



IF WE WERE BIRDS

Janine Harrison

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Locofo Chaps is dedicated to publishing politically-oriented poetry.

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I.

We were babies, toddlers, preschoolers, grade schoolers,
when carried over borders,
 allowed entry via visas now expired.
We absorbed English like top soil imbued by rain.
Outlooks as pliant as our cartilage
we fed and drank American myths
of hard work and boot straps,
 college
 white pickets and 2.5.

Only later did we understand
in high school
 in driver's ed.
 on field trips over state lines
when applying for first jobs
 college
that we lived outside
 looked in a window so clean
 if we were birds
 we would have flown into the glass
 would have made that sound
 you know the sound, the clunk
 that makes you wonder
 Will it ever fly again?
 The sound that makes you dread
 opening the door
 bending down to examine.

We wear shrouds
 are *not* seen, *not* heard
don't complain
 break laws
 report violence
don't even whisper

as we tiptoe through
days and years
afraid of 15 minutes
tapping us on shoulders
15 minutes of shame
as we are deported to countries
where aromas assault our noses
 sounds startle us to shivers
we may speak the language
but cannot speak the culture.
We were raised on
“Take Me Out to the Ballgame,”
PBS Kids,
M&C and M&M’s,
“Rock, Paper, Scissors”
fist bumps and 4th of July,
Star Wars and Marvel.

We learned in school:
If you believe it, you can achieve it.
You can be anything you want to be.
Each imagined a street sign
bearing our name,
all gold roads leading to
American Dreams.

We later grew to know
without papers
we can be Honor Roll,
4.0,
National Honor’s Society,
Who’s Who,
Salutatorian,
Valedictorian –
it won’t matter:
We are Juan Doe and Juana Doe

We are untapped clean energy for future consumption.

III.

When police pulled over
Daisy Romero's Dad
for a broken tail light
he didn't have a license.
The officer asked,
"Why are you driving...
if you know it's not okay?"
Her dad replied,
"Because we
have to survive."

Aseal Reyes
dropped out of high school
feeling he had "no future."
With DACA,
he is a 4.0 double major.

A U.S. history teacher explained,
"DACA allows me to
give back to my community.
I teach in the same neighborhood
I grew up in."

Denisse Rojas explained,
"Without DACA or
a long-term remedy,
I will not be able to practice
as a doctor."

"The moment I was smuggled
into this country
at the age of seven,"

argued Fidencio Fifield-Perez,
“my body ceased to be my own.
DREAMers’ bodies have been debated,
regulated, rounded up...
The stakes have risen...
We find ourselves repeating
what we’ve done before,
convincing you that we exist,
while allowing you to ignore
that our parents are
the original dreamers.”

IV.

When Mexican ancestors came,
they were greeted with signs:
No Mexicans Allowed
We Serve Whites Only –
No Spanish or Mexicans
No Mexicans or Dogs.
Low-wage migrant workers,
they were deported during
Great Depression “Operation Wetback” –
suddenly accused of stealing
American jobs.

Like the Italians, the Irish, the Chinese,
all the unwanted before us
still we came.
Now we are the largest
minority population.
Did the USA fall apart
when the Chinese Ban was lifted?
Will it fall apart if children
trained as tight-rope walkers
on the hyphen between

“Mexican” and “American”
are built a highway to citizenship?

V.

Native Americans believe
the Eagle is Master.
Eagles fly higher, see better,
commune with Father Sky.

Bald and Golden Eagles*
are equally revered
by these indigenous people –
here before the French and the Spanish
the English came

If we were birds
we would rise and fly again
accept leftovers no longer
we would have broad wings
be fast, agile, and strong
be Golden Eagles ascending.
We all exist as Eagles in America.

*The Golden Eagle is the national bird of Mexico and also
lives in the Western United States.

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