



MARIELA GRIFFOR

# Words

Fourteen years feels like a century.  
Memories of the last flight still linger.  
My heart is pumping fast. My hands are cold.  
My stomach crinching in a nut. I fear not breathing.  
The image of my mother trying to tie me to a chair.  
Was she crazy? She must have been. I will never know.  
The language is unspoken but so familiar. I know this language.  
I know this language and its power and defeat.  
I can not love in this language. I will never love in this language.  
No Latin can be spoken by this river.

# Daphne and Non-Profits in the Western Hemisphere

Her code name then was *Daphne*.  
She recruited me in September of 1983,  
three months before the official launch of  
the organization. No other  
students were invited, not even *the boyfriend*. We were  
45 members in the entire country when  
we started and at least 400 at its peak,  
and 75 in the metropolitan area that  
covered 5 million people. It was fun  
to be with *them* at some moments.  
I learned their code names and their laughs  
—or no laughs—*Francisca* who laughs loud and smoky,  
*Wolf* who laughs silently—attached to it.  
We could not share so much,  
the tension was always too high.  
The adrenaline addiction was the biggest problem  
after two or three years of belonging,  
cheap whiskey and wine rolled its own nightmare.

# Andres the Barbarian

He was a ghostly figure  
walking in the house of my grandparents  
with a pipe in his mouth and  
the tobacco that smells like *gitanes*  
around him as if smoke were coming out of his hair.

He had a dark beard and anyone  
who might see him in the streets could not  
figure him out so easily. At moments he looked  
like a type that could solve the problems of the world.

At other moments  
he looked like a *DINA*,  
a secret agent that  
would beat the shit out of you  
if he was in the mood.

My friend Cote was afraid of him.  
She said he looked like a gangster, a mobster  
with impeccable gray suits  
and dark glasses covering his melancholic eyes.

He was for some, an electrical  
engineer hired  
by a firm to electrify

buildings across the country.  
I don't know which was the real him.

It changed everything for him  
if I didn't spell *Hermanos* with the "H" in it.  
I do remember some good times with him,  
Like when he came back from a trip to Easter Islands and  
grandmother and I got a pink pearl necklace from the natives.

For me he was the man who taught me to read,  
and the man who hit me in the head  
every time I forgot the letter "H".  
How can I pronounce the letter "H"  
if it didn't have any sound?

He could not forgive the error, that simple detail.  
The fact that he did belong to the National party  
didn't mean much for us.  
Family is family.  
Grandfather loved his son anyway.

The issue with the letter "H" was the worst.  
I do remember his books lined up in alphabetical  
order in his room.

# Never Had

For the son I never had,  
I lend some green tears,  
I share some fuchsias opening.  
I bathe him and make his skin glide.  
No matter whatever language he speaks,  
I read a lullaby for sleep.  
I share some red roses from my yard.  
For the son I never had,  
I chant this dark song tonight.  
No matter what good news the world strikes  
I could see sweet skin and closed eyes,  
and my husband's sins are forgiven.  
My sorrow never heals,  
no matter what oceans I cross.  
He stands more alive than ever on the other side.

# Green Bills

The last time I saw my grandfather was at  
the airport Merino Benitez,  
in Santiago, Chile, in October of 1985.

The *DINA* was after me.

He was tall and handsome. Blue shirt.

He gave me a hug and put a green roll of  
bills in my right hand.

The first time in twenty two years

I saw grandfather drying his tears with a  
white handkerchief he always had in his pocket

*You will not be back soon and this is the last time*  
he told me with serenity.

Four years. And ten years.

Talking to my mother over the phone, she told me  
she was visiting him at the cemetery.

I saw him last night, this time he was laughing  
with Elena, my youngest.

He visited me very often,

He was right. I was never back.

I never stopped seeing  
him. Blue shirt.

He visits me before bad things happen, as a warning.

He brings me peace.

I meet him at the rise of the sun after  
a night of dreams when

the face of Lincoln appears on the green bills.



# Chiloe Island

The room was small and cheap.  
As darkness settled over the capital of Santiago,  
a thin crucifix hung above the headboard.

A garden in the blanket's embroidery  
embraced simple *copihues* and violets,  
and when we glanced at these threads

they seemed to blink at us.  
Who could have the time to embroider  
tiny blue, yellow, red flowers

on the borders of this quilt?  
An old woman who knew of the resilient  
shape of a young woman's heart,

asleep for the first time with her husband?  
No evil hand makes such a garden.  
Still, we breathed a fear of torture

and when he came back to the hotel, after his  
lens in photography class saw everything,  
we ran up the street to a restaurant.

The smell of *curantos* and fresh bread

and corn pie was a reminder we could stay  
there forever among shellfish

and fishermen with red cheeks,  
knives in harsh hands that opened  
that traitor Pacific Ocean.

How the ocean eats bodies in silence,  
in an act of revenge, but succulent waters  
spit up oysters or fish.

When we went back to the room,  
he called me to warm his body.  
We fell asleep as two old friends.

He made me promise if we ever had  
a child, and if he was not there, I would leave the country.  
I slept like a cat until morning

The noisy street opened long before my eyes,  
And as I was going for my breakfast

Everyone else was going for lunch.

He wanted me to pose with a lobster.

I agreed only if it was the last time  
he made me touch shellfish.