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John C. Evans

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A Postcard from Las Lenas

He didn't have the glow, at least not like you would have thought.

"Some guy landed a forty-five-footer today—front flip."

"Who?"

"An American. Just west of Martes. A skier. Nobody anyone has heard of."

"Bullshit. Was it on film?"

"Yes, two cameras. And Facundo saw it."

That's how I heard about it, or him, I guess, only Diego's the one who told me about it so he would have used meters instead of feet. The guy didn't look cocky, just young, with a big, relaxed smile and long hair tucked below a beanie. Diego had pointed him out the night before at Winebar. This night we were shooting pool at a bar whose name I forgot. We were high up in the Argentinean Andes. It seemed that only the Americans were taking the tough lines. The snowpack was stable, and no one was afraid.

"It's always locked. I just use the damas."

"Yeah?"

"Yeah. I've been here three weeks, and I haven't seen that door open once. Where you from?"

"Vail." I wanted to ask him straight out, but didn't. "You?"

"Taos, but I grew up in Boston..."

We talked for a while—about the snow conditions, where we had seen slides and wet-sluffs, how ridiculously hot South American women are. I never asked him his name. He never mentioned what he had been skiing. I forget who pissed first.

"He did it." That's what I said even before anyone asked.

By noon the next day, he was dead

"Have you talked to Jim?"

"Sorry, don't know him."

There were some Americans we didn't know over by Mountain Rescue. Everyone was quiet. We hadn't seen a helicopter.

"He came up short on a landing, and his helmet broke on a rock."

That's all I ever heard. That night I saw one of his friends playing pool by himself. I wanted to tell him I was sorry, I wanted to tell him his buddy seemed like a great guy, but I didn't know how.

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After that, the place had a weird, muddy, end-of-the-season vibe, but we could still get girls back to the hostel without too much trouble.

“No tengo amigos en la ducha, podemos estar solos ahí.”

We rode what we would have ridden anyway.

Everybody laughed two nights later when, drunk, bloody, and concussed, Charlie held a nurse hostage with a charge defibrillator.