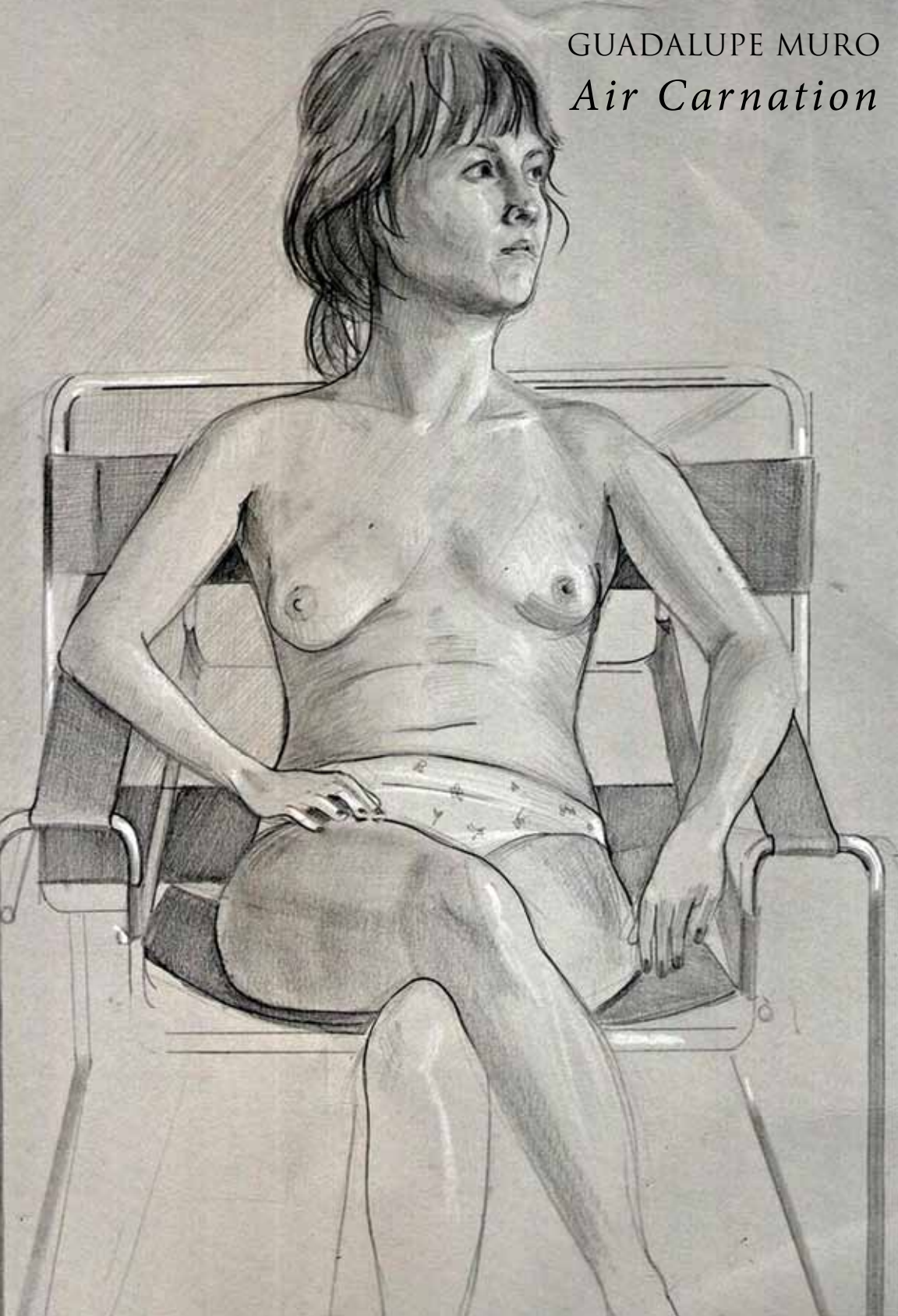


GUADALUPE MURO
Air Carnation



Air Carnation

Guadalupe Muro

A sample from the novel

FIRST EDITION

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LIBRARY AND ARCHIVES CANADA CATALOGUING IN PUBLICATION

Muro, Guadalupe, 1985-, author
Air carnation / Guadalupe Muro.

