa began. Alejandro was surprised, not only by the offer but also that his mother was including him in the conversation. Since his father’s death two years ago, she had relied solely on Martín.

“I’ve always hoped to maintain our land in the true gaucho **tradition** and keep it in the family. Sadly, as you both know, we’re losing money because the land is **overgrazed**. I’m just not sure how much longer we can keep the place going.”

Alejandro’s heart dropped as he thought of his father. He had always said the estancia—the land, people, and animals—was a family.

With a sigh, his mother explained, “Eco-Tours International wants to buy the land, build a resort, and create a—how did he put it?—‘a destination for travelers to experience the legendary gaucho way of life and the stunning beauty of **Patagonia**.’”

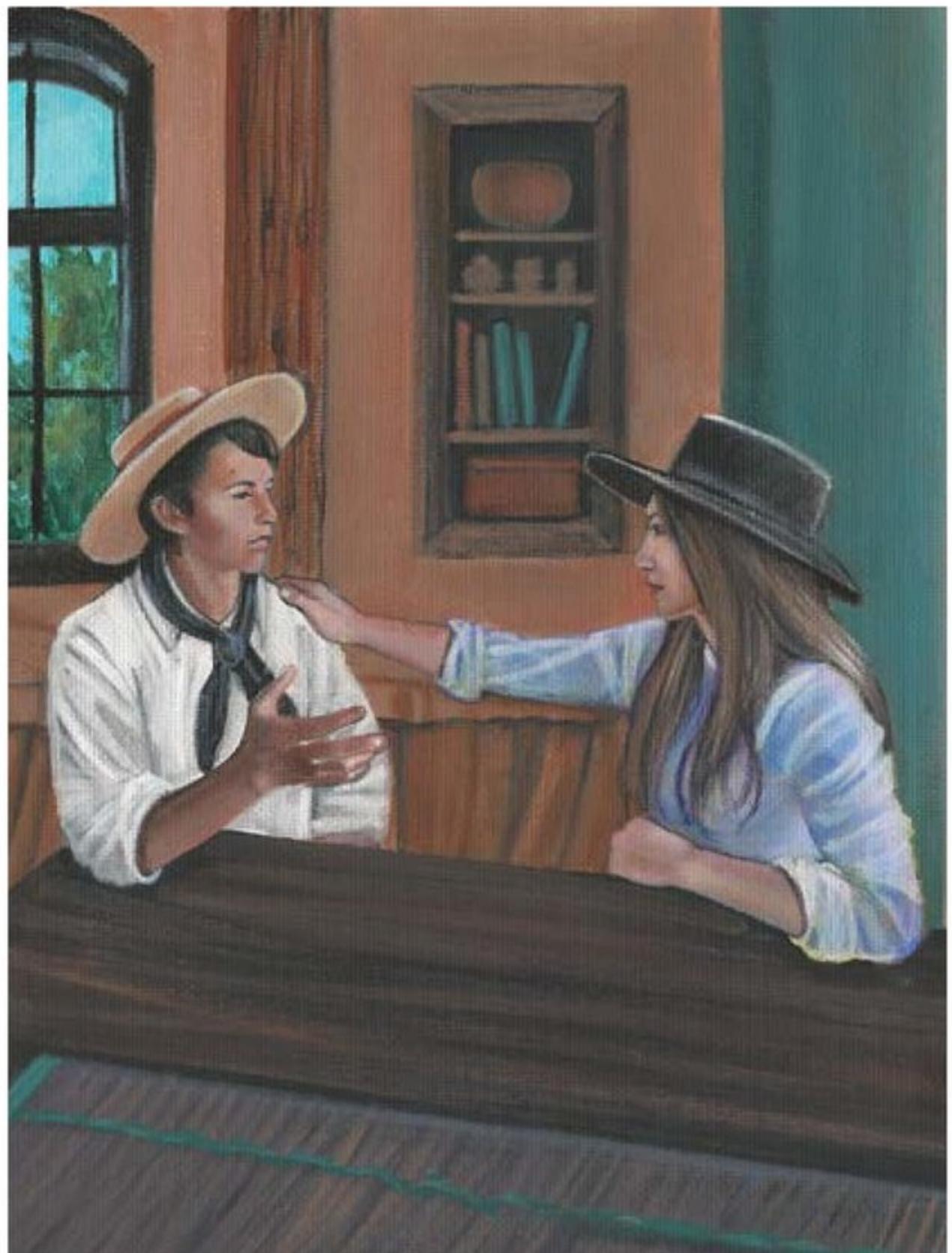
“Not travelers—tourists!” Martín almost spat the words.

