

ACCEPTANCE.

TRUTH.



Taking Back Sad

Allison Joseph

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Locofo Chaps

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Locofo Chaps is dedicated to publishing politically-oriented poetry.

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Ghazal With Lost Naturalization Certificate

I really want to love this country
but I'm not really of this country

I want to stay but papers have been lost
I don't think I'm above this country

Came when I was young, green card in hand
a resident thereof this country

I thought that we could help each other live
another hand in glove, this country

Who pushes out the needy and the lost?
Who's pushing back to shove this country?

Should we prepare for when it all runs out
we wing it off the cuff, this country

Such patriots remind us every day
we make tremendous stuff—this country!

It's not a sin to need some help in life—
why act so rough and tough: this country?

So many cruel effects, so many lies
Another mourning dove, this country

Immigrant Girl

I learned to speak the language,
I learned to blend, fit in.
I lost my ethnic accent,
replaced it with a grin.

I learned to blend, fit in,
to walk where I should walk,
to modulate my grin,
to whisper when I talk.

I walk where I should walk,
away from all of you.
I whisper when I talk,
the words I say are few.

Away from all of you,
at home when I'm alone.
The words I say are few —
my silences have grown.

At home when I'm alone,
in memory, I'll hide.
The cruelty I've been shown,
this hurt to native pride.

In memories, I hide,
the past still here with me.
This hurt to native pride,
abandoned history.

The past still here with me,
I lost my ethnic accent,
abandoned history.
I learned to speak the language.

Don't Speak To Me

I'll ask you not to brush away my pain
to claim you know my feelings more than me
explaining what I've lived through yet again
debating every nuance that I see

I'll ask you not to argue that I'm wrong
when I have nightmare visions of this land
when I dissect each patriotic song
admitting that this nation's less than grand

for some of us who live in darker skin.
I'll ask you now to stop your blunt attacks
proclaiming I must take it on the chin
describing all the courage that I lack.

I have a right to all this angry grief—
I'll burn down every stage to get relief

Memo from the Accused Girl

the school did not protect me
dismissing my complaint
the school called me a liar
said I should choose my dates

with wisdom and discretion
that I should be demure
that kind of education's
not what I'm paying for

they called me loud and crazy
for speaking up and out
preferring I stay lazy
abhorring how I shout

to make sure that my anger
goes everywhere at once
past all the campus officers
that mostly useless bunch

they came to get my interview
as if it were a joke
an ugly laughing audience
every time I spoke

so I went to the hospital
for them to stitch me up
somehow I was the one to blame—
my hair, my dress, makeup

all made me "someone's slut"
instead of someone's daughter,
somebody's angel child.
again I heard their laughter

again I heard their blame,
But I won't let me anger
be buried under shame
not silent any longer

when frat boys speak my name.

When We Leave

When the people who hate us
with the power of a thousand suns
finally bring us to that final despair
we're taking everything with us—
the sauces and spices and music,
all the DJs on the wheels of steel,
all the hip-hop and up-rock,
the boogie and the blues.
No gumbo left for you.
No mofongo. No plantains.
We're taking all the salsa,
the soy and the fufu,
char siu and dim sum,
all the fry bread and callaloo,
the adobo and tandoori,
teriyaki, mounds of soba.
No flavor no flava no sabor no sazón
left—all the goya and malta gone.
No accent marks to scare you anymore.
No names whose vowels make you sweat.
No—we're not leaving Jordan.
No—you can't have Drake—
though Canadian, he's got peeps
in Memphis. No Billie Holiday—
who you threw in a cell
when she was alive,
no, you don't get to love her now.
You don't get Bob Marley,
no matter how irie you got
at Sandals. We taking all
the hustle and flow, the temptations,

all the new editions and old schools—
leaving all scrubs hanging off the passenger side.
You don't get to adore us
then abhor us, dine then
dash us to the ground.
You don't get the help. The arithmetic.
You don't get these figures
running for you, making music for you,
making supper for you, until you learn that
ancient song of respect, that Otis
and Aretha try a little tenderness.
Not a day late and a dollar short.
You don't get these bodies
with your mouths curled in that state,
so full of hate nothing can ever taste good.