(Department of narrative studies ; no. 13)

Issued in print and electronic formats.

ISBN 978-1-77166-031-0 (PBK.).—ISBN 978-1-77166-038-9 (HTML)

I. Title. II. Series: Department of narrative studies ; no. 13

PR9300.9.M87A63 2014 813².6 C2013-908723-0
C2013-908724-9

EPDF ISBN 978-1-77166-058-7

PRINTED IN CANADA

*To whom it may concern,
with love.*

Epiphytic organisms usually derive only physical support and not nutrition from their host, though they may sometimes damage the host.

– WIKIPEDIA

One Scene

I was born in 1985 in Bariloche, a small town in Patagonia. Like any small town, Bariloche consists of a centre and suburbs. We lived in the suburbs, at KM 15, in a house surrounded by trees. To the centre we went only to fulfill the standard duties of citizens: to sell handicrafts, buy food, send letters. For most of my childhood we didn't have much money. We had no car, no propane, no phone, no television.

When I think about those years, one scene, always the same, lights up in my mind. My mother, my father and I are in the kitchen. It's night, an eternal sepia-coloured night, and we are talking. I can observe the scene in detail, as if watching bugs trapped in a jar. My father and I are sitting next to each other, and in front of us, across the table, is my mother. She begins to stack the dirty dishes. On my plate there is still a little food. She looks at it, considers, and leaves it where it is. She rises from her chair and carries the dishes to the kitchen sink. My father is talking and talking so I put my ear to the glass of the jar and listen. A faucet is open and for a moment I can hear the running water. Outside, Lulu is barking. My parents are telling me about their travels around the world, about the day they met. My mother is talking about the years she worked as a teacher in little country schools, about her travels following guru Maharaji. My father is talking about his crazy musician friends in Buenos Aires, about the time he travelled across Perú with them, about the places where they used to hang out in Buenos Aires, places that don't exist anymore. The hitchhiking trip across Perú is my favorite story by far and I have asked him to tell it to me again and again.

“Dad, weren't you cold in the cave where you lived in Perú?”

“Sometimes, but I wore the grey poncho, the one that's covering the sofa now. My bed was made of sticks and burlap potato bags. I hung a curtain around it so the bugs wouldn't bother me at night. And my pillow was that old *I-Ching* that's now in the bookshelves next to the sofa.”

In our house there were always lots of people, visiting or on holiday. Every summer, friends of my father came from Buenos Aires, bringing their girlfriends, never the same one from year to year. They were seeking the simple life of chopping wood, watering the garden, sleeping under the roses and, of course, detox. Each summer they filled the house with backpacks, sleeping bags, guitars, drums, berimbaus and even lice. Most of them had no children yet, so they brought gifts for me and took me for walks around the town, just as tourists do.

Eventually, people we didn't know started showing up. They would arrive at the train station and ask around to find out where our house was, then come and knock at the fence and say to my parents that some friend had told them they could stay with us. In this way we put up lots and lots of long-haired, bearded backpackers.

Years later, my grandmother Eugenia sent us a small black and white TV from Buenos Aires, and we became hostages of the local channel with the same schedule every week. Every Saturday we had the same old tedious movies of submarine catastrophes or people trying to escape from East Germany. I will never forget one scene in one of those movies in which a guy tries to jump a giant fence. Each Saturday, as I watched that movie, I always fell into a weird mood that lasted for hours. Again and again that scene troubled my mind. The barking dogs, the white searchlights, the police talking on megaphones, the shooting and the screaming. I would examine each detail to try to understand why, why didn't they let that guy jump the fence. I couldn't understand what a prison was, not until I discovered mine.

National Geographic

A square drawn by the sun pouring in through an open window of regular size and shining on the floor of a middle-class house at midday: that was the world for me. I spent my childhood sitting in the middle of that light with my legs crossed, staring for hours at the window with lost eyes, a *National Geographic* open in my hands.

