



Brenda Mann Hammack

Poems Based on the Life of Frida
Kahlo

Accident

17 September 1926

One day she'll paint more wounds than Saint
Sebastian's.

One day: Judas skeleton will peer through canopy
as she, fish beneath
ice or else coffin lid, prepares
to flop.

Beneath quilt agave: tongue-blossoms.

She'll have no scaffold, then, only bed
arboretum
and necklace: thorned hummingbird.

Then: even brow will fly. Even blue lizard cascade
will laugh her.

But, for now: she is just staccato.
ribs' craquelure
and clavicle, feathered, light.

Henry Ford Hospital, 1932

They plucked you out of body like a plum, my darling,
and would not let me see or feel what pelvis

could not hold. And, so, I trust anatomy text to conjure feet (those little figs). Your puckered eyes: unspeckled

shell. The still life gloss of cowrie. Your father told the doctor, let her read if she is able. A bone trap

does not cradle. See: these tesserae of spine. Unclean
autoclave; prolapsed orchid. These relics, little moons

that constellate my sky as smokestacks spike horizon.
And I wonder: how could I hope to keep my frogling,

Dieguito, three-month child when this city means too narrow, when proletariat can't survive this un-united

country? And who am I to cry for undescended testes? Little snails should stay inside for all is *mala suerte*,

worst of luck. In world of gearbox, chassis, mass production, picket line, where automation mocks

creation, why should we be surprised that our children come in fragments? No instructions; assembly required.

What the Water Gives

Alone in my bath tub,
undrowned in my past,

I glimpse *cemetaria*.
Dead bird on its back.

My mother and father.
A skeleton cast to read fortune.

Even decked *Tehuana*,

I am always undressed:
anatomical model;
écorché; pus-red.

My finger pads
 shriveled;
my womb shell,
 unebbed.

Hear my conch shush
as it empties. Hear me

strangle, then laugh.

The Love Embrace of the Universe,
 the Earth (Mexico),
Diego, Me, and Señor Xolotl

I dandle you on lap like bee-stung fetus,
 pickled Cupid. And all around, tendrils,
luminous, finger. Maguey cusps
 us hard. Even *itzcuintli* dog nestles

into hand (earth pap; pod lactase), while
 I leak blood. When third eye pocks
and moon spuds, two below wink bright.
 Fire-flower seems igneous rock

by comparison. If I am Cassiopeia,
 you are Olmec god. So, what
is not my fault? I am no Pietà,
 but suffer mother's lot.

Our mother, Mexico, is no Golgotha.
 But, in her arms, even I can hold you up.

Brenda Mann Hammack 's poetry has appeared in *Mudlark*,
Pedestal, *Arsenic Lobster*, *The North Carolina Literary*
Review, *The Sow's Ear Poetry Review*, and elsewhere. She
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She teaches at Fayetteville State University.