

Excerpt from *Frida*

Frida was saucy, impertinent, lively,
despite her withered leg and limp
from polio. She was eighteen years old
and in love with an older student, Alejandro,
when one September afternoon, after school,
the rickety, wooden bus they were riding
was rammed by a street trolley.

They had been on another bus
when she missed her pink parasol,
and they got off to look for it.
After a while they gave up
and caught the next bus.
It was a long bus with benches
on either side. Struck in the middle,
the bus bent until it burst into pieces,
while the train kept moving.

*It is a lie that one is aware of the crash,
a lie that one cries. In me there were no tears.
The crash bounced us forward, and a handrail
pierced me the way a sword pierces a bull.
A man saw me having a tremendous hemorrhage.
He carried me and put me on a billiard table
until the Red Cross came for me.*

The train's steel handrail broke off,
entering Frida's abdomen
and exiting her vagina.
Her pelvis and spinal column
were broken in three places,
and her collarbone was fractured.
Her third and fourth ribs were broken.
Her right leg had eleven fractures.
Her right foot was dislocated and crushed.

The impact of the crash stripped
the clothes from her body.
A packet of gold leaf
carried by a painter spilled open,
sprinkling her naked, bleeding body
with flecks of gold. Seeing her,
people cried, *La bailarina!*
Alejandro covered her with his coat.
Few thought she would survive.

Alan Steinfeld reviews *Surrealist Muse*, *Escaping Lee Miller*, and *Frida* in *American Book Review*, Vol. 45, no 1, Spring 2024.

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