I grew up in a house where setting the table for dinner always meant moving piles of books. So it was natural that, when I learned to write, my

mother would give me a notebook and say, “this is for you to write in. Write whatever you want, but write.” For as long as I can remember, my mother’s life has been listed. She forgets everything not written down, so she keeps lots of lists simultaneously: work lists, grocery lists, activities-for-the-day lists and lists of the lists she needs to list. The first thing I wrote in my notebook was my name. Then I turned the page and, in capital letters, wrote the word “DREAMS,” and under that title I started a list.

I was a voracious reader. Like a bride-to-be considering furniture in catalogues, I read and read – books, newspapers, magazines – and each time I found something interesting I put it on my list. I did this for my whole childhood. For twenty-two years.

Oh, Baby, Baby

Last summer I went to a friend’s birthday party in Bariloche. There somebody introduced me to the friend of a friend who works as a mountain guide, and he told me this story:

Not so long ago a Mexican fellow hired him as guide for a very complex crossing in Chalten, south Patagonia. The Mexican was well trained, so he was prepared for the journey. They walked for days across the ice fields. When a snowstorm surprised them and they got lost, they set up their tent, called for help and waited.

In the middle of the night the wind blew the tent down and scattered almost everything they had. They survived that night, but with very few provisions and a radio whose battery was running out. They tried making a cave in the snow, for shelter, but that didn’t work. Inside it, they could hardly breathe. And then the wind destroyed even that refuge. They couldn’t tell if it was night or day, and they got colder and colder as the hours passed. Only one thing was certain: whoever falls asleep loses. They said goodbye to their wives and kids just in case help didn’t reach them soon enough. The Mexican died the next night. The friend of my friend survived for two more days by playing a game he invented – trying to sing all The Beatles songs in alphabetical order. When the rescue team found him he had reached “Yellow Submarine.”

At the age of four, by mistake, I found out that Papá Noel doesn’t exist.

I spoke to my parents about it, saying “I found out there is no Papá Noel, but I’ve decided to keep on believing.” I think they took that as a statement of principle, but they were also smart enough to recognize the first sign of the coming avalanche.

Disappointment, velocity, meanness, technology, underpaid work, expectations, the literary canon, womanhood, assassinated whales, school teachers, fashion, good manners, personal tragedies, global catastrophes, diet yogurt, emotions, sex doubts, academic emptiness, demanding boy-friends, war, needy friends, desire, contests, birthdays, disillusionment, scholarships, viruses, tickets and bills – oh, baby, baby it’s a wild and a cold world, and we who are reared in the mountains learn that Cold is a patient beast.

I built my first tent with a blanket draped over two chairs in my room. Inside it, I trained myself to stay awake, determinedly dreaming against the growing numbness, and so discovered that my only chance of surviving outside the tent was to become a writer.

Penelope Syndrome

I was born with a very strange syndrome, a disorder characterized by significant difficulties in social interaction and time perception, along with restricted and repetitive patterns of behaviour and interests. My syndrome differs from other autistic disorders by its relative preservation of linguistic and cognitive development. Although it is not necessarily required for diagnosis, atypical use of language is frequently reported.

Being diagnosed with Penelope Syndrome (ps) means that I am a person who can wait forever. And when I say forever, I *mean* forever.

The exact cause of Penelope Syndrome is unknown. Research supports the likelihood of a genetic basis, but brain-imaging techniques have not identified a clear common pathology. Even though there is no single treatment and the effectiveness of particular interventions is supported by limited data, some theories based on recent investigations have suggested that most writers suffer from this syndrome, and also that writing may be the most successful treatment for it.

Scientists have named Penelope Syndrome after *The Odyssey*, because,

like the heroine in that story, afflicted people suffer from waiting. They know they are waiting and what they are waiting for, and they possess an immeasurable faith in their own belief.

Most ps children improve as they mature to adulthood, but social and communication difficulties may persist. Some researchers and people afflicted with the syndrome have advocated a shift in attitude toward the view that it is merely a difference, rather than a disability that must be treated or cured.

