& then the woman who wants to sleep with my husband sends him a card with Frida Kahlo’s sepia face peering through it & he begins reading the note aloud to me, as if the words might bring the woman back across the line she crossed that summer he mentioned her name for the first time. Then I think his brush with temptation isn’t as noble as he’d like to believe, more like cleaning the house when it gets dirty—he could mark it on a table of triumphs, but, at the end of the day, it mostly amounts to what he is supposed to do.

Men are so clueless sometimes, which isn’t a revelation, but occasionally needs restating & brings to mind something I read about Lenny Kravitz composing penitent lyrics for Lisa Bonet, for committing particular betrayals to song, how he believed the pair might reconcile as soon as Lisa heard the album he’d dedicated to her. Women are clueless sometimes, too, like the one who cried to me on a campus bench that she wanted to be an artist, to travel, while the others rushed to lunch, to more classes. & what should she do? Then I thought,

*People are always asking questions whose answers they already know & That’s a great necklace she’s wearing*
which I told her, but she recoiled when I said
wearing turquoise jewelry & Frida Kahlo skirts
doesn’t make women artists, which was probably the cruelest
thing
I’d ever said to a young woman, but exactly how I felt
watching her fuss over the ruffles of her long, black skirt.
These days, Frida Kahlo appears like a god to whom I’ve
prayed, like accessories that shake at the bottom of a woman’s
shopping bag, a loose divinity of feel-good postcards &
magnets
rocking on paper handles in the crease of an upright arm.
This is what I think when I ask my lover to stop
reading the note he wants me to render harmless.

Does a woman’s affection for Frida make her
my comrade? Years ago, with my head wrapped & bracelets
jangling, I might have answered yes. But when I ask
Who’s Lupe, Who’s Frida, Who’s Diego? I can’t help but
conclude
someone’s at work on a grand cliché I’m supposed to buy into
& there’s nothing harmless about Frida Kahlo, exquisite painter
of stitches & steel, thorns & wombs & vaginas—something
utterly
misleading about Frida’s face on a 4 x 4 note card, a little
too neat & too square, which makes sense in the American
sense
of matinee love or lust or art or what passes for art, or living
the life of an artist, those heroes & heroines dangling over
the cliffs of vanity, begging for a little more rope.