

# Cultural Daily

Independent Voices, New Perspectives

## Barbara Jane Reyes: Two Poems

Barbara Jane Reyes · Saturday, January 15th, 2022

### Daughtersong Ending With a Pot of Lugaw

1.

    this is my story  
where stories are shaped like the ocean, deep blue hue  
they move with the moon, they pull us into them, they surge  
which is to say, it moves with the mothers, and their mothers  
which is to say, it has been gifted quietly to all the daughters  
which is to say, it must be given and received at the right time —  
    how I remember  
elder women taught us how to turn the verse, to make fire  
how to light the earthen pots, and wide pebbled paths  
through the churchyard of cow dung and grazing goats  
the church stones still blackened from last century's wars  
which is to say, we are daughters, granddaughters of war —

2.

what I know is there is always too much if if story is sown by our elderwomen's hands, if planted  
into terraced mountains turquoise at solstice if in bare feet, to run in its mud knee deep so sweet  
if we could weave story from red threads of horn carved beads strung through the ribs of our  
language, along its ridges into its hard glottal stops if I was afraid to ask her it is because she  
(always said she) never had time to remember if she knew choosing to forget was a kind of death  
if story may come if you know how to ask if to ask is a hard earned art if story comes if you  
know how to ask a wound if it will split itself to spill and tell if the wound has ever wholly  
woven itself shut what I know is my mother is dead and all of her stories are in the wind what I  
know is now I am making it all up, rewriting everything about us in her absence

3.

    this is our story  
given silences simmering in our stew pots  
given pencils in secret, and hand sewn books  
given only moonlight sees the water of our eyes  
and how to soothe the open pits in our bellies

given that hunger has many ways of being —  
     how we remember  
 in our perfect penmanship, to write our stories  
 given spring water, flor de sal, and neckbones  
 given bawang, luya, saffron in tiny pinches  
 which is to say, we feed all who will come to us  
 with salted hands shaped into empty bowls

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## Letters I Never Sent to My Mother

1.

*what I cannot remember, I'll pretend instead*  
 that we are not simply spores at the mercy of gale  
 germinating faith in air, unhusked and blooming  
 from seedlet to sapling to hardened heartwood  
 from minerals gliering beneath deep soil beds  
 what if our tender words could grow from seed  
 that we could reach into our sharp spined trees  
 pluck the poems, reddened flesh, falling, free  
 and when our droughted roots curl from thirst  
 that we could break apart the terrain and disperse  
 drink wildfire as if it were rainwater (or wine)  
 that hearing these verses could be so consoling  
 we could be so gorgeous, thorned, revolting

2.

*we carry in our heart the true country and that cannot be stolen*  
 tongues are tricky, and we were given slippery translation —  
 I say this not to place blame but to utter one unfulfilled wish  
 that I would have recognized while you were still alive  
 how you moved your water in times of need, mother tree  
 spreading all the autumn sunlight only she could reach  
 knowing the art of sharing sugar threading through dirt  
 through the dark wood and soil of decomposed matter  
 coaxing her sapling daughters upward from her deep root  
 they named us invasive, in translation, they said we'd wilt  
 but we bound their leaves and wrote down your stories  
 the ones from your mother, the ones all the kumares knew  
 this memory's deep well, filled with spirit and medicine  
*we follow in the steps of our ancestry and that cannot be broken*

3.

let my mother know how she was loved  
 for more than her usefulness to everyone  
 let my father know he could have been

more than his patriarchs had prescribed  
let my mother know that she deserved  
the happiness we were all disallowed  
let my father know that we were dying  
for the smallest evidence of tenderness  
I am not brave, truth telling to the dead  
a storyteller in a slow moving storm  
all the poems I could not give you then —  
offerings of song in your mother tongue  
hymns from the hummingbirds hovering  
sipping sweet water on Sunday morning

4.

*what I cannot remember, I'll pretend instead*  
that we had time for art, that we deserved art  
to cover our walls in watercolored murals  
to fill the sala with symphony, starlight  
that we always had time to tend the earth  
to gather flowers and mushrooms for hours  
to steep tea, to breathe the clean sweet air  
to heal you with leaves from our bayabas tree  
*what I cannot remember, I'll pretend instead*  
to talk to the wind that will carry us here  
to rest you among the santos and virgin  
to fashion you a crown of flowering herbs  
to weave bamboo, red threads, soft feathers wings  
to return you to your waiting mother

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## TO A YOUNG BROWN GIRL



BARBARA JANE REYES

[ poems ]

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Barbara Jane Reyes

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