As the story goes, Penelope refused to believe that Odysseus was dead, even when everybody was saying so. When she could no longer refuse to marry another man, she started to weave, saying to her suitors that when she was finished her tapestry she would choose a husband. Like smoking, weaving was a way to legitimate her waiting, and she unravelled by night what she had woven by day in order to weave again the next day and thus continually postpone the moment of her decision.

I find it very difficult to explain to other people why I write. My tapestry is made of strands of differing natures. I interweave the strand of memory with the strand of hope, the strand of hope with the strand of reality, the strand of reality with the strand of imagination. Then I weave the strand of imagination with a strand of words, and the words become a colourful, beautiful blanket that is too hot for summer and won't keep anybody warm in winter.

Friends and others familiar with those who are diagnosed with ps know that, while the subject is writing, he or she is stable. The risk in the waiting is sometimes to feel that one is wasting time, which can create huge amounts of anxiety. I know this from experience. Ever since I was diagnosed with ps, I have kept a diary of my waiting. It distracts me from waiting.

I waited for love, I waited for success, I waited for the bus to come, I waited for money, inspiration, recognition, test results, letters, responses from job interviews, for a salary, for the end of school. And I waited to travel, to run away. I waited for the right moment... But my waiting has never really changed. What I am most waiting for is truth. No matter what else it involves, writing knits me to that truth.

Classic Songs

Until just a few months ago, my mother only wrote me things like: I deposited your money; we will send you the washing machine by freight tomorrow; remember your grandmother's birthday on Wednesday. But today, in a letter about other things, she mentioned our beloved garden: "Luckily, Dad's sciatica is a little better. It was very painful and made him sad all week. Each time he raked leaves or chopped wood, he couldn't move afterward... Autumn is a dream: dry, dry cold in the morning and warm in the afternoon. The garden is ablaze. I'm finishing the grey pullover that you liked so much. I'm going to send it to you, when I'm finished, with the washing machine."

There are children raised by wolves, apes, dogs, gazelles and even chickens. I was raised by hippies.

If the season is fall, then my parents will be picking plums. After the first snowfall they will remove the wax from around the cork of their homemade liquor and take a glass in front of the fireplace. If it's winter, they will be at home, sitting on the couch with balls of yarn, listening to *James Taylor: Classic Songs*. Then the wires will have been brought down by the snowstorm so they will have no electricity, no telephone, no internet.

Play It Again, Mom...

My mother loves to tell how she met my father. I've heard the story a thousand times. Her story is a hit. It never fails. Everybody loves to hear my mother tell how she met my father. She tells the story always in the same way, needs no variations. She has found the perfect form for her story, and whoever has heard it more than once is as delighted as a child with the repetition. It's a fable of possible love, unexpected and perdurable. It happens in Bariloche. The story begins with punctilious description of the clothes she was wearing that day. It includes a premonitory dream and a mysterious melody played on a piano, but I haven't met a single person who has heard the story and doubted its veracity. I've heard the story a thousand times and each time I understand better why people love to listen to my mother tell how she met my father. Thirty years after, whenever she

tells the story she still creates in her listeners the sensation that there can actually be a path that leads straight to true love and that we might all, every one of us, be able to walk it. Play it again, Mom...

I was wearing a blue corduroy blazer and a blue dress with white polka dots that a few years later were stolen from the clothesline in the backyard of the house at KM 3. At that time I was acting in "A Christmas Carol" at the Sarmiento Public Library, where I sang and danced in the role of Mr. Scrooge's girlfriend. It was December 25th and I was invited to a party after the show, but I was starving so I went with my mother, Grandma Marina, for a sandwich at Munich Bar at the corner of Mitre and Quaglia. The bar was demolished this year, so sad. Well, as I was saying, sitting at a table were Eric and Andres, two of my ex-boyfriends, with a third guy, and I thought, "What a handsome man!" and also, immediately, "I'm sure he's not from around here." They introduced him to me as "The Spider." He had just arrived from Buenos Aires, had come here via Perú. He was wearing a grey poncho, was carrying a brown leather bag and he still had hair. Your dad thought, "This beautiful girl is going to be mine." Six days later at a new year's party at Eric's house we met again.