Memo from the English-Only Coalition

Go back to where you came from
we don't want you around
you people make us angry
with all your foreign sounds

We don't want you around
we want to keep things pure
don't speak your foreign sounds
it's too much to endure

We want to keep things pure
no robes, no hats, no wraps
it's too much to endure
we'll wipe you off the map

No robes, no hats, no wraps,
don't want you in our schools
we'll wipe you off the map
no justice in our rules

Don't want you in our schools
or clogging up our stores
no justice—they're our rules
we've seen your kind before

No clogging up our stores
no whining in our streets
we've seen your kind before
all those weird foods you eat

No whining in our streets
this is the promised land
all those weird foods you eat
go in a garbage can

This is the promised land
we are the chosen few
we know that garbage can
leave awful residue

We are the chosen few
you are the great unwashed
your awful residue
is gone at any cost

You are the great unwashed
you don't belong at all
you're gone at any cost
you'll all be gone by fall

You don't belong at all
you people make us angry
you'll all be gone by fall
sent back to where you came from

Precarious

You're dealing with depression
some pills bring some relief
but make one wrong impression
and everybody leaves

You're dealing with it daily
cheer progress though it's small
embracing little failings
you learn to rise and fall

You make the apt decisions
but people claim you're weak
such cloying calm derision
you wish they wouldn't speak

You can't control their fables
or chase them if they run
you learn you're not unstable
no monster they should shun

You rock though they're unsteady
you roll despite their loss
don't care if they're not ready
you're paying other costs

No place that you can take them
eliminates their blame
you can't afford to make them
feel right about their shame

And as you fight for balance
the ones you leave behind
go elsewhere with their damage
abandoning your kind

In the Marketplace

you're just as qualified
but still you get replaced
could it be your accent
the brown skin of your face

You still get replaced
told that you're not a fit
the brown skin on your face
your smile more like a slit

told that you're not a fit
rejected at the gate
your smile turns to a slit
as lawmakers debate

rejected at the gate
turned back because you're brown
as lawmakers debate
you have no legal grounds

turned back because you're brown
sent back from life and work
you have no legal grounds
no way to part this murk

sent back from life and work
cast out beyond the pale
no way to part this murk
no way to tip the scales

cast out beyond the pale
could it be your accent
no way to tip the scales
you're just as qualified

Hymn of Intolerance

I don't want you living near me;
you pray to a different god.
We pray standing; you pray kneeling,
all that you believe is wrong.

You pray to a different god—
all your priests in satin robes.
All that you believe is wrong;
we don't do the things that you do:

all your priests in satin robes,
all your temples full of sin.
We don't do the things that you do—
worshipping the sky and sun.

All your temples full of sin,
all your whirling endlessly,
worshipping the sky and sun,
instead of learning how to live.

All your whirling endlessly
making fools of divine faith
instead of learning how to live
with the proper dignity.

Making fools of divine faith,
you make all the wrong days holy.
With the proper dignity,
we could save you from your fate.

You make all the wrong days holy.
You babble in your sacred tongues.
We could save you from your fate—
all that sin you dwell among.

You babble in those sacred tongues.
We pray standing. You pray kneeling.
We could save you from your fate,
but I don't want you living near me.

Why They Hate Us

They hate us for the color of our skin,
they hate us for our youth, for our old age.
They mock us for grief, our nation-rage,
the way we claim God as our own, their sins
so rich against us, flinting hate within
the borders of those countries on a page
we haven't studied yet. We can't assuage
this depth of hate, or see where it begins
until we find where hate thrives in us too,
where fear makes us mistrust a foreign sound:
a name, a cry, a widow's chilling plea.
They hate us for the things we do not do—
they way we prop them up or let them down.
They hate us for our brand on history.

