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Sweet sorrow

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For the Herald

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The confusion I feel every time business or family commitments take me away from Buenos Aires is aptly typified by Shakespeare's love-stricken Juliet's words "parting is a sweet sorrow" as they describe the contradictory sensations I experience every time I leave which I always do sorrowfully but buoyed with the sweet prospect of an early return.

The near thirty years I've spent clasped to Buenos Aires' ample bosom have been the happiest of my life as within her welcoming embrace I've found succour from the raw, nascent culture of New Zealand which although it is the land of my birth is too newly-minted for my taste compared to Buenos Aires' elegant sophistication and rich, multidimensional cultural heritage.

Buenos Aires is a far more seasoned, ardent and jealous lover than the innocent Juliet ever was but Juliet's words ring true again when she tells Romeo "Yet I should kill thee with much cherishing" as the cherishing Buenos Aires affords me, while not fatal, causes me much difficulty as she consistently and successfully conspires, often interminably, to delay our farewells.

Most recently I returned to New Zealand for a couple of weeks and the day before my departure air-traffic controllers went on strike causing chaos in airline operations and much angst on my part as I feared I would miss my connection in Santiago and be stranded in Chile for days.

After the Police stormed the control tower at Jorge Newberry Airport to evict the strikers many of the controllers returned to work and thankfully my departure was only marginally delayed which, compared to the other delays I have suffered over the years and putting my angst to one side, was a piece of cake as usually I find Buenos Aires much, much more difficult to put aside no matter how briefly.

During the first flush of my affair with Buenos Aires in the early 1990s when business called me to Mexico the hour I allowed to get to Ezeiza proved woefully inadequate as the construction of new lanes on the Ezeiza Autopista caused a four hour traffic jam and I missed my flight by a mile, had to pay for a new ticket and wait six days for another seat to become available.

That experience was a telling portend of how difficult it is for me to leave Buenos Aires as practically every one of my departures in the last thirty years has been disrupted to some extent by my lover's meddling hand reaching-out to hold me back.

The most telling intervention was in 2011 when clouds of volcanic ash from the Puyehue volcano in Chile made flying hazardous and my Aerolineas Argentinas flight to New Zealand was cancelled and only after twenty six days cooling my heels in an hotel was I finally able to leave.

Over the years I have additionally missed four flights due to union pickets blocking the Ezeiza Autopista, had eleven flights cancelled or postponed due to technical faults as well as a further nine flights cancelled by industrial action by pilots, cabin crew or ground handling staff and even had two flights turn-back once airborne with engine disorders all leading to delays of between one and eight days.

On another occasion my flight was delayed while we waited for an Argentine Government minister who arrived five hours late which meant the flight was postponed because it could not later land at its final destination, Sydney Airport, before a night-time curfew came into effect and the passengers had to wait for twelve hours in the airport terminal before the flight took-off.

The most bizarre delay was caused by a rat which once seen scurrying around in the passenger cabin just before departure led to a near twenty four hour delay while the rodent was trapped during which time thankfully Aerolineas had the decency to send the passengers to hotels.

Buenos Aires' reluctance to loosen the ties that bind us are no more to me than a most welcome token of reciprocated affection and in affirmation of my love and admiration for Buenos Aires I can offer a few more of the Bard's words; "All days are nights to see till I see thee, And nights bright days when dreams do show thee me."