I was wearing my Lee Oxford blue jean overalls, the ones that are now in the attic, the ones with silver stars on them. As I was coming out of the bathroom we met in the corridor by chance and he said to me, "Let's go?" Yes, like that: "Let's go?" and we went together to his house at KM 3 where he was living with Negro Luis. Your dad played some piano music on the stereo and I remembered a dream I had four months earlier. In that dream, a handsome guy I'd never seen before made me listen to piano music I'd never heard before. It was The Köln Concert of Keith Jarrett, and that was what your dad played for me the first night we spent together, and after that we have never been apart...

"Dad," I once asked my father, "why do they call you The Spider?"

"Because," he said, winking, "all the pretty girls fell into my web."

Anne Frank's Diary

For my eleventh birthday I received six copies of *The Diary of a Young Girl* by Anne Frank and six diaries. It was a weird coincidence. Maybe the

books and the diaries were on sale at the book shop, but for me the whole thing seemed like some kind of existential puzzle I had to solve. It was disturbing. My birthday presents caused me a lot of work.

After the party, I took one of the six copies of Anne Frank's diary and tried to read it, but I was bored after the first page. Writing about her own birthday, Anne describes all the presents she received, including the diary, then she writes all about her schoolmates. I was almost her age and I didn't feel any empathy whatsoever. Actually, I felt she was phony, like an adult trying to write in the voice of a child.

Then I took one of the six diaries and tried to write in it. My first impulse was to describe my party and make a list of my presents, but after two pages I abandoned the idea. The entire diary thing upset me. Trying to be faithful to reality was tiring and boring. And how could anybody write a good poem on pages featuring stupid images of Garfield yawning or Minnie Mouse smiling like an idiot at the bottom?

I really tried to read Anne Frank's book. I felt it was the least I could do for her. But should we value a book just because the author suffered a lot? Should we even read another person's diary at all? To be truthful, I came to hate Anne Frank's diary. Adults had given me the book with emphasis, as if to say, *you who complain and worry about stupid things, read this*, and also as if they believed that the only book appropriate for a reader of my age had to be written by someone my age. The solution to my puzzle unfortunately arrived: the existence of Anne Frank's diary automatically negated the possibility of any interest in writing my own diary.

Lots of children are afraid of the dark, so they ask their parents to leave the corridor light on and the door open. I've never heard of a child who is afraid of light. While reading Anne Frank's diary, the lights snapped off in my mind and the door slammed shut. I had always imagined Anne's life as elapsing in a hole, a shoebox, a wet basement or a dusty attic – a place you cannot leave, where you cannot move, where you cannot make noise, or run, or even be alone. When I was Anne's age and knew her story, I felt close to her in one thing only, and it had nothing to do with being her age.

You can visit the website of the Anne Frank Foundation and see a panoramic 3-D view of the room in which Anne and her family were hidden for two years. As soon as I entered I began to have an uncomfortable feeling. I realized that the quality of the image was the same as those very

realistic videogames in which you have a gun and go hunting zombies. I pressed forward. After opening a green door, I entered a well-lit room, with a nice big green-framed window and beneath it a table set with a tablecloth that reminded me of my grandmother's. This one was white with red flowers, and on it were displayed a candle and a flowerpot. The place looked like the cheery house of a humble family.

Nobody writes a diary hoping that no one will read it. Not even Anne, whose diary has now been read all over the world. I know people who have read that book and no other in their whole life, because it was assigned in school. I'm starting to think that reading Anne Frank's diary is a charity act, something a good person feels obliged to do. At the age of eleven, I didn't offer Anne my patience. I have to confess that I was jealous. I wanted to be a writer myself, and longed to be read by many people. After reading Anne's first pages, I thought she must have been published because she died in a most horrible way. I didn't like the way she wrote, and though I felt that was a good reason not to read any book, I also felt guilty, disrespectful of her suffering and ungrateful for my own life. I wasn't really imprisoned, not then. You might say I wasn't imprisoned at all, but I had many plans, and they were the world, and the world was everything outside my sunny window, a place I expected to reach once I freed myself from childhood.

