

## Affections and Afflictions with You

**Gloria Park**

**Abstract**

This poem is about the underlying discrimination that East Asian people encounter in relation to the COVID-19 pandemic. After the pandemic struck, I started to analyze my thoughts and feelings on subtle and covert racism, especially during quarantine, which manifested into this piece. My poem explores first-hand experiences of the kind of microaggressions that second generation immigrants from Asia are regularly subject to, as well as the realities of xenophobia, cultural confusion, and identity disjuncture we often endure. Through the poetic form, I expose how everyday interactions are laden with histories of anti-Asian racism and, more specifically, how the coronavirus has further revealed these concealed racist beliefs. The piece opens up the deep-rooted feelings of displacement I have long experienced and ponders if the recent rise in hate crimes against Asians are mere infestations of a hatred that has been growing for generations.

**Keywords**

COVID-19, identity, culture, race, xenophobia, beauty

When I was six, you told me that I was ugly.

I was too young to comprehend what you meant,

from where your words came from –

that place in your heart was like a seed, pitted with superiority.

As we grew older, those thoughts festered and grew roots; they took a hold of you.

Meanwhile I couldn't understand why I didn't look like the girls I saw out of my monolid eyes.

They were curvaceous with double eyelids and ultimately, beautiful.

Beautiful in terms of Eurocentric standards, no,

universal standards.

My whole life, from birth to death,

an unintentional beauty contest that I did not ask for—

and judged nonetheless on standards I do not qualify for.

When I was ten, you told me that I was Chinese when I said I was not, but you were adamant.

You told me to go back to where I came from, to the country I was born in.

Going back to the country that was torn between north and south,

a place that experienced war and political turmoil,

to the country that I never visited before, it did not make sense.

You did not know that you were asking me to leave to a place I never knew.

It took years for me to realize that I have intrinsic worth;

I do not need to beg people to listen to me,

that love will pour out of people willingly,

and words will heal me just as they have cut me.

Now, at twenty-three, I quietly mind my own business,  
I do not tell you to wear a mask out of fear and I make sure I stay away from you in public  
but not because I am docile, innocent, and all the things you think all Asian women are,  
I stay away because I am afraid.  
I am afraid of what will burst out of me when you provoke me now.  
While seeds of xenophobia and division grew in your heart, wrath bloomed in mine.  
Anger billows slowly within me and I know how to respond now —  
but my answers will never be enough  
no matter how eloquent, gentle, and polite I am  
because these toxic roots have rotted your heart.

COVID-19: a disease with no cure,  
harboring death,  
revealing another infestation that we knew about for generations.  
From my great-grandparents to my future children, will this prejudicial infection persist?

**Author Biography**

Gloria (she/her) is a writer, researcher, and digital and media marketer who is interested in creating content that is innovative and meaningful. Her research interests are in Indigenous rights in Canadian prisons, gender and feminism, and structural violence. Gloria has received a BA in Criminology and a Digital Marketing certificate at York University and is currently a Master of Public Policy in Digital Society candidate at McMaster University. She is passionate about creating content that combines research and policy together. Outside of her academic and professional endeavors, she enjoys cooking, reading, and writing poetry. As a second-generation Korean woman residing in the Greater Toronto Area, she often writes about her lived experiences with identity, racialization, mental health, and femininity, and hopes that her written work will resonate with others.