



## **Incantation of Frida K.**

*Kate Braverman , M. Astella Saw (Designed by)*

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"I was born in rain and I will die in rain," begins Kate Braverman's *The Incantation of Frida K.*, an imagined life journey of Frida Kahlo. The book opens and closes inside the mind of Frida K., at 46, on her deathbed, taking us through a kaleidoscope of memories and hallucinations where we shiver for two hundred pages on the threshold of life and death, dream and reality, truth and myth. Defiant and uncompromising, Frida bears the wounds of her body and spirit with a stark pride, transcending all limitations, wrapping her senses around the places, events, and conversations in her past. Frida K. interacts from her hospital bed with her mother, sister, Diego, and her nurse. She calls herself a "water woman," navigating into unexplored dimensions of her world, leading us through the alleys of San Francisco's Chinatown, of Paris in 1939 (where she rubbed shoulders with Andr  Breton), and of her neighborhood in Mexico City, Coyoacan. Her voyage is an inward one, an incantation before dying. In *The Incantation of Frida K.*, Braverman's language dances and spins. She carves out a bold interpretation of the life of an artist to whom she is vitally connected.

## Incantation of Frida K. Details

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# From Reader Review Incantation of Frida K. for online ebook

## Jerm says

This is an EXCELLENT book. I like Frida Kahlo, but looking at the book I didn't think it would be very good. I was completely mistaken. This is one of the best books I've ever read. I'm not sure how biographically accurate it is, but the author does an incredible job of getting into Frida's head and showing us just what may have been going on in there. I love the relationship dynamic between Frida and Diego. I can't recommend this book enough, especially to anyone interested in art.

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## Mikimbizii says

*Our bodies are ultramarine like suffering and sweet masks and returning to the terrace in the last light, in a stalled transparency, longing for boats and splendor. Free fall and we know the violets and the postures of loss in winter. Diego. How we talked of love and awe while leaves scattered in complications of violet and jade. When we beat the linens clean on rock and draped teeth around our necks like captured moons. Before free fall and blistered autumn, when our lips became maps of where the taint lies. That was before the hard ceremonies, when we were cold and gave testament, when we swam out to meet all the ships, when we stood on terraces anointed by rain, when we lived in a country of rivers that had all names.*

Delirious - that is the only word to describe this book. I loved it at the same time I want to laugh at the immaturity of it. At its worst, this book is a rant; the self-pitying, angst-addled ramblings of a delusional narcissist and at its best, this book is what happens when poetry decides to luxuriously unspool and spread its scintillating feathers, softly stretch its furry paws, shake its opulent, iridescent mane and drunkenly, wantonly dance into the sunset. I was drunk on this book; Braverman's prose mesmerized me, made me forget time, reality. I read this book while recovering from flu. Perhaps it was the combination of clogged nose, cough mixture and reconstituted chicken soup, or perhaps it was the way she threaded her words – creating a fantastic paradise that could only be invented by a deranged imagination.... the vibrancy, the metaphors composed of warm spices and autumnal smells, emotions corpulent with delectable richness, so plush, so abounding that I was left breathless.

*A stalled harbor. Paralyzed. Becalmed. The water is fragile, translucent, the texture of some intrinsic confusion that lingers. I am the river concluding in the sea. I am coming home.*

*Between a concussion of sky and ocean, elegant, like a suggestion of bleached violets, I have drifted to a seaport in mist. Perhaps all the inhabitants have vanished. And I cannot determine if what I hear is rain or waves. Does it matter? There is no actual line between drowning and communion.*

*It's a spring of remission. Morning is a sequence of tamed waves rising and falling like strings of clear glass bells. I paint in my wheelchair. In between the azure gulfs and eddies of morphine, I paint in my canopied bed. My bed was lost for a while, I don't remember how, but now it has been returned to me.*

I could have easily given this book a five star if not for that undercurrent of smug laziness I could detect in the writing. Prose tumbled into prose, images unfolded in luscious cornucopia, metaphors mutated, soared, drunk, dazed and dancing and soon you start getting a sickening feel of having eaten too much cake, the one that has multiple layers, sprinkles, adornments and frostings of different flavors. The one that sticks to the roof of your mouth in a cloying, sugary lump.

