



## Daughter of a Promise: A Novel

**Jeanne McWilliams Blasberg**

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*Women storytellers and communal bases of women's knowledge undergird a woman's year of self-discovery in New York in the intimate novel Daughter of a Promise.*

In Jeanne McWilliams Blasberg's coming-of-age novel *Daughter of a Promise*, a woman undergoes a tough, transformative year, making her way in New York City.

Betsabé, the daughter of Cuban immigrants, was raised by her mother, Gloria, and her grandmother, Yaya, in Miami. Upon finishing college, she puts her dreams of acting on hold. She begins a position as an analyst at an investment bank, working under David, with whom she sparks a semi-illicit attraction. While the thrills of the city are promising, Betsabé is too swamped by looming deadlines and a competitive atmosphere to enjoy them. The outward glitz and glam of her new lifestyle is hard to reconcile with her lower-middle-class background: she is both envious and scornful of the status and privilege that surround her.

Betsabé narrates, in the form of an extended letter addressed to her unborn son, Sol. She devotes considerable time to reflecting on her experiences during her first year in New York. Her tone is intimate and self-aware; she makes space to acknowledge her imperfections. And small moments are cast as profound: when her roommate, Rae, confronts her about a missing ring, Betsabé lingers on the scene, noting that she spewed anger—and refused to admit that she tried it on and put it back. Unspeakable jealousy, indignation, and shame color her perceptions.

Betsabé's moving relationship with Yaya exists in contrast to such troubles; it is the novel's other driving force. Indeed, Betsabé continues to draw from her grandmother's knowledge and heartfelt spiritual leadership even in New York. She recalls that Yaya worshiped Yemayá, a sea goddess representing femininity and sensuality. Throughout, Yaya and Yemayá are invoked as consistent centers of compassion, love, empathy, and strength, and Betsabé tries to impart their wisdom to her son in turn.

Betsabé's narration is somewhat undermined, though, by her occasional focus on the minute details of financial transactions at her job. The exploration of the ambiguity of Betsabé's romance with her boss, David, is more fascinating. While Betsabé is aware of the power and age difference between them, acknowledging that "victimhood was the popular narrative, mine for the taking," she refuses to adopt that label. Instead, she chooses to frame her story as one of courage and self-determination. And she is convincing in doing so as she strives for love, self-fulfillment, and her own place in a messy world. She refuses to let anyone else quell her own fervent pursuit of personhood, even when she feels in over her head.

A fresh college graduate experiences life away from her family in Miami in *Daughter of a Promise*, a powerful feminist novel set during a tumultuous year in New York.

ISABELLA ZHOU (December 13, 2023)

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