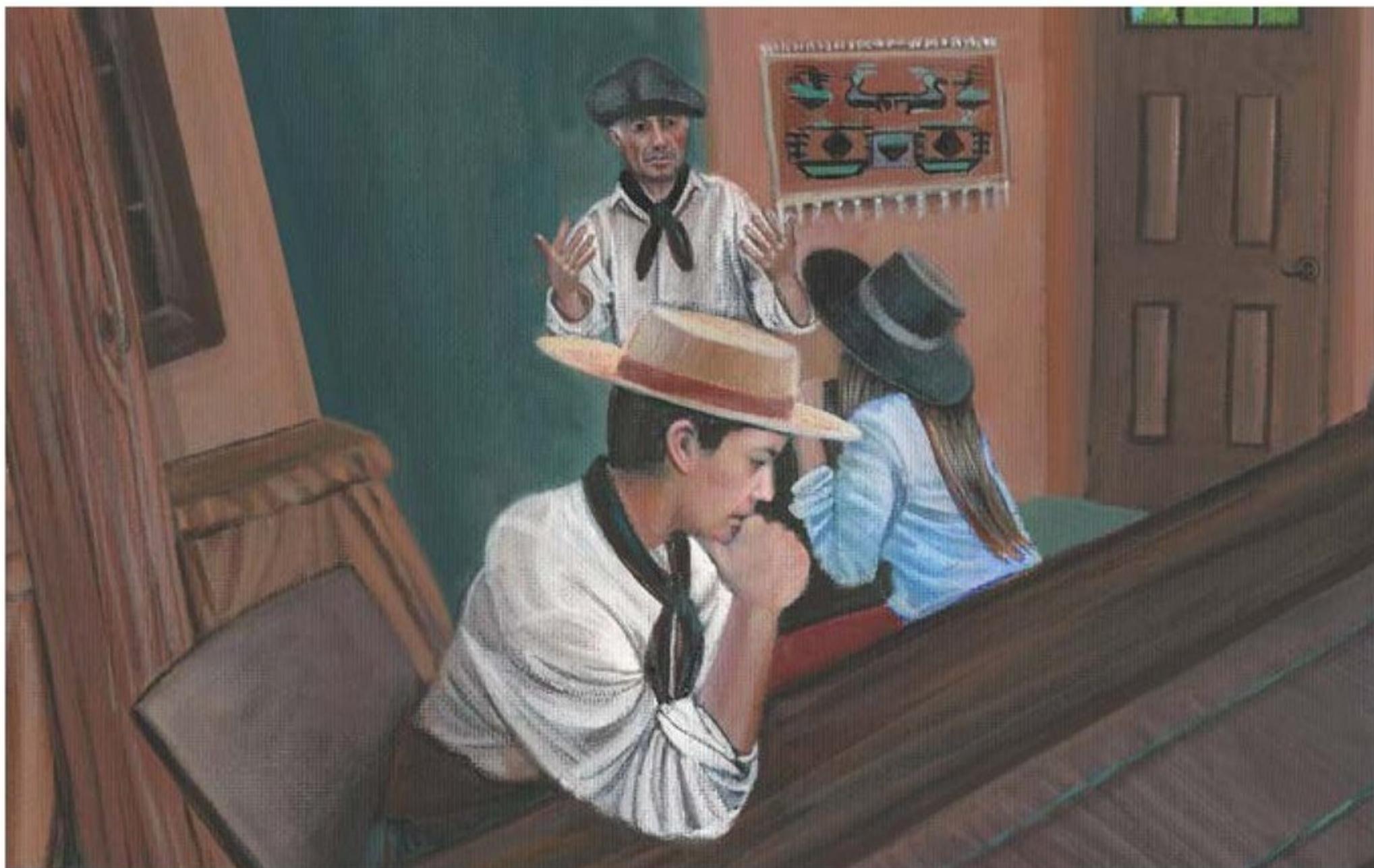


"Ha! You thought I was just a tourist when Gerson brought me down from Santiago," Melissa said. "Even so, I was in awe of you gauchos, with your traditional berets, **bombacha pantaloons**, and leather boots. They just want to experience a bit of this culture, and I can't say I blame them."