While waitressing in a family restaurant, I approached a table to refill drinks just as a mother was administering the well-known parental wisdom to her child: "Finish your food! All over the world there are kids dying from hunger." The kid very patiently answered her. "Well," he said, purposefully pushing the dish toward her, "give my mashed potatoes to them." The whole thing blew up into a storm, after which not even the mother finished her meal. I felt two ways about the scene: Yes, the boy was irreverent, but his mother was wrong. In a world of wasteful consumption, it would be better to teach children to take only what they need, not more, and to be grateful for what they have instead of filling them with guilt. Well, Anne, I must say in your defense that I was put off by the cheap edition of your book with the too-small typeface, not to mention my childhood jealousy, and I promise that one day I will read your book in the way you deserve – as the writer you are.

Poor Girl

I knew Natalia was spending the summer at her grandparents' house in the neighbourhood, as she did every summer, but she hadn't showed up yet. She was eight, two years older than me and I admired her. But, when she finally appeared at the front door I realized that I wanted to be alone, so I told her I was my twin sister, and Guadalupe was not at home.

Sometimes Guadalupe is not at home and I have to take care of her stuff. When she and I were nineteen years old she got pregnant, and I decided it wasn't the time for us to have a baby.

It was a cold winter night; she was afraid, it hurt.

After that, Guadalupe decided to die, but not by suicide. She decided to have an accident and die in some stupid way, like our uncle did. He was waiting to cross the street when a wheel flew off a passing truck, struck his head and killed him.

Guadalupe decided that, once she died, I would go into her stuff, find the diary under her pillow, discover that she had been brilliant, and publish it. She was sure that people would read the book and think, "Oh, poor girl, so brilliant and now dead, and in such a ridiculous way," and her epitaph would be a line of a verse by Susana Thenon: "Okay, I'm dead and now I want to have fun."

So from the tomb she published her first book of poems.

At the launch of the book, I saw my friend Sasha for the last time. While I was reading Guadalupe's poems, I remember raising my head from the book to see him sitting before me and staring at me with his mouth open. When I finished, he came up and gave me a hug and said he didn't know Guadalupe was writing a book. He seemed very proud of her. A year later he died of an overdose of ketamine.

Sasha was twenty-three years old and brilliant, but he left us shelves of unwritten books and a pregnant girlfriend.

Dreams

Be a pirate. Travel to Canada in the fall to collect maple leaves and make a collage with them. Be a volunteer at a refugee camp in Cyprus. Know

Prague and Portugal. Embark on the Rainbow Warrior and go hunting Japanese whalers. De-oil penguins. Place an empty five-liter plastic bottle inside the toilet tank so that less water is flushed. Become president and give food to everybody. Travel to India and touch an elephant. Obtain the Playmobil pirate ship. Be friends with Subcomandante Marcos. Be a photographer for *National Geographic*. Go whitewater rafting down the Amazon. Be awarded a scholarship by Gabriel García Márquez to attend his screenwriting workshop in Cuba. Do handstands. Get married under the sea in the Great Barrier Reef in Australia. Be a writer. Be a visual artist and live in New York. Know Isla Negra. Have a residency in a Zen Monastery...

The list goes on and on. I have achieved a few of my goals but have realized that being president won't feed the starving millions of the world.

Olivia

Olivia was two years old. As soon as her mother left, closing the front door behind her, she started to cry and began shouting for her to come back. But the reality was that her mother needed to go to work. So did I. That's why I was there – to clean and take care of Olivia. So I did my work over the shouting and, in the desperate way adults have of responding to kids facing reality for the first time in their lives and realizing they can do nothing but cry about it, I started to tell her a story.

