

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

*

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



TO A YOUNG BROWN GIRL



BARBARA JANE REYES

[poems]

Barbara Jane Reyes

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