

Frida and Diego - a love story

a biographical play

by Tony Broadwick

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MUSIC

(1954)

A bed is placed stage left. A chair and a small table are positioned close to it. There are a jug of water, two bottles of medicine and a basket with fruit on the table. Some wilted flowers are in a clear glass vase that has no water in it. A pale and sick looking FRIDA KAHLO is in bed. She is writing in a diary. She folds the book and puts it aside. She takes some pills from a bottle and takes them with a drink of water. She closes her eyes.

DIEGO RIVERA, an overweight man in his early fifties enters the stage. He walks to the bed. Takes the diary. Reads for a moment. Holding the diary close to his chest he walks to the edge of the stage and addresses the audience.

DIEGO: My wife died today. The doctors are going to say she died of complications from some fancy medical condition but I tell you something. She was too strong a person to be defeated by any disease. Hell, a bus ran over her. Broke half the bones in her body. A metal rod went through her pelvis. That didn't kill her. She spent months in hospitals undergoing surgeries. Those didn't kill her. She was married to me – twice. That nearly killed me, but it didn't kill her. She didn't want to die in the autumn and be a part of the season when everything is dying. She didn't want to die in the spring and be a contradiction to nature. She chose to go in the blaze of summer. Yes, listen to this. She wrote in her diary: "This is the time. I hope the exit is joyful— and I hope never to return— Frida" (*pause*) You can draw your own conclusion, but as far as I'm concerned, she made a decision. (*walking to the table and picking up the bottle of pills*) She was in control. And when the time was right, she said, "I accept." What she did is not accepting defeat. It's heroic. (*pause*) There's a tradition in Japan. It's called hara-

kiri. A most honorable way to go. It takes real guts to look death in the eye and shake hands with it and say, I accept....That was my Frida, the fighter. Never the quitter.

(DIEGO walks to the bed. Puts the book down and pulls a sheet across her face.)

(The bed is carried out, leaving a table and a chair on the stage.)

Lights go down.

MUSIC.

(1944)

When lights come back on, DIEGO is sitting in the chair. He touches the dead flowers in the vase. Bottles of medicine and the fruit basket are no longer on the table.

DIEGO: I brought these to her. The last thing she said to me was ...

(FRIDA enters. She is wearing her hair short. She's dressed in a two-piece suit – pants and a jacket. She looks weak but angry)

FRIDA: You fat pig! You have the balls to bring me flowers! Take them back to your bitch, your Cristina.

DIEGO: She's your little sister.

FRIDA: For me, she's dead. She's your little whore. How dare you come to see me? You think I'll take you back because of these flowers?

DIEGO: You paint flowers all the time!

FRIDA: I paint flowers so they will not die.

DIEGO: Believe me, my Paloma, she meant nothing. She was just a fuck, it meant nothing. I put more emotions in a handshake.

FRIDA: *(throws the flowers at him)* How dare you speak to me that way about my sister! How could you do it?

DIEGO: I couldn't have you. She was the closest thing to you. Don't you see? I was longing for you.

FRIDA: You're a pig. All men are pigs. Only difference is some are little pigs, some are big pigs, like you, a big fat pig!

DIEGO: You didn't mind sleeping with me when I was married.

FRIDA: You were not married to my sister. And I was in love with you.

DIEGO: What's the difference? Love justifies your actions, not mine?

FRIDA: Yes! You men never understand anything. Yes, I made love with you because I loved you. Did you make love to my sister because you loved her? No. Because if you do, marry her. You have my blessings. Do you love her? Do you?

DIEGO: No, but I like her. She reminds me of you.

FRIDA: Then you should have come back to me. We are living next door to one another.

DIEGO: We are not living together. We are separated again.

FRIDA: There have been two great accidents in my life. One was the bus, the other was you. Diego, you were by far the worst.

DIEGO: That hurts.

FRIDA: You don't know what hurt is... Why did I marry you in the first place? I must have been blind. What did I see in you?

DIEGO: Do you want me to refresh your memory? (*gesturing towards the wall*) Or shall I make you a painting?

FRIDA: (*throwing a small handkerchief at him*) Don't flatter yourself. Here, paint your picture in this.

DIEGO: (*no longer angry*) You kill me.

FRIDA: (*laughing out loud*) I wish I could say the same about you. But the doctors are killing me. Are we going to work or are we going to waste time talking about meaningless ... fucks?

DIEGO: Work, work, work. Yes, work. Would you like some wine?

FRIDA: Wine does not mix with pain and work. Give me some cognac.

DIEGO: Brandy. A taste you acquired in Paris ... from Josephine Baker.

FRIDA: No, brandy, I liked before I met her. From her I acquired a rather new taste. New for me, not so new for you.