Holding a fourteen kilo crying baby in one arm and trying to mash a pumpkin or peel a hot hard boiled egg with the hand on the other arm – *Little Red Riding Hood*? Don't be silly, it never entered my mind. No, what I did was talk about anything that occurred to me until a magical word somehow seized Olivia's attention and caused her to go silent. So I gave thanks to the Lord, and thought, "Don't waste time now, follow this line." The magic word was "chicken," so, while I was feeding Olivia, I told her about the chickens that used to live in the backyard of the house where I grew up, how I fed them and went looking for their eggs. I have found that animals are the best story hook for kids, and that telling about animals works better if you also make their sounds. So one animal followed another, with clucking and mooing and baaing, until I found myself talking about Lulu, my dog.

This is more or less what I told Olivia about her:

One day before I was born, in the coldest winter Bariloche had known in decades, my father went for a walk with a friend. A storm had just passed and everything was covered with snow – the trees, the house, the road. After a snowstorm, the world is drained of colour – as if someone had erased it – and almost emptied of sound, as if everyone were sleeping. The air was cold and clear and, as my father talked with his friend, a small fog escaped their mouths. The only sound was their steps crunching in the snow and the distant crack of a dead branch breaking off a tree under the weight of the snow. They were in the middle of the forest when snow started to fall again and the wind began to blow. They had begun rushing back before it got worse when they heard a frightening sound. It was like the laughter of a witch.

A white wind was blowing hard now. They couldn't see farther than a meter, and walking was difficult, but they took courage and made their way straight to where the noise was coming from. They were very close to it and still saw nothing. Then my father took one more step and the eerie sound suddenly got louder. He realized that he had stepped on something and when he looked down he found what had been wailing – a tiny black puppy. It was freezing under the snow, so my father picked it up and wrapped it inside his coat for warmth, and it fell asleep. My father said that Lulu was so small that she fit in the palm of his hand, “a black spot,” he said, “on an infinite white canvas.”

Olivia and I were near the balcony. Buenos Aires rush hour was ending and the car horns were blaring less and less. The sun was setting behind the buildings. Sitting on my lap now, Olivia was silent, looking at me with big, wet eyes. I thought I had scared her. Then she said, “Lupe, what is snow?”

Theory

There is a theory that dogs are descended from wild wolves. Analyzing their bodies and brains, scientists have arrived at the conclusion that dogs develop psychologically no further than the puppies of wolves, even when they are adults. According to this theory, in ancient times a lost wolf puppy was adopted by a human tribe, breast-fed like a human baby and only later

fed with meat. So that wolf and its descendants had no need to hunt and defend themselves. Wolves stopped developing their teeth and lost most of their basic instincts.

Kids raised by hippies are very much like wolves raised by humans.

For Example

In March 2003, I left my parents house in Bariloche and moved to Buenos Aires to go to university, and for months I phoned my mother almost every night. My telephone bills were monstrous. Whenever she told me about the house and the garden, I wished I could teleport myself there. She would tell me what she and my father did on the weekend. On one Saturday, for example, they took all the books in their library to bed and cleaned them while drinking *mate*. They discussed each one and occasionally discovered treasures between the pages – a dried flower from Ouro Preto, Brazil that my father cut in the late seventies before he met my mother; a picture of El Negro y La Pancha taken at the time when he was dancing in the musical *Hair*; a train ticket from Chacarita Station to Santos Lugares whose number was a palindrome (which means good luck) found in the pages of *Thus Spake Zarathustra* and dated 1985, the year I was born; notes from prehistoric lovers. “How can it be,” said my father to my mother, waving a copy of *On The Road*, “that in the twenty-four years we’ve known each other, you still haven’t read this book?!”

They separated out books to donate to the public library and books to recommend to my brothers, Valentín and Julián. Then, by common agreement, they pulled together all the pages lovingly written by others, read them for the last time and burned them with prunings from the sorbus in the garden.

Rice With Meatballs

Father: When I met your mother, I was dating Lela.

Mother: When I met your father, he prohibited me from bringing my clothes into his house at KM 3. So every day I had to go back to my house,

get my clothes and change to go to work.

Father: After dating your mother for two weeks, I told her that I had a girlfriend and that she was arriving in town the next day.

Mother: Your father never washed his clothes; he “aired” them.

