

Poetry

Chrysalis

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Abstract

Description

This poem explores the experience of being an Asian American care provider and civilian, growing up and trying to mesh together culture with “fitting in” and suffering racism from other individuals and patients. It was inspired by the March 16, 2021, shootings in Atlanta and discusses the origin of hatred and racism/xenophobia. What I hope this conveys is a glimpse into the shared perspectives of many Asian American and Pacific Islanders and describes the optimism moving forward as we begin to tackle these issues.

Keywords

humanities; poetry; Asian American; AAPI; medicine in the arts; race; racism; racial discrimination; hate; cultural diversity; social discrimination; patient care

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Playground rules and awareness of other

Innocent ostracizing innocent

We did not know then

That when I walked with my mother in her salwar kameez

The fabric printed, embroidered, lovingly packaged and brought from the homeland

Her mouth yielding words in a language they had never heard before

It was nothing to be ashamed of

Embracing your culture is not a passive process

It requires you to leap forth and overcome

Take over the stereotypes on television and the media

Shatter your identity into parts until you don't remember which was the one you held closest

It requires you to wrap yourself into a cocoon,

And emerge transcendent

When those we care for say they don't like our kind

That they know who we are

And they have no trust in us

How are we supposed to react?

How can I tell her that my people are the people of the rice fields at sunset and the lily paddies in the day?

Our patients play at being coy, that they have their own opinions, that they know what they know, and that we are the other

Yet we heal them and care for them without complaint

Trained by years of just letting it go

March 16, Atlanta, organizing center of the civil rights movement
Six women who had spent their last day surrounded by white floors and the smell of nail polish
 Gone in an instant
Six women who had fought the battle of the American dream only to encounter vitriol against
Asian-Americans

Hate is not a virus
 Hatred does not spread passively, riding currents of respiratory droplets
 Hatred is bred, engineered, nurtured in people's hearts
 The crops of hatred are watered daily and yet when they are reaped
 We play at surprise
 We let this happen

Brushing atrocious acts aside like crumbs on a picnic table
Like they had brushed us aside for years
Work in the shadows and you will be left alone
He had a bad day, they said
We are done having bad days
We are waking up from this nightmare
 And calling forth the sun

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares she has no conflicts of interest.

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