DIEGO: (*offering her a drink*) I did not mind your encounters with Josephine Baker and her other girlfriends.

FRIDA: For that you can kiss me ... on this side of the face. If you remember, this skin was removed from my ass.

DIEGO: I loved kissing it when it was there, I love kissing it when it's here. (*kisses her*) What do the two doctors from East Europe say?

FRIDA: They say it's going to take time. Which means it's going to cost a lot of money. I thought communism was about human dignity and not about money. Not so.

DIEGO: I told you so. A week after I met Trotsky, I knew they were all phony. Trotsky, Lenin, Stalin, all of them, turning around Karl Marx's words to their political advantage.

FRIDA: You thought Trotsky was the messiah. He walked on water. He could perform miracles.

DIEGO: I think that was your revenge affair. Don't talk about him and his philosophy. It was all bogus.

FRIDA: His miracle was not phony or bogus.

DIEGO: I don't want to talk about it. Don't ever talk about him or about your Japanese architect friend, Isamu Noguchi.

FRIDA: You're forgetting Heinz Berggruen, your personal secretary.

DIEGO: No, I have not forgotten him. But I have the good taste to not bring him up. This is one thing I cannot forgive.

FRIDA: You cannot forgive! Who's asking for your forgiveness? I was attracted to Trotsky's ideas, his words. And his wife seemed clueless. He was an oddity.

DIEGO: I don't want to discuss it. One marvels at oddities, one stares at oddities. One does not go to bed with oddities.

FRIDA: It meant nothing. It was just a fuck. Okay, more than once, but still it meant nothing. It was like a firm handshake.

DIEGO: More than once and it meant nothing? What do you think I am? A fool?

FRIDA: What do you think I have been ... all my life? A fool? What did my sister mean to you? It was more than once, no? Did she mean nothing? What about you and me before we were married? Nothing? And what about that little girl you used to screw in your studio when I first saw you? Nothing? It seems that all your life amounts to a series of big fat NOTHINGS . (*She storms out of the room.*)

MUSIC.

(1927)

DIEGO: The first paintings I saw by her, I knew, she had potential. She lacked discipline, but she had talent. I had to take her by the hand and guide her, cultivate her. But, how to

attract her? How to get her attention? I planted myself in places where she could see me. I left easy to find tracks. I let her discover where my studio was. She used to spy on me. I thought she was spying on me to learn my style of painting. That was not it. She spied on me with my models, you know, not just painting but making love with them. I knew she was watching. I let her. It kept her interested in me. She knew I was married and had children. It didn't bother her. My models didn't bother her. That's how I knew that she was an artist at heart. Dedicated to art and not concerned with trivial things like marriage, family, or my afternoon flings. Soon after we got married, she made a dual claim. She said, "I was born a bitch; I was born a painter." The world came to know her as a great painter; I got to know both her claims were true. I say it in the nicest possible way. She has left a space here in my heart that will never be filled. I will always miss her. For me, if you love someone once, you love them forever. Even if you can't stand them, you still love them. Loved her, I did. Desired her? you bet. I had dreams about her that would make most people blush. She was pure like the first flowers in the spring; she was like the smell of earth with the first few drops of rain after a long dry season. *(as if speaking to someone off stage)*

DIEGO: The only reason I seduced you was because I thought you were a virgin.

FRIDA: *(off stage) Don't flatter yourself; I would have still been a virgin after you seduced me.*

DIEGO: I don't think she needed to get married. I felt that I needed to marry her. Make her my wife. Both times. I made her happy, but I also caused her pain. I asked her, not too long ago, if she had gotten over me. She said she was still forgetting me.

(DIEGO exits)

MUSIC.

(1929)

(DIEGO enters. He is carrying a big tray of food. He puts the tray on the table and goes out. A moment later he returns with more food. He brings wine glasses and wine. He arranges the food and sets the table. FRIDA enters. She is wearing a bridal dress.)

DIEGO: Let's eat. It's been a long exhausting day. You must be very tired.

FRIDA: Standing around is hard for me. My neck hurts, my back hurts. Pain. I'm used to pain. As far as I can remember, life has been painful. All one can do is to find new hurt to forget the old pain.

DIEGO: I was looking at some of your work and I see the woman you paint again and again, she is in pain. Very surrealistic.

FRIDA: You also think I'm a Surrealist. Everybody else thinks so too. But I'm not. I don't paint dreams; I paint my own reality.

DIEGO: I'm going to make you very happy. Always. With my love, I'm going to make you forget your pain.

FRIDA: Good, Diego. I drank to drown my pain, but the damned thing learned how to swim.
(tasting the food and nodding her head in approval) For a cook, you're not a bad painter.

DIEGO: I'm glad you like it.

FRIDA: Diego, this is our wedding night. You were gone for three hours! Where have you been?