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

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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