There was too much saccharine – as if an overenthusiastic baker was trying to cover up a slipup with generous amount of butter and sugar. Half-way into the book, the repetitions starts to nag you – descriptions of autumns, the colours, the gardens, the drugged ravings, Digeo turning into a larger than life villain. Perhaps it makes sense as Braverman is trying to portray the Demerol and morphine fogged mind of a dying woman. But somewhere, the scrumptiously layered profusion seems to be an attempt to cover up the lack of a concise characterization or a narrative structure. There are no loose ends because everything is infused and plumped with sugared violets and candied roses, characters are richly painted and boxed in ornate frames to seem real, the narrative meandered, teased, tortured and eventually left me gasping with its malicious beauty.

I cannot claim to have understood the book. But I tasted it, felt it swelling, pulsating and breaking inside me brimming me with silken textures, moist orchards and kaleidoscopic visuals. I suffocated in that air soaked in liquescent light and swirling colours. A part of me was left bemused trying to feel something, anything for those miserable, self-centered characters yet another part of me splintered into a million fragments when I turned the last page.

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### **Lote L. says**

186 lapaspuses haotisku s?pju, nepr?ta un kr?š?a rudens. Breivermenai veiksm?gi izdevies iztulkot Fr?das gleznas v?rdos, att?lojot vi?as dz?vi m?kslinieces p?d?jo dienu drudža murgu form?.

Tom?r es tai nedodu visas piecas zvaigznes, jo arvien š?ita, ka gr?mata cenšas par daudz - manupr?t, ne jau katram teikumam ir j?b?t k? s?pju templim. No s?kuma uzsp?l?t? murgain?ba kaitin?ja, bet galu gal? es pieradu.

Gr?mata lika padom?t par cilv?ka ?erme?a p?stošo trauslumu un t? skaudro atš?ir?bu no gara un sapr?ta, un bija interesanti mekl?t m?lest?bu Fr?das un Djego skarbaj?s v?rdu apmai??s.

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### **Katherine says**

I still can't decide if I liked this book or not! The writing was very rich and beautiful... but relentlessly so, to the point where I wanted to say, "OK, does EVERY sentence have to be such a rich confection?" I found it a bit much but others may disagree. I did love the section describing their lives in San Francisco; I cannot walk throughout Chinatown without picturing it through Frida's eyes now.

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### **Laurel says**

I can't put this book down. Could have easily read it in one sitting but started it at bedtime and didn't dare stay up all night because I had work the next day! I put the other book I was reading aside to just look at this and that's all it took to get me hooked. But then, I am fascinated by Kahlo. I should say this is not for the average reader and there is a lot of graphic sex and violent behavior. I also think only people truly fascinated by Frida and her art and life will enjoy this.

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## **Diann Blakely says**

Conceived as a single opiated fever dream by Kahlo on her deathbed, Braverman's novel is stylistically compact, imagistically lavish and brutally confrontational as Kahlo's paintings. "I do not feel like a victim from the accident," Braverman's protagonist tells us near the beginning in the short, disjunctive sentences that sustain and derange the overall narrative momentum: "I felt chosen. Strangely, the actual collision was a clarification. I suspected that I was inexorably different. But an intuition is not proof. Now I had conviction." As Braverman's protagonist negotiates her way through a world as profoundly distorted by pain and drugs as a carnival house of mirrors, she also recognizes, gradually, the perverse freedom that the accident and its lifelong wounds gave her. Braverman's prose mirrors perfectly—and believably—the most dizzying and deranged psychological truths of Kahlo's story: "How mediocre I would have been without this chance event. In the months of incapacity, my true nature emerged. I was a solitary. No rules applied to me.... I accepted this. I relished it."

(originally published in the NASHVILLE SCENE / Village Voice Media)

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## **Emily says**

a gorgeous book, pulsing with life, takes great risks.