Taking Back Sad

I take it back into my bones and bless it.
I make it hold with this mouth and these
words: I sing it back into silence

and collapse under the weight of it—
how it rings my neck and shades
my eyes, no matter how I try

to disguise or ignore it. I take it back
from cynicism and ignorance,
from hate controlled by 140 characters,

snatch it back from hands that hold
no comfort, fingers that twitch
ridiculous torment. I take it back

and feed on its sorrowful beauty,
blurred and battered by its depths,
its sleeplessness and melancholy glaze.

I feel the necessary weight of sadness
on each shoulder, then lift it up
off my dead with two strong arms,

and this restless, striving tongue.

Alternative Facts

sounds like the name of one of those early 90s Britpop bands

I loved so much, as in "I liked that new Oasis album, but the one by Alternative Facts is better!"

I guess losing should now be known as "alternative winning."

Infidelity shall henceforth be known as "alternative dating."

The raccoons that tore a hole in my house's roof?

Alternative pets!

That bill didn't get paid? I'm not delinquent—
I just paid it in alternative money.

Cake shall henceforth be known as "alternative celery."

Students, don't be upset if you get an F. It's just an alternative A.

This chocolate donut I'm eating? Alternative apple.

It's not belly fat--it's my alternative six-pack.

The New York Knicks will be the alternative winners of the 2017 NBA Championship.

That dead tree in my backyard? Alternative gardening.

You can call it sleep—I prefer the term "alternative exercise."

Jelly stains and milk mustache=alternative makeup.

When it comes to tennis, I'm an alternative Serena.

Gymnastics, I'm an alternative Simone.

That concrete over there=alternative grass.

That pile of dirty unwashed exercise clothing: alternative compost.

How many of us are here because our parents practiced “alternative virginity?” Doritos=alternative carrots.

When I was a young flat-chested teenager, I had alternative plastic surgery.

I put socks in my bra.

This alternative water sure does make me giggle my inhibitions away....

But I'm not ignoring you—I'm just paying alternative attention.

One More Fight

Stop mocking my true sadness
stop targeting my sense
what you call truth is madness
and pain at my expense

Don't undermine my vision
I know the truth I see
I don't need your derision
I've got my victories

Don't trip me when I'm shaking
don't shove me to the ground
The people you keep breaking
might slip but won't stay down

Don't ruin what I'm viewing
with tangled knotted lies
our numbers keep renewing
our multitudes won't hide

No matter how you mock us
you can't steal our delight
we stay alive and raucous
prepared for one more fight

In Hate We Trust

All the hate in the world seems to come out
in airports, in restaurants, in drive-thrus
and express lanes, neon fast food joints
and hot bowling alleys. Suddenly, the nicest
people in the world — the sweethearts and
the Sunday school teachers — feel the need
to tell you to stop speaking unless you're
speaking English, feel the urge to yank off
your headscarf or headwrap or whatever
you dare anoint your head with, upset
with whichever way you lean away
from what's ordained: length of your hair
or the absence of it, length of your skirt
or your refusal to be caught alive wearing one.
Someone will always find you too masculine
or too feminine, too black or too strange,
too fundamentally un-American
to buy your groceries in peace,
to go about your business in Target,
to make your kid a sandwich in the park.

It's the price we pay to be together,
country of distrust, of side-eye
suspicion, nation of dogs trained
to bark at darkest neighbors.
Every time I go to board a plane, I steel
myself to be pulled out of line,
head searched like a lice-ridden
schoolchild, knowing the knotty hair
on my head makes me guilty of treason
before I board — now matter how much

I try to shake the feeling of second-class citizenship—my father's immigrant rage tasting like acid on the back of my tongue. I bow my head so that my hair can submit to the gloved hands of a woman who doesn't really want to touch me, woman I hope has a real love at home whose hair she can stroke without a latex layer between her hands and the strands she actually wants to touch, the scalp she knows like her own, the damp neck curls, fuzzy nape of her beloved's neck. I want to believe that's our nation too, a kind of tenderness that I can never see.

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COMPASSION.

