

Dear Reader,

What does it mean when we say a book, a poem, a song, a story is “timely”?

Does it mean that art met a moment? Was inspired by the times? Or something else entirely?

I think it means the world shows interest in a truth that existed long before it became a topic of public dialogue. It means that for a brief moment, this truth is given an opportunity to be shared, a moment of liberation. Artists must hustle to extend these moments; the world’s attention is fleeting.

I started the story that would become this book in the summer of 2017. It was born from the desire to tell a story about anti-Asian racism. I wanted the world to know it was real. I wanted to explore Asian American history, Black and Asian solidarity, reasons we stay silent, and what it takes to speak out.

In the years that it took to draft and revise this novel, I never imagined that the term “anti-Asian racism” would become a phrase widely used in newspaper headlines, social media posts, or in any kind of collective dialogue. I never imagined a global pandemic. Atlanta. Attacks on our elderly. I could not have fathomed that one day, anything related to Asians in America would become a topic of collective conversation. It had simply never happened at scale in the decades I have breathed on this planet.

The world showed interest in a truth that existed long before.

This story was born from the teenage suicide epidemics that racked my community for years, the effects of which still reverberate to this day. It was born from a group dinner I attended where a wealthy white man stated the pressure and stress and suicides in our community came from the Asian families that lived here. It was born from a Lyft driver who told me the same thing less than a week later. It was born from the invisibility of being Asian. It is an invisibility that runs so deep people don’t see me even when I face them across a dinner table or when I’m the only passenger in their car.

What would it be like to have your world shattered from the suicide of a son, a brother, a friend – and then have the world accuse you of driving your loved one to his own death?

I set out to write a book to explore this question. It started out as a story about anti-Asian racism, but racism doesn’t exist in a vacuum. This is a story about family, friendship, mental health, fear, power, hope, healing and love. It is a little bit of my truth. It is one of many stories that can and must be told.

Thank you for picking up this book, reader. I place this truth in your hands. Let’s extend this moment together.

With love and solidarity,
Joanna