

For the Aswangs¹ who are your *best friends*² (a triad)

After Barbara Jane Reyes

1.

Let it be known— daylight would have nothing to do with me. Hued ~~bitch~~-butch, I could mangle maws, but I prefer to cleave the cursive of your daughter. At night my desire razorblades rivulet veins. After all, a craving is a craving. Palm leaves sway against starlight, something hymnal, what is a better soundtrack? So sure, my abdomen might be a chess piece for a rebellion nobody wanted. My esophagus riled to brine, bucks hums. Together, we'll swivel brolic, I promise. Why boast baptisms or battles, when there's hunger for daughters and wives? Call me belligerent or desire or all of it. In every barangay, I tally limbs. I track deluge. I strap sampaguita lush. In the pantheon of monsters, it's not just about blood, I take it all. Track intestines, guzzle kidneys, binge scalp silk. To fear might as well be incantation. To croon is corpuscular. To moon is mayhem. Maybe we are all just someone's idea, someone's folklore gasping to be fed? Maybe I'm not so carnal after all, maybe the economy of limbs can be just enough. Here you come, pointing fingers all gloom and guttural, when we all segment ourselves as best as we can to stay alive. Don't tell me you haven't undone your own beliefs, fissured your face for office jobs and family acceptance. My crime is that I spill gash wide open. For me fish there is no such thing as pretend.

¹ "Depending on who you ask, you'll get a different answer as to what an **Aswang** is. She can be a shapeshifter, or a werewolf or a vampire, a spinster. In truth, the Aswang is a monster born out of enlightenment and colonialism, a narrative tool once used to get a whole country of heathen women to behave," By Melissa Chadburn, *Electric Literature*, *You Better Be Good or the Aswang Will Get You*. (April 12, 2022)

² Cultural Context **Best friends**: LGBTQ Fil-Am romantic relationships are accepted sometimes indirectly using the term "best friends" to signal a boyfriend, girlfriend, even spouse (often referred to as, in front of reluctantly accepting family members and elders)

2.

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3.

mangle maws.

cleave your daughter.

my desire a craving against starlight

So sure

nobody

riled, bucks hums

I promise

battles,

belligerent or desire.

In the pantheon

It's not just about blood,

mangle maws.

Track

guzzle

binge

fear is
corpuscular.

Maybe we are

gasp

Maybe

maybe

all gloom and guttural

you

stay

tell me you

spill

wide