"Other estancias have already gone under from overgrazing," she continued. "This is a hard life." She rubbed her forehead and sighed. "Somerset said Alejandro and I could stay on for five years if we wanted, with me assisting with the management."

"What would we do after that?" Alejandro asked, trying to keep his anxiety in check. "What would happen to Martín and the other gauchos? Some of them have been here more than thirty years!"





“I’m not sure,” his mother said almost in a whisper.

“But Dad said—” Alejandro stopped himself, as he knew the situation was difficult for his mother, too.

“Do we have to decide right now?” Martín asked.

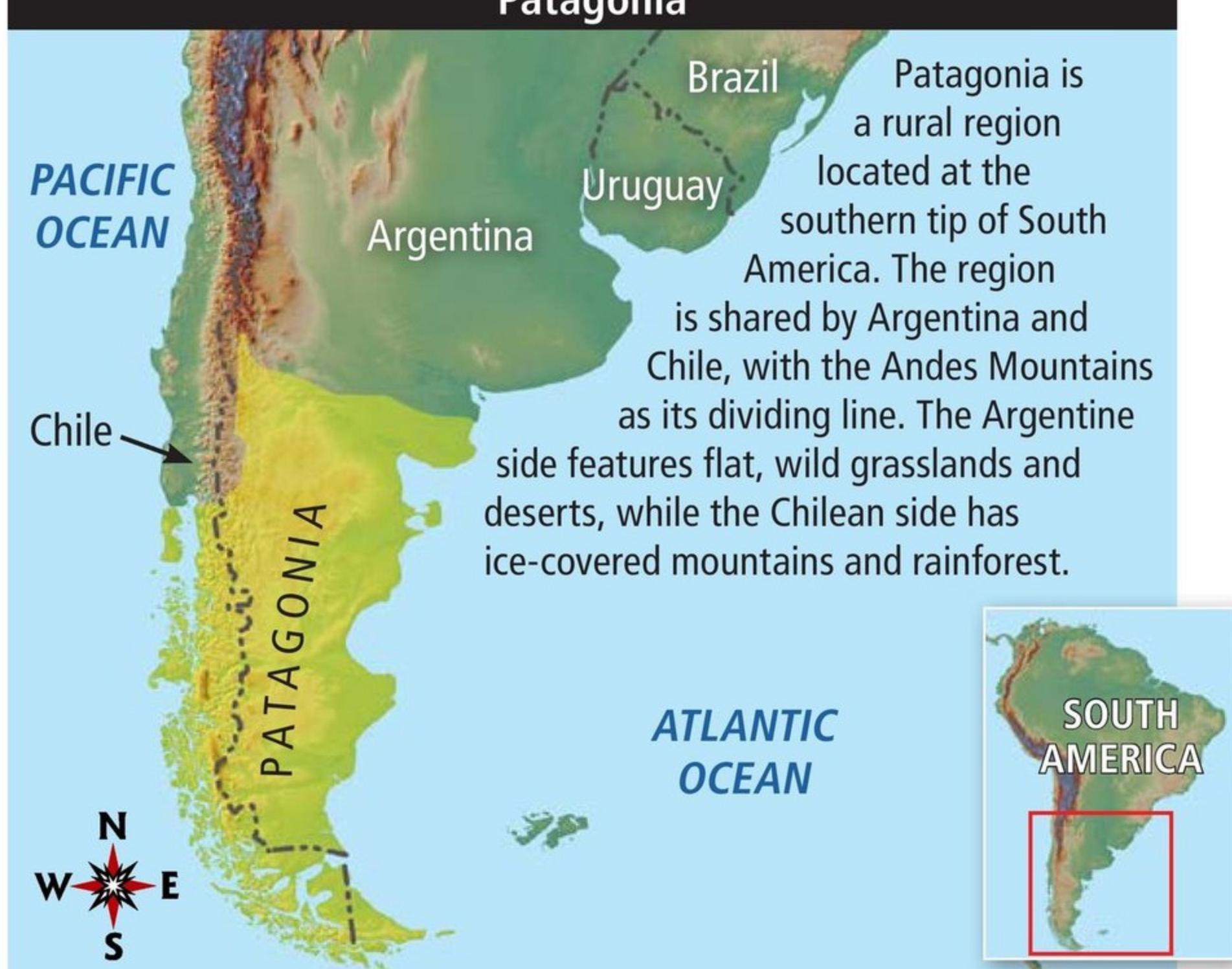
“Two weeks,” Melissa replied.

