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Margarita Luna Robles

WHAT FRIDA KAHLO THOUGHT OF THE SUICIDE OF DOROTHY HALE, 1939

*Painted at the request of Clare Boothe Luce,
for the mother of Dorothy.*

I. Frida's Vision

What time was it, Dorothy,
when you first looked toward the window?
Was it noon and the light too bright that made you stay
in the middle of the room waiting for the moment?

What made you think of stopping time?
Did the thought of your mother enter this time?
She must have been thinking of you. This is the way mothers are.
What made you take the step toward the window?
Was it the light? I thought maybe you reached for it
but at noon it was still too bright. So you waited.

It must've been dinnertime. But there was no
dinner date. There was no dinner. There was no one. The sun had
moved over. The light was more delicate.
What time was it, Dorothy, when you walked over to the window
and saw the skyline etch the horizon?

You must have thought of birds, their wings, their feathers.
You must have thought of the absence of trees and the color green.
You must have felt the coldness of concrete everywhere.
The color of the sky began to blend with everything.

You must have thought of air.

I imagine you standing at the window of your New York apartment.
You must have been meditating on your life.
This is the way it is when one thinks of death.
Life and death at once both become inevitable.
I can see you lifting your right leg onto the window sill,
the early evening light blurring the shadows.
As you brought your left leg up next to it
you must have thought that this was a balancing act.
The knees, life and death all in unison trembling now on the sill
as you looked down into the city. You looked back into this room
just once more to remember everything in it.

You saw the door across the room that opens into the hallway.
You remembered the first time you walked the hallway through
that door into this room. You remembered the door opening and closing.
You looked at the door you could have opened to take you in another
direction.

But, then you thought you had to swing both legs over the ledge
looking away from the closed door as you thought of letting go.

For a moment you must have embraced yourself
knowing at that moment you were alone.
There was no one to hold you.
You must have clutched at your breast
trying to reach for your heart.

If only you had known how to touch your heart.
If only you had known how to soothe what felt empty.
If only you had known how to embrace infinite space.

You looked down, what was it? Twenty stories?
You held onto the ledge one last time as you felt
the wind push you, you caught the fragrance of flowers.
In the middle of concrete a sweet scent the corsage, the gift
now weighing at your breast.

You were still holding back the tears.
You were still holding onto the pain
as you let go.

II. Frida's Painting

I painted you as you fell out the window.
Your Mme X dress draping your beautiful body spinning down.
I paint you so small we can't see you.
We can't see that it is Dorothy Hale falling.
No one saw you falling.
No one heard you falling.

You didn't scream.

The clouds spiral in this rhythm you have entered falling.
Your arms over your head
I paint your body again on the same canvas halfway down this journey.
I paint you no longer thinking.
I paint your face, your hair neatly pulled up.
Now we can see you falling.

Maybe you wanted to lift your breath once more.

III. Death

Dorothy, no one wants this portrait of you. They want to remember you the way they want to. They want to see your porcelain face when they think of you. They remember your silky thighs and perfect legs. They remember your lips kissing the man you charmed while making movies. They want your perfect teeth. They want the tenderness and fullness underneath your satin blouse. They don't want to see underneath your skin. I loved you. I saw you before you ever got near the window.

Dorothy, I painted you fallen, the life oozing from your mouth.
You are looking at us. You are forcing us to look into your eyes.
Your body is broken. Your hand is open. What does it ask for?
Your blood drapes the asphalt. I paint my own name in blood

IV. Life/Death

How can I paint life without death/
How can I paint beauty without ugliness or pain/
How can I distinguish one from the other if I don't know both/