

The Other Color

By Jean Rockford Aguilar-Valdez

Ah, I'm a nice safe white girl
No need to worry about watching your words
Chum right up with me
Talk to me in knowing glances about
The problems you're having with your maid, Maria
And how cute the dirty little faces of the people of Bolivia look
When they were trying to sell you handmade bracelets on your last vacation
And it is very likely that
I will just smile and nod
Because I have no idea what you're talking about
And therefore it will seem like
I am validating your airs of white superiority and confederacy
Your secret