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## **Sally Howes says**

At a basic level, *THE INCANTATION OF FRIDA K.* is a book comprised of the morphine-addled stream-of-consciousness memories of a dying woman whose body is so broken that she should have been dead long ago. Sound grim? It's anything but. In fact, it's really a book comprised of color, texture, water, air, vivid emotion, and fierce individuality. It is a life lived out loud. Despite the traumatic story it has to tell, the only thing it lacks is any hint of self-pity, although it certainly contains an intense ferocity against a society that thinks the "asymmetrical," those with broken bodies, must have broken minds and spirits, too - that they can't possibly burn even brighter and love life even more passionately than their "able-bodied" peers. As Frida says: "There was an exchange. I gave them my human body, my standard-issue female possibilities, and in return, they let me open the door. I traded my body for canvas. I bartered human love for a palette, for having the veil removed from my eyes. There had been a trade, and I got the better of it."

*THE INCANTATION OF FRIDA K.* is a feat of imagination such as I have rarely seen equaled - if ever. Not just the interpretation of Frida Kahlo's own personal life but her entire inner world, the things she sees

that nobody else sees. According to Frida: "Morphine clarifies the memory, purifies and distills it, finds what was vivid, the indelible traces. With morphine a woman can find her footprints and follow herself down streets she does not remember. Startling images grow in the partial fish-silver dark, sulfur tinted, and singed like the aftermath of fireworks above a squalid river." I kept forgetting that I wasn't reading Frida Kahlo's own memoir, that this was a book written by someone who was not Frida. Perhaps that is the greatest compliment any author could receive, but I just have to add this: Kate Braverman is a genius. And I have not a shadow of a doubt that Frida Kahlo herself would thoroughly approve of *THE INCANTATION OF FRIDA K.*

In this book, Frida is the prime example of an unreliable narrator, but I couldn't care less. I don't want her story as it actually happened, I want her story as she sees it. And she amply justifies her own stance on the nature of remembering: "Memory is a construct, a series of sketches in constant fluctuation. It is an artifice. I did not look into the mirror but through it." In fact, memories, storytelling, reading, and listening all have a lot in common: "These anecdotes are recited through generations. What the grandmothers offer is not truth, but rather an approximation. As the story is repeated, there are mutations, in the one who speaks, and in the one who listens. In this way, all we ever exchange are forms of fiction."

There were certainly times when my conscious mind did not entirely understand what Frida was saying - but my unconscious always did. *THE INCANTATION OF FRIDA K.* is not meant to exercise the ego, it's meant to exercise the id. It's not a book you're supposed to understand, it's a book you're supposed to feel. I can't describe to you exactly what this passage means, for example, and yet, I understand it: "How can I know this, as rain falls and bells fall and dissolve, and petals and moths and stars? I am pagan. You cannot get to my birth-place simply by booking passage and having your passport in order. There are doors where your stamps and visas are rejected absolutely. Some points of entry are deceptive. The currency and conditions for admission are in constant fluctuation, like a woman dreaming. Perhaps you must offer human flesh, or gardenias out of season. Or butterflies in jars collected by crippled children in alleys dense with the scent of jasmine and urine and the sense that a woman has been recently slapped." Frida obviously understands the true power of words: "Words are charms or sails or stones. You offer verbal amulets to the air, to your husbands, and to circumstance."

For Frida, all things, times of day, seasons, themes, feelings have their own very particular color schemes. At one point: "... the air was vivid, cinnamon and copper, a seduction into possibility." At another: "The sun was beginning to set like certain satins and curry." Color, water, subversive femaleness are at the heart of this book: "I would know dusks are disguised, a mime of shadowed iris and asters. Painters and madwomen know this. Angry women. Discarded women. Women who lose their symmetry. Women who will not conform."

Air, textures, and different falls of light are also central to Frida's consciousness. For example: "Chestnuts are the texture of hypnosis, a quality similar to somnambulism but more curious, like waking in your sleep and drowning." Or in even more detail: "Fall. Damp leaves belly up in startlement. A litany of leaves like lipsticked mouths in gutters, what rustle, what taffeta, what October shudder. A canopy of branches had turned magenta, skinned bark a burgundy I could get drunk on. The parks were variations of auburn, charcoal, and russet. There was the fragrance of early lamplight, which is distinct like wild anise on northern riverbanks."

