

fresh tortillas, nopal salad. From another she bought fresh, sweet maguery water, from another, tequila, and from yet another a bucket of cold beer. Surrounded by boats clunking against theirs and the shouts of merchants, they were a floating island of chaos and reverie, and Sedova, who sat across from Leon, sought out his eyes.

“Don’t worry, not like this, it’s too chaotic,” he said to her. “It would cause a great commotion. Others would get hurt. It would be suicide.”

To add to it, a mariachi band approached and blasted into string and trumpet. Frida sang along. A marimba band pulled up now, too, beating on their hollow tubes and crooning with their wooden flutes. The mariachis quieted as the marimba group played the love song “María Elena,” “*Vengo a cantarte mujer, . . . eres mi fe, eres mi Dios, eres mi amor.*” Kahlo knew every word of the soft, romantic melody.

In time the vendors dropped away, then the marimbas, and only the mariachi band remained. From his end seat, Trotsky gazed out the back of the skiff where amidst all of the floating color a man launched a small rowboat. He watched as the lone boatman swung the prow of his boat toward them, rowing, his back to them, dipping the oars with increasing rhythm. When Frida thanked and paid the mariachis, Trotsky stood and said, “Please ask them to stay a bit longer.” Then he stepped to the back of the skiff. Breton stepped next to him. The other picnic *trajineras* had followed the main channel while the poleman of the *Rosaria* guided their skiff to a slightly narrower bend to the left, a place where Kahlo had indicated she wanted to take them. Trotsky nodded at the rowboat.

“He seems to know what he’s doing.”

“Do you think?” said Breton.

“It won’t hurt to be ready,” Leon Trotsky said.

“We artists only commit suicide,” said Breton.

Trotsky laughed. He turned to the three women who were staring at him. “When that boat draws near, have the band strike up very loud,” he said to Kahlo.

“*Muy ruidoso,*” said Kahlo.

“*Y rápido,*” Trotsky said.

The rower moved determinedly now, glancing once over his shoulder to guide the rowboat toward the skiff, *Rosaria*. “Step back, comrade,” Leon said to Breton and raised his hand to the women. The band struck up as the rowboat met the skiff and the rower raised his arm for

a lift aboard. Trotsky casually offered him his wrist and lifted him as the women began to sing and scream to “La Cucaracha.” The boatman, now aboard, quickly reached to his belt and pulled out a knife. Trotsky pulled his .22 pistol from his belt and plunged it into the man’s stomach. There were two quick reports muffled by the music, song, and the attacker’s stomach, like the sound of two small firecrackers. Trotsky shoved the man back into his boat and pushed the rowboat away from the skiff with his foot. Kahlo quieted the band. “*Gracias,*” she said to them and paid them again. Trotsky raised his palms and said, “A man taking a nap in his boat on a beautiful day,” though before he could finish his sentence a bouquet of flowers fell from the air and landed in the rowboat.

Flowers falling from the sky. Then the air was filled with flowers, falling around them into the skiff. From the shore, and from some small skiffs poled by boys, girls flung armfuls of flowers and bouquets, pelting all of them. The rowboat filled with flowers, burying the assassin while Frida began gathering flowers, laughing and flinging them into the air, carnations, roses, marguerites, lilies, and more bouquets. “The Children’s Battle of the Flowers!” yelled Frida Kahlo. Sedova, Lamba, and Breton joined in, flinging flowers at each other. A rose struck Trotsky. “Struck by a rose!” Frida yelled and threw another, hitting his chest. A lily floated through the air and fell on the enflowered rowboat. Sedova pointed at it. Trotsky smiled wryly. The air was filled with shouts of children and the soft cascade of flowers.

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## DOROTHY ROBINSON

*Meaning What*, 2017

Oil on canvas, 48 x 64 in



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