

Cultural Daily

Independent Voices, New Perspectives

Little Girl

Amber Wang · Tuesday, October 19th, 2021

Inspired by the poems “Brown Girl Breaking” and “Brown Girl Beginning” in *Letters to a Young Brown Girl* by Barbara Jane Reyes

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They ask me if I was born lucky. Oh, to have three older brothers. Oh, to be the baby, the little precious princess of the family. You should be grateful. I always answer yes because I love my brothers, but I notice they are never asked the same questions. They don’t need to be lucky after all—they’re boys. That means Legos, Yu-Gi-Oh cards, and basketballs all belong to them, so no matter how cool you think those are, you cannot touch. You can, however, be ridiculed for the things you were taught to like. Dress-up with your dolls, evening gowns made of curtain drapes, and mama’s sparkly high heels—all too girly, all too vain. When I tell mama I want to be a boy when I grow up, she doesn’t even look up from her place at the cutting board, stacked with flour skins and a bowl of dumpling fillings. That’s ridiculous, she says. What do they have that we don’t? And at five years old, my only reply was: they can pee standing up if they want to. But looking back, I think it was the choice that made all the difference.

They ask me why I want to quit ballet. You can’t take martial arts, why does a little girl need to learn how to fight? No, ballet is the proper way to bruise and bleed. With pain comes elegance, with elegance, femininity. Don’t cry, you must sit still and endure the burning between your outstretched legs when they push you against the wall. (Flexibility training, they call it, but why does it feel like they’re just conditioning me to open my legs and embrace the pain?) You must keep your shoulders back and your spine straight. Show off your curves, your grace, your face. You must be pretty in pink and skin-tight things. Suck in your stomach—no one wants to see that. Look at your thighs, they are too round. How will they fit in? How will you carry this weight? You are already seven, you should know better. You must be delicate. You must be pliant. You must bend when they tell you and keep a smile on your face.

They ask me why I can’t choose to be someone sensible, realistic. For the 6th grade Living History Museum, you need to step into the shoes of a historical figure. Perhaps Queen Elizabeth I or Christopher Columbus? I stand firm in my answer: Apranik Pirandokht, Persian military commander and resistance fighter. Her insignificance in western culture does not lessen the importance of her existence. Ah, but you must remember your place. You can never be ruler or warrior; those titles were not meant for someone like you. You can only be princess, healer, sweetheart, laundry basket, china bowl, punching bag. Look, look how lucky you are. You have so

many choices when you are born a girl.

They ask me why I stopped wanting to be a girl. I tell them the problem was never being a girl.

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