Symbolism is appropriate for an artist like Frida, and her symbol, her personal totem, is water, vital, full of depth, wending its way between the fragments of her narrative in every way imaginable, as she watches herself turning into water: "They will say I smoked cigarettes and marijuana, cursed hoarse as a crow in all my languages and loved morphine and Demerol, tequila and pulque, women and men. I will shrug my

illusion of shoulders and answer that I am a water woman, not a vessel, not something you can sail or charter. I am instead the tributary, the river, the fluid source, and the sea itself. I am all her rainy implications. And what do you, with your rusted compass, know of love?"

The contrast with her sometime-husband Diego Rivera's categorizing, blueprints, scaffolding, and obsession with all things man-made is stark: "Diego lacks an appreciation for the vagaries of vignettes. He believes there are indisputable memories, like chemistry formulas. He is convinced that progress is a matter of patterns, geometries that become buildings. I leave him with his ignorance." When Diego tells Frida she is out of order, Frida only wonders: "Out of order as in a courtroom, where there is punishment? Or out of chronological order? A woman can be punished for this. Men invented these sequences, how to build the Stock Exchange Luncheon Club, cathedrals and roads, airplanes, concentration camps, and machine guns. They play cards and bet on bulls and horses, but they do not believe in chance. How a piano nocturne on a silvery November afternoon just before rain falls is indelible." It isn't long before Frida, despite having a certain need of him, feels mainly contempt and pity for Diego: "Poor Diego. A man with the sensibility of pond scum."

This book is very feminist in style as well as content - fragmented; introverted; passionately emotional; feeling and sensing more than doing; jumping about in time and space; all but multi-tasking. For Frida: "Marriage was simply a context. It let me make my wounds specific." Diego is virtually Frida's antithesis in so many ways: "Diego considers a field and sees sunflowers and the backs of women. He has a vision of women gathering calla lilies, holding them in their arms like children or swans. Women with braids, on their knees in dirt. He prefers their backs because then they are like cattle or piñon trees. He does not consider their faces, which might require thought. Diego's women are merely symbols, leached of meaning. He might as well be reciting the Communist Manifesto or prayers with a rosary."

But her feminist views are far from self-centered, as she constantly watches and empathizes with all sorts of women from all classes and cultures: "The women in other apartments were greenhouse women, blossoming behind glass. They had the dreams of plants. They inhabited anonymous rooms, minimally furnished, utilitarian, generic. Everything is beige, dirty cream, and brown. It is a decor for women without personal vestiges. Such women have divested themselves of cousins and aunts, the family doctor, the baker who knows your name, the priest who married your parents. Some women prefer absence. They have evolved from a set of circumstances so monumentally painful that they must be shed absolutely. Some women run from their homes with only the clothes on their backs. Some women run naked, without shoes, without visas. This is called running for your life."

Frida's intention and much-desired aim of achieving the peace of a water woman and a vanished woman seems at least partly desirable in order to escape the limitations of men: "When they have skinned me completely, I will be as water women freed of their unnecessary bodies. Men prescribe these structures, these female forms, for pleasure and convenience and the perpetuation of sons. They invent laws and rituals to enforce this. I have taught myself to become deaf to them, oblivious. Of course, it's been a mutual decision. Mine has not been a typical exile but rather a negotiated settlement. I left the world as it is ordinarily known and it left me."

As the book progresses, Frida becomes more and more obsessed with her goal of "disappearing." This was not always easy for me to understand, but it became more intelligible in certain flashes of insight, particularly sparked by this passage: "When a woman has disappeared, everything is intelligible, human motivations and what wires carry. All impulses are equally coherent and predictable. Once you have divested yourself of ordinary structure, once you have lost or abandoned symmetry and body parts, once you have become more than subterranean, once you have successfully reconstructed yourself one atom at a time, you

sense when storms are coming."

Throughout, Frida's body and its afflictions are almost ciphers, not only for her own emotional state but also for the collective consciousness of all womankind. Perhaps this is why she seems to embrace her own asymmetry and pain so readily and wholeheartedly, even within the terrible moments following the horrific trolley-car accident that changed her life forever:

"What's the point?" the first doctor asked. 'Even if she lives, which she won't, she'll never have children.'

"The pragmatist. So I already offended their aesthetics and hierarchies, made their watches run backward, made nurses vomit. My name was barren bitch, abomination ... I realized that our lives are not static, passive, but rather a dance. It is not enough that you choose it. It must also choose you."