“Then we have two weeks to find an answer,” Alejandro said, trying to sound upbeat.

“All right, then.” Martín’s expression was blank as he **sheathed** his blade. “Don’t be late tomorrow morning, Alejandro.”

* * *

Patagonia



The next few days were filled with the hardest work Alejandro had ever done. He saddled horses, herded sheep, fixed fencing, and hauled feed. He made friends with an old sheepdog named Lucinda that followed him around like a long-lost sister. In the hot afternoons, he would listen to the gauchos sing and tell stories while passing around **mate** prepared over a small fire. In the evenings, he would sit with his mother, who would ask, “What did you learn today?”

Alejandro excitedly told her everything, but when he was done, tiredness crept back into his bones, and a well of sadness filled his heart. He didn’t yet know how to save the estancia.

On the fourth day, Alejandro and Martín came across a **guanaco** with its leg stuck in one of the fences. The animal was terrified and worn out, weakly thrashing its long neck and thin legs.

Martín kneeled beside the animal, which was breathing heavily and watching him with large brown eyes. As Martín reached out with a small pair of wire cutters and snipped a few times, he talked to the animal calmly, like a doctor explaining a procedure to a child. The guanaco, once released, climbed up and limped away as fast as it could.





“These are wild animals,” Martín said as he repaired the hole. “They don’t understand fences. In the old days, we didn’t have any fences on the estancia. We followed the flock all over the mountain. It was harder to protect the sheep, but at least there was always enough grass.”

Alejandro was silent. Something churned in his mind, but he couldn’t figure out what it was exactly.

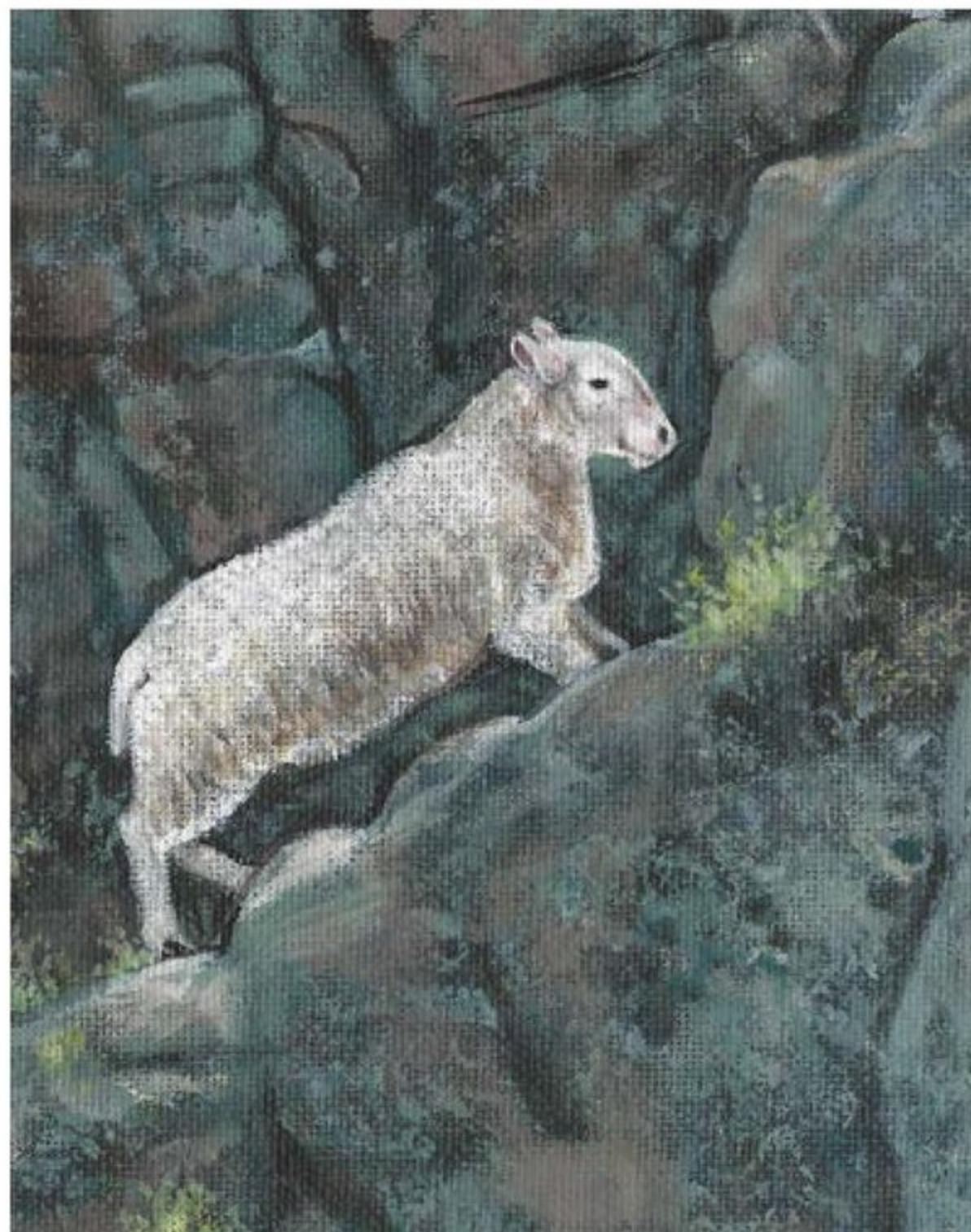
That afternoon, as they drank mate, Alejandro listened as a gaucho told them about seeing a large puma hunting one of the flocks. “I’d never seen one so close to the main buildings,” he said. “I frightened it away with a few shots.”

