



Blue Wren



Bron Bateman



FREMANTLE PRESS

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Fragment

Cotton-mouthed,
I bite my lips
and tell the truth,
as much as I am able.

Frida Kahlo

The Sticking Place

At eighteen, on the way to Coyoacán
with your boyfriend Alejandro,
the bus you rode collided with a tram.

Your bones
s n a p p e d
like kindling,
your pelvis
impaled by an iron rail,

misplacing
your
spine.

I think of your thirty operations,
of your body encased, for nine months,
in plaster corsets.

In too much pain to study,
and pinned to your bed for all that time,

you borrowed paints from your father's studio.
Your mother had an easel made
and you began to paint.
Feet at first, but then self-portraits.

You said:

*I paint myself because I am so often alone
and because I am the subject I know best.*

I think of you, at eighteen,
already seeing the world
in crashes and grinding metal.
Layering your heart's blood onto the canvas.

'Henry Ford Hospital' (1932)

Here is a painting of you
haemorrhaging
on the hospital bed
like a bloody snow angel.
You started painting it nineteen days after
your second miscarriage.

Your body twisted in pain,
head and torso facing one way,
lower limbs the other.
An impossible contortion of flesh.

Diego will respond to this loss
by having an affair with your sister
—your best friend, your beloved little sister—

She, who should not have,
snared your husband so easily,
with her quieter, softer mouth
and her pretty, unscarred body,
while you bled and bled on the hospital bed.

The way he looks at her when he thinks
you're not watching
will catch in your flesh like thorns.
As you begin to recover,
he offers you squares of pressed tin to paint upon.

What can you do but colour your lips,
smoke another cigarette,
and paint? Your heart, this time:
as an open wound in your chest.
As a weeping eye raining tears of blood
onto your white frilly dress.
Or quivering like a timid bird
in the cage of your ribs.

'The Two Fridas' (1939)

With all the colour daubed on plaster and tin,
with all the colour swallowed over the years,
it is as if I have taken in the wholly lit moon and the sun
in one fearsome gulp.

I have bled you dry, my dear, other Frida, can you see the
little shocks of blood on our white lace dress?
Our one strong heart pounding truly in my open chest?

We are joined tenuously by a single artery,
a skein of memory, the connection of future and past,
the burden of family and loyalty running deep within us.
We love Diego. We hate Diego. We have left him in order to survive.
Our twinned bodies have both been rejected by him countless times.
We barely hold together. Heartbeats slowing
as I cautiously join our hands, entwining our fingers.
We are blood. A clotted dichotomy.
We shall endure.

Self-Portrait with Thorn Necklace and Hummingbird' (1940)

Diego gave you the spider monkey we see pulling
at the ends of the crown of thorns necklace.
The cruel spines pierce your skin,
beads of claret travel slowly down the column of your throat.
Black ropes of hair, piled on top of your head,
are studded with butterfly combs.

Two dragonflies hang pinned to a jungle sky.
A cat with ice-blue eyes curls against your shoulder.
To you he is like Diego, a symbol of the jaguar,
harbinger of chaos and death.
A dead hummingbird rests between your breasts,
the curve of its wings mirrored by the curve of your brows.

Your mouth, pain-stiff,
and slightly pursed, seems
about to sigh at us.
Your eyes, brown as pebbles,
stare unflinchingly from the canvas.
You dare us to wipe away the droplets of blood
gliding down your throat.
To pull at that thorny necklace
until you scream and scream and scream.

'The Broken Column' (1944)

In this painting,
with your torso splayed open,
you are a rejection of the boundaries
that separate human from animal
and human from machine.

The segmented plaster corset cuts into your ribcage.
Your spine is cast from iron,
and iron nails are hammered

into
your
flesh.

Slight oozes of red, flecks of sacrifice and death.

You paint yourself harsher and more unforgiving.
Your terracotta skin becomes
wide-pored and sallow,
your brows and moustache have grown thicker
with each passing year.

In another one of your paintings,
the little doe with the nine-pointed
antlers, and your face,
runs heedlessly into the woods,
blood streaming down its flanks,
its side punched full of arrows.

A hunting narrative emerges from the chaos:
An arrow's white vanes disappear into a deer's body,
forward and slightly low. The deer's hind legs kick out as it runs,
hard at first, then slowing to a staggered walk,
tail twitching erratically. Moments later it falls and lies motionless.
Solid evidence of at least one heart shot.

The Girl of My Eyes

Your hair, which you grow,
or cut short, depending on your mood,
is wrapped neatly around your skull.
He likes it long, and loose on your shoulders,
or piled intricately upon your head and woven with fresh flowers.

The painting of the two of you
shows you seeming to float,
inches above the ground,
tethered
only by the weight of his hand
holding you in place.
He, six-foot-tall
and three hundred pounds, in
brown shoes and his best grey suit.

He paints you and titles it *For the Girl of My Eyes*.
You are his wife and his muse.
He is the light of a Mexican summer
that washes you clean.
Your body is full of him
for days and days at a time.