And that is when, how, and why she begins to paint: "The paintings were not of me. They weren't a striptease but a dissection. Autopsies of the still breathing."

Frida treats her pain and all the things she has lost - health, fertility, peace - not with regret or resentment but with irony and sarcasm. This is an entirely, entirely authentic reaction to such losses:

"I was already living posthumously. Then I began painting.

"I knew the border where absence is an ache, sunlight a betrayal. I recognized the raw scalloped edges, the deceptive taint in bone and leaf, shaky midnight, an interminable violation. Only a woman who has already died could dare to paint as a woman. A dead woman would use her stumps and the textures of terra cotta, the creamy mucus of afterbirth."

THE INCANTATION OF FRIDA K. certainly contains a myriad of savage and searing allusions to Frida's many kinds of trauma. For example: "I found beads and a bracelet composed of miniature machetes, knives, and hearts. This was how I said I hate you. I dressed for dinner. I brushed my hair, braided it with pink ribbons and pink silk flowers. Pink for atrocity, for scars and burns and girl babies." Yet in spite of all its trauma and raw emotions, reading this book always left me feeling calm. Perhaps it was cathartic.

This book is iridescent, phosphorescent, luminescent. Every single sentence glows with an artistry so beautiful it could break your heart wide open. THE INCANTATION OF FRIDA K. has become the book I will go to when the artist in my soul needs solace and refuge. And perhaps the most important message Frida had for me was this: No matter how ugly life gets, you can always wring beauty from it with your bare hands. "Perhaps I will consider landscapes. After all, there is only earth and silence and trembling in all the ruined latitudes. We are bodies with hands, words, and longing in the nights of impossible gatherings beneath jacaranda trees."

★This review is also available on my blog at [feelthepowerofstory.wordpress.com](http://feelthepowerofstory.wordpress.com)★

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## Judy says

Ok...as much as I love Frida K. and love learning about her life, I HATED the writers style. She writes in some fugue state that is filled with angst. Usually after a writer does about a paragraph in this style is jumps to regular prose. Holy cow, this made me crazy. Enough. Not a good read for me.



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## **Lauren says**

A fast and easy read, despite its rich language. I never before considered Frida Kahlo to be a major feminist icon - these days, she's more an icon of the eccentric and bohemian - but Braverman's interpretation has me convinced. If we listen to Braverman, we find that Frida was a bold, angry, unswaying woman, in deep with true physical suffering, imbibed with drugs and yet never sexually beholden to anyone except perhaps Diego, who is made out to be a self-absorbed monstrosity, his ego as mammoth as his famous murals. Likewise, the descriptions make Frida's world seem as toxic and colorful as one of her own paintings. Reading this book is like being awake for a perfect dream.

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## **Lexi says**

I hesitate to give this book three stars because I did not actually like it. I did not like Braverman's portrayal of Kahlo--I believe it is inaccurate. I found almost all of the writing to be very morbid, very depressing, very melancholy. Braverman essentially reflects upon the tragedy of Kahlo's life, albeit in flowery prose...prose that are sometimes very beautiful, sometimes bizarre and meaningless (meaningless to me, anyway). I felt that the writing is a little too contrived. However, it is experimental and rich enough to mark it as worth reading.

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## **Don Lively says**

Ms. Braverman's writing style is one of a few that can truthfully be described as exotic. The Incarnation of Frida K. is a vividly written novel containing prose that cut and heal, drown and bathe. Powerfully composed, this 'incarnation' of Frida Kahlo's life, as interpreted by the author, lets the reader live the painful journey of a 'vanishing' woman. I recommend this to anyone able to recognize and appreciate bold writing. Ms. Braverman pulls no punches and does not coddle the reader.

The novel relates a vibrant story drawn from the paintings and images produced by her subject, Frida Kahlo. If you are familiar with the paintings of Kahlo, you will immediately see them play out in this novel. Hard fought prose render a tortured life to the page beautifully, and tragically. A worthy read.

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## **Gara says**

This is the most favorite book that I own and have ever read. I spent a long time reading it. There is hardly a page in it w/out a sticky page markers, underlining, &/or notes that I wrote. I have an extensive list of phrases and words used in unusual ways.