“So you missed,” another gaucho said, and they all laughed.

“She’s hungry,” Martín said quietly. “The changes to the land affect us all.”

When Alejandro's mother asked him what he had learned that day, he told her about the guanaco and the puma, but he didn't feel the usual excitement. Something felt strange, as if his brain were trying to tie together two wires that weren't quite long enough. Each night the well of sadness in his heart filled more and more. They did not have much time left.

Five days before Mr. Somerset was due to return, Martín sent Alejandro on his own to seek out a sheep that had wandered away. After a while, he saw the sheep moving through an opening in a rocky outcropping.

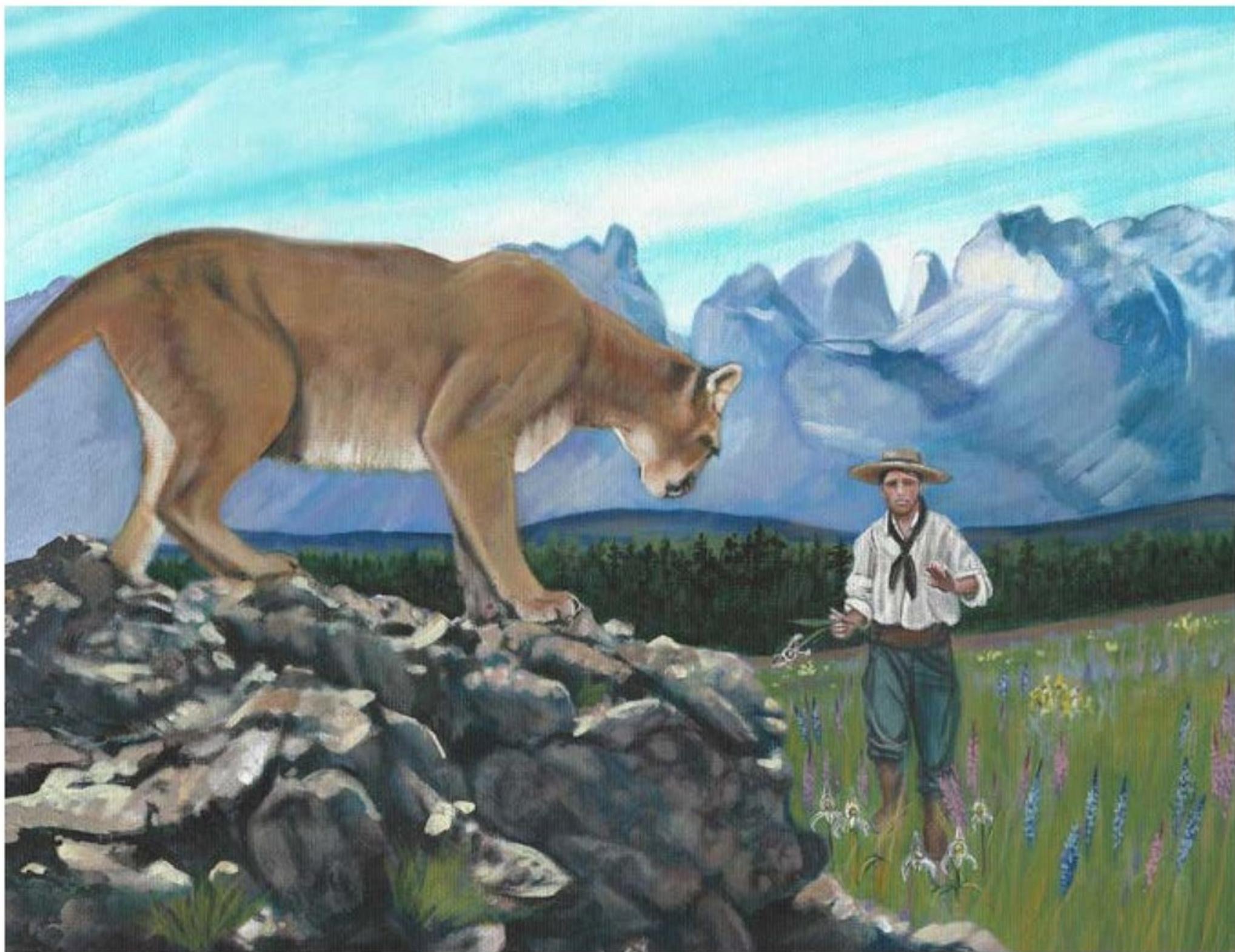


"How did she get on the other side of that fence?" he asked Lucinda, who barked and panted happily, bounding back and forth.