Father: When Lela arrived, I continued seeing your mother. We pretended that nothing was happening but we would secretly feel under the table for each other’s feet.

Mother: I washed all his clothes. Since he wouldn’t let me bring my clothes in, I started to wear his.

Father: A week after Lela arrived I told her, “Lela, we need to talk.”

Mother: All the time I was warning your father, “I don’t want to get married” and he was saying “Me neither, I’m not crazy!”

Father: I told her, “Lela, I need to tell you something. I’m in love with Gabi.”

Mother: The first thing I cooked for him was rice with meatballs because “you reach men through their stomach.” That’s what my grandmother used to say.

Father: Lela answered, “Great, I’m in love with Luis.”

Mother: And that’s how I conquered your father’s heart.

Father: Gabi, you really think I fell in love with you because of “rice with meatballs”?

A Real Estate Business

Twice in my life I have been able to choose a house to live in. The first time was the result of an offer made by my friend, Debbie. Debbie is an elderly woman, an authority on museology who worked freelance in museums with my father. Ever since the day we met for the first time, Debbie and I have had a beautiful relationship, like grandmother and grandchild. It was 2003, my first year in Buenos Aires, and I was having great difficulty finding a place to live.

Debbie’s father was a Jew from Brooklyn, a realtor from whom his daughter had learned a lot. She ran her own real estate business almost as a hobby, buying houses in places all around the world and offering the care of them to people she liked and trusted, occasionally for years, until the

market was favourable for selling. She had bought a restaurant in London and given it to a couple who were trying to start their own business. She had a house in Australia, another in Washington DC, where she lives in the summer, and another in Vieques, Puerto Rico, where she lives the rest of the year – if she is not traveling around the world. Debbie is never quiet, always moving. It's impossible to take a picture of her that is not blurred.

When she heard of my problems, she decided to buy a house for me. At first I didn't believe it, but with the aid of her instruction, and after three months of searching, I found a house and Debbie bought it. I was eighteen years old and took care of the house for seven years.

Then the house was put on the market again and I needed to rent another place in Buenos Aires, so I started looking for the ideal residence for myself and my brothers, now grown up and coming to study in the big city. We wanted a terrace and a garden, or at least a balcony. We liked neighborhoods with trees on the boulevard, and we definitely needed three bedrooms. Laughing, Valentín said that we actually needed six bedrooms: three for each of us and three more for our egos. And we didn't have much money. So we started our search. We walked hundreds of blocks one cold foggy May, touring all the neighbourhoods near the university and near our jobs. We visited almost ninety houses and apartments, most of them unacceptable.

We were running out of hope when we found the apartment on México Street. As soon as we stepped inside we had no doubts, and rented it immediately. It had no terrace, no garden, not even a balcony. There were no trees on the street. Still, it was love at first sight. We could easily imagine our stuff in it and we wanted to live there. We were three exhausted swimmers letting ourselves be carried by the waves and trusting that we would be delivered to the shore.

At this point in my life, at nearly thirty, I believed that love worked just like real estate, and that if I had the opportunity to choose I would certainly spend the rest of my days in a yellow submarine.

GUADALUPE MURO is an Argentinian writer, producer and artist. Her first collection of poems, *Con quién dormías?* was published in 2007. *Air Carnation* is her first novel. A soundtrack to the novel, a project called “Songs for Runaway Girls,” can be heard at <https://www.facebook.com/songsforrunawaygirls>. Muro lives in Sc. de Bariloche, a small town in Patagonia, where she directs the collaborative literary project “Las Cartas de Guadalupe.” Follow Muro at <http://facebook.com/lascartasdeguadalupe> and <http://lascartasdeguadalupe.com>.



COLOPHON

Manufactured as the First Edition of *Air Carnation* in the Spring of 2014 by BookThug. Distributed in Canada by the Literary Press Group www.lpg.ca. Distributed in the United States by Small Press Distribution www.spdbooks.org. Shop online at www.bookthug.ca



Type + design by Jay MillAr
Proofread by Nicole Brewer
Copy edited by Ruth Zuchter