I love this book so much because Frida is one of my favorite artists and because of the uniquely creative way it was written - it fits Frida and her art very well.

Some of my favorite paragraphs have to do with Flora Violetta, her imagined daughter. Especially favored is a paragraph on pg.131.

"...Flora Violetta was a winter baby. Winter daughters are most prized,...they long to be held. Winter daughters crave a Mother's lap. They are indoor children, content with paints and poetry books and music. Often ... choose not to marry, and remain with you." I have that kind of daughter.  
I also love when Frida talks of disappearing or vanishing.  
The remarkable use of language and thought in this book is beyond amazingly creative and thought provoking in many ways. I identified so much with this book that it captured me.  
If you're an artist (especially) and like unusual use of language, I highly suggest a read!

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## **Edward S. Portman says**

*L'incantesimo di Frida K.* rientra nella categoria di libri che finiscono per un motivo remoto nella mia lista di libri da leggere e che rimangono lì a fare muffa fino a quando non mi decido a leggerli. Possono passare anni prima che riprenda in mano un romanzo che mi ero segnato, magari per il semplice motivo che nel frattempo non riesco a trovarlo oppure non mi decido a comprarlo. Poi, quando finalmente apro il libro in questione, mi trovo davanti a un romanzo che non mi aiuta affatto a ricordare per quale motivo mi avesse interessato tanto da segnarmelo nella mia personale lista. Il lavoro di Kate Braverman è l'esempio più lampante di quanto descritto poco sopra. Non era difficile intuire che il libro trattasse la pittrice Frida Kahlo, di cui io non è che sia un appassionato scatenato. Eppure c'è stato un momento, c'è stato un motivo, c'è stata magari una frase o un periodo, un capoverso, un paragrafo, capace di attirarmi e in un particolare periodo della mia vita (lo so, così sono un po' troppo epico/fatalista). Leggendolo però non sono riuscito a ritrovare niente che avrebbe potuto esercitare su di me un così potente potere attrattivo.

La lettura per questo si è forse trasformata in una specie di caccia al tesoro che come tutte le caccie al tesoro troppo difficili finiscono per deluderti. Molto probabilmente il target di riferimento in fase di stesura era un po' più specifico, ovvero fan sfegatati dell'artista messicana, ma anche con questa scusante (soprattutto perché non riesco a immedesimarmi abbastanza per esprimere un giudizio) il libro risulta un po' troppo pesante, e forse anche un pizzico confuso. La narrazione non è prettamente lineare, e le vicende si susseguono una dopo l'altra senza continuità di tempo, a volte pure leggendole più di una volta, come nel caso dell'incidente stradale. Questo potrebbe essere una nota positiva, ma la vera grande pecca è, a mio avviso, la prosa troppo piena ed eccessivamente barocca. Il modo di scrivere di Kate Braverman ti riempie la bocca e la testa, non ti dà respiro, ti fa sentire sempre pieno, come se stessi mangiando e stessi buttando giù un boccone un po' troppo grande. Il tutto è appesantito ulteriormente da un altro aspetto, che potrebbe anche essere una sciocchezza ma che secondo me non è da trascurare, ovvero la decisione di non dividere la storia in capitoli, ma buttarla giù senza interruzione, dividendola solo in grandi paragrafi. Può sembrare una cosa da nulla, ma in realtà così facendo il lettore ha la sensazione di stare leggendo il romanzo tutto d'un fiato, quasi in apnea. Io almeno mi sono sentito così, con l'aggiunta tra le altre cose di essere arrivato in fondo al libro e di non aver capito/ricordato cosa mi avesse spinto a leggerlo, tanto tempo fa, quasi fossi stato una persona diversa. Forse è vero, chissà.

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## **Kathy says**

Through the magic of Kate Braverman's imagination you are inside the head of dying Frida Kahlo. Amazing as the concept itself is the author's artistry in communicating the thoughts of a woman in pain who is reliving moments in her life as an artist, feminist, political activist, and wife of Diego Rivera. The writing is stunning and even though at times you become lost in Frida's drug-induced dreams it's worth the effort to hang in there