Yet when they reached the big rocks, Lucinda suddenly refused to go through the opening. “Fine,” Alejandro said, “you wait here.” The passage was narrow, but he could easily squeeze through by turning to the side. He quickly realized what had attracted the sheep: a small area of deep green grass dotted with wildflowers.

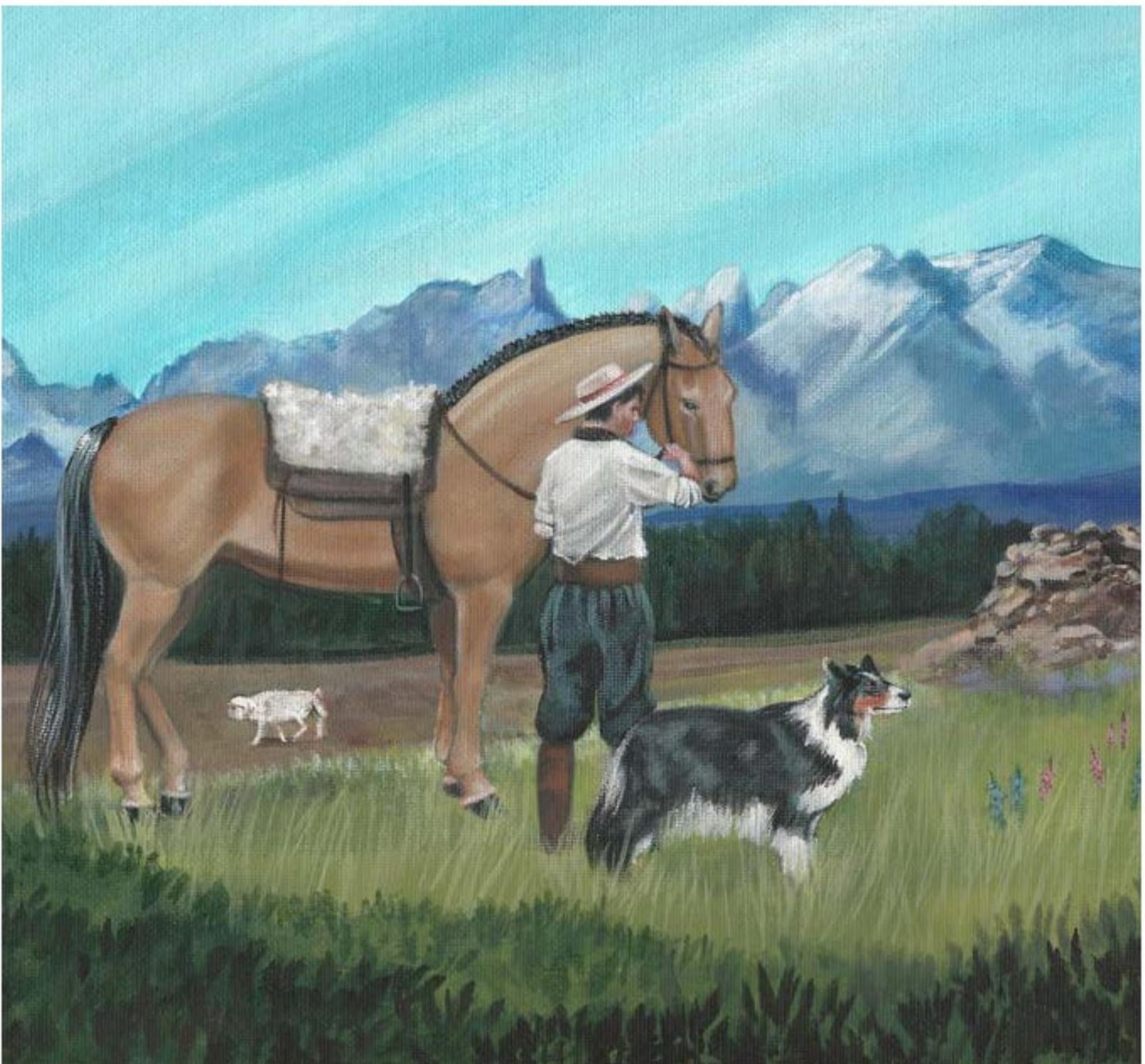
The sheep was unhappy to leave her feast, but Alejandro managed to get her through the passage. Before he followed, he stopped to pick one of the flowers—a yellow-tongued **porcelain orchid**. He remembered his father bringing them to his mother after working on the estancia. Back then, the orchids had been much more common, but these were the first Alejandro had seen since his father died.





