

Cultural Daily

Independent Voices, New Perspectives

Barbara Jane Reyes: Two Poems

Barbara Jane Reyes · Friday, May 19th, 2023

Mother's Day

Ask her what was her first memory of joy

Ask her what she did when they told her she must do as they say

Ask her what she did when they told her to shut her mouth

Ask her what she did when they told her she couldn't do anything she wanted

Ask her if they ever told her not to follow her own dreams

Ask her if she ever loved him

Ask her if she ever thought of leaving

Ask her if she ever thought of leaving, and then talked herself out of it

Ask her who has hurt her

Ask her how they hurt her

Ask her if he hurt her

Ask her how he hurt her

Ask her if he hurt her often, always

Ask her if he hurt her every night

Ask her if anybody heard her, and if they did, why did they do nothing

Ask her if they told her to shut her mouth and bear it, bear everything with grace

Ask her what she did when they told her to be a wife, a mother, was her duty

Ask her if she has ever had a pure moment of quiet

Ask her if she ever wished she'd never left the provinces

Ask her if she ever wished she'd never gone to the big city

Ask her if she ever wished she'd never come to America

Ask her if she was afraid

Ask her if she was afraid every day

Ask her if she believed him when he showed her his fists

Ask her if she believed him when he showed her his firearm

Ask her if she ever slept through the night

Ask her if she ever said no

Ask her why

Ask her why she never said no, when everyone's requests became demands

Ask her why she kept giving

Ask her why she kept giving to those who would not give back

Ask her if she ever fed her own hunger

Ask her why she never kept anything for herself

Ask her why she never set it all on fire and drove away

Ask her why she stayed, when even her sisters were telling her to go

Ask her why she never told you any of this

Ask her if she would have told you, if you'd only asked in the first place

Ask her how she did it all without you, or anyone to help

Ask her if you have done enough to help her

Ask her what you could have done to fill her

Ask her what you could have done to heal her

Ask her if she wishes you would have done more, or anything at all

Ask her if she knows you have been angry on her behalf

Ask her if she knows you have been shouting on her behalf

Ask her if she cares

Ask her how it could have been better, even though it's irrelevant now

Ask her if you could have protected her, even though it's irrelevant now

Ask her how you hurt her

Ask her if she will accept your apology

Ask her if she will ever forgive you

Ask her if you deserve her forgiveness

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Brown Girl Creed 3

I believe in my mother, much more than the sum of her suffering

see the flowerbed blooms in the womb
 see the pots of pink succulents flowering
 and vegetable vines in the veins
 taste the heart's earthy stew of roots and fruit
 fill our lungs of pink jasmine to trellis the trachea
 tickle the larynx with monarch butterflies
 let us weave a crown of sampaguita for her

I believe in my mother, our lady of luya, our lady of laing,
 descendent of centennarians and soldiers,
 daughter of dressmakers, doñas, doctoras,
 asawa ng makulit, at makalat, kahit nakakainis, asawa pa
 ina dagiti bartekera, how a proper lady raised four drunk girls
 lover of In-N-Out Burgers, lover of prosecco in tiny sips

I believe my mother left us too soon; and I never posted video
 of her dancing tango with the drag queens at Gattaran town reunion,
 or playing Rachmaninoff on the piano on Saturday morning,
 or Spamsilog Sunday, because her girls are hungover again
 how many hands, how many eyes must have been required
 how a single womb does beget such a schedule

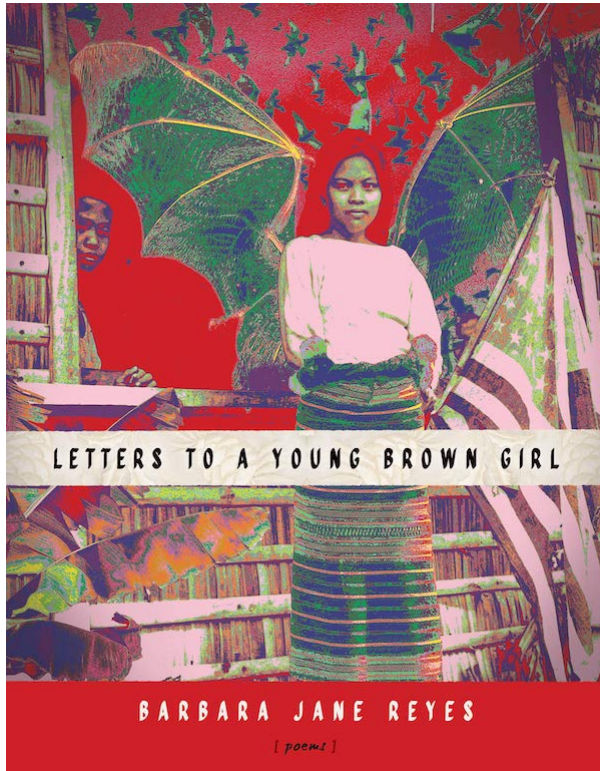
I believe she left us too soon;

I'm still trying to text her when the Dubs game is on,
 and when Giants baseball radio broadcasts are back,
 and when I've had the best quesabirria tacos ever,
 and when it's a good time to go bargain shopping
 and can we stop at Valerio's for pan de sal after the mall,

And I will always want these things, all the things with her,
 to sit in her garden with her, our lady of lemon trees
 to singsong among the backyard weeds, here, the angels sleep
 and so I continue to wear my grief soaked dress
 and so I continue to apply my grief tinted lipstick

And I believe I am still a daughter, I will always be a daughter

though my hair now grief gray, face now dark spotted dull
though my father has passed, and my mother has now passed
I am second daughter of the dead, daughter dreaming of the dead
daughter awoken as orphan, irrevocable daughter still
middle daughter undeniable, now and ever. Amen.



Letters to a Young Brown Girl by Barbara Jane Reyes

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