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 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.

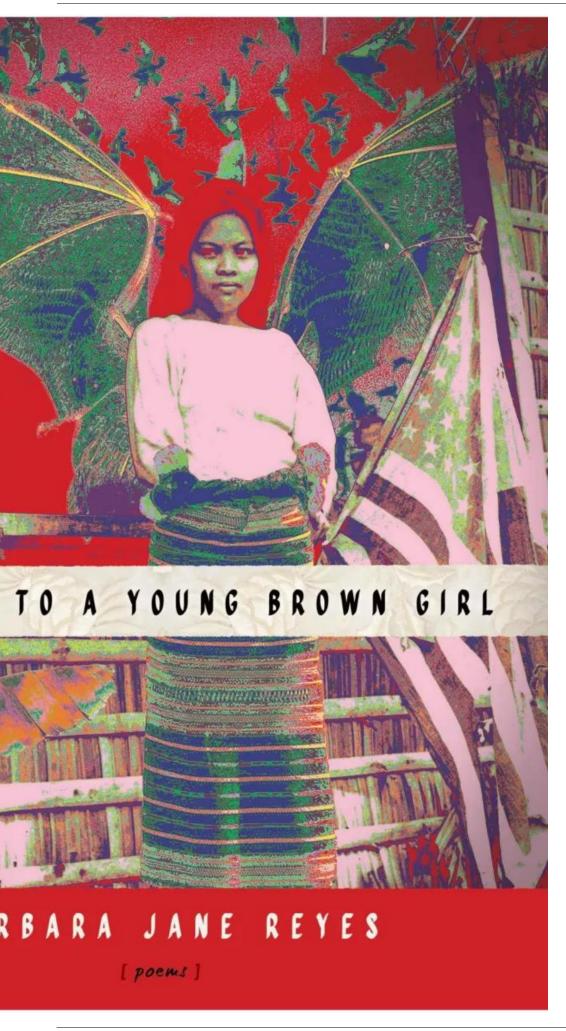
we carry in our heart the true country and that cannot be stolen tongues are tricky, and we were given slippery translation — I say this not to place blame but to utter one unfulfilled wish that I would have recognized while you were still alive how you moved your water in times of need, mother tree 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



arbara Jane Reyes

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