He was about to leave when he noticed a sudden movement. A puma stood on a flat rock overlooking the patch of grass, staring at Alejandro with yellow eyes. It paced back and forth.

Alejandro returned the hunter's gaze, clutching the flower in his hand like a weapon, slowly backing toward the opening. Then, as if giving up, the cat lay down with a low sigh, its eyes lazily half closing. Alejandro almost felt sorry for the beast. It had been hunting the sheep, and he had ruined its meal. He squeezed his way through the tunnel as quickly as he could, not waiting to find out if the puma was willing to attack a human.

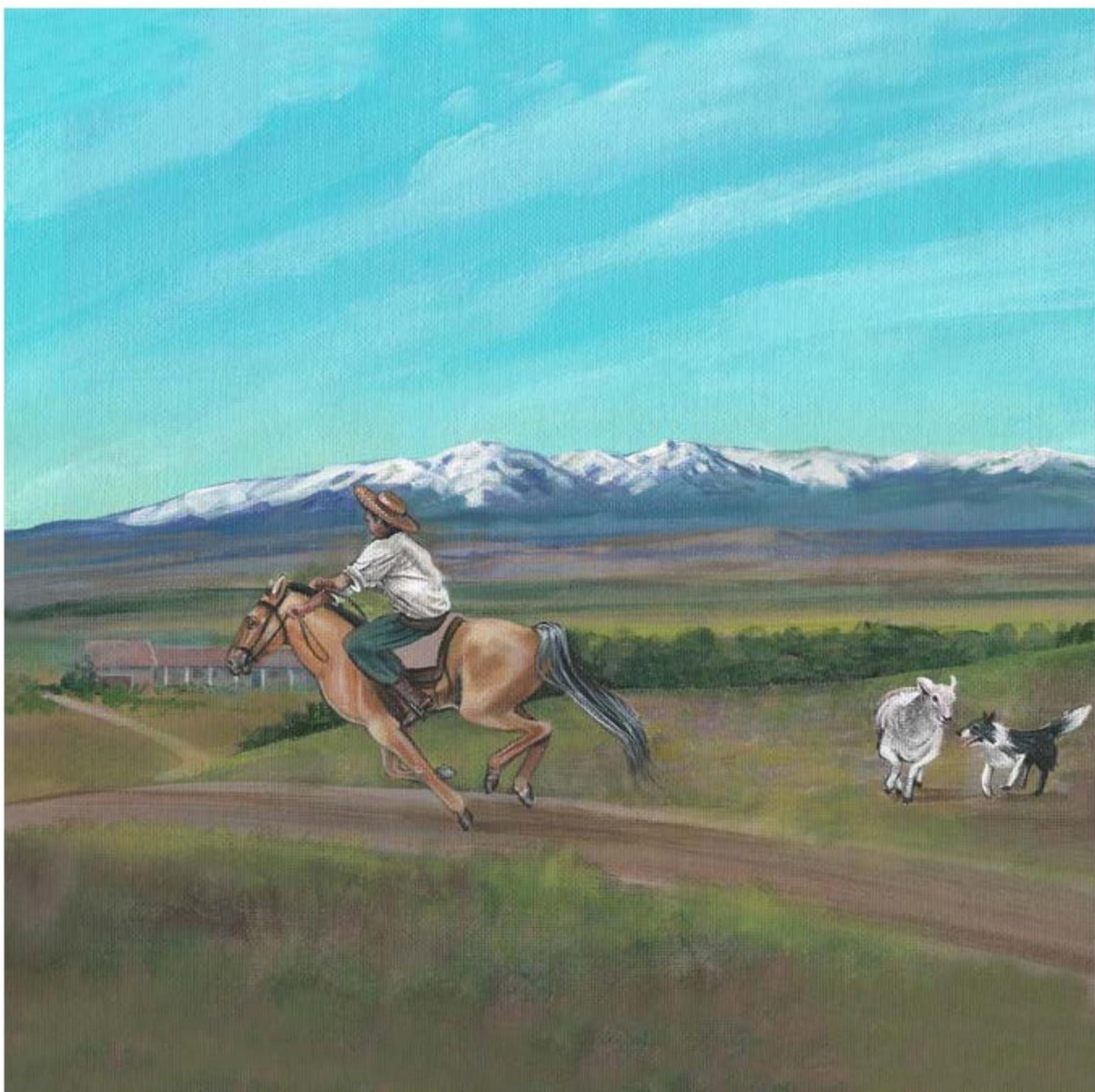


With his heart still pounding, Alejandro placed the flower in his pouch and lifted the bleating sheep over the fence. He finally felt safe when he reached the other side.

As he nudged his horse forward, he couldn't push the blooming **pasture** and the puma from his mind. They were wild, strong, and healthy. The estancia was no longer a place for wild things, but instead a land that was controlled. The fences protected them, but they also kept the sheep from the rich pastures beyond.

Alejandro imagined an estancia with no fences. Some of the sheep might fall victim to pumas, but the flock as a whole would survive and grow stronger. He realized that he could tell his mother that he had truly learned something today.

Alejandro urged his horse into a gallop. He had to talk to Martín and the other gauchos. It was time to return to the old ways. They could fix this. There was still time.



Glossary

bombacha	long pants with baggy legs gathered at the ankle, typically worn in Argentina and Uruguay for working outdoors (p. 6)
pantaloons (n.)	
estancia (n.)	a South American farm or ranch used for raising livestock (p. 3)
facón (n.)	a large knife used in South America by gauchos (p. 4)
gauchos (n.)	cowboys of the South American grassy plains (p. 3)
guanaco (n.)	a South American mammal with a long neck and soft brown fur that is related to llamas and camels (p. 9)
mate (n.)	a traditional South American beverage that is made from steeping yerba mate leaves in hot water (p. 8)
overgrazed (adj.)	damaged by allowing animals to feed too long in one area (p. 5)
pasture (n.)	a field with grass and other low plants on which grazing animals, such as sheep and cattle, feed (p. 14)
Patagonia (n.)	a barren plateau region in South America covering the southern parts of Argentina and Chile (p. 5)
porcelain orchid (n.)	a South American plant with six-petaled flowers that are usually white with a green pattern (p. 12)
sheathed (v.)	put a weapon's blade into a case or cover (p. 7)
tradition (n.)	a belief or custom that is passed down from year to year and generation to generation (p. 5)

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A Reading A-Z Level W Leveled Book
Word Count: 1,406

Connections

Writing

Make a list of the glossary words in the order in which they appear in the story.

Write your own passage that uses all of the words in that order.

Social Studies

Research the Patagonian region of South America. Create a trifold brochure that gives details about the region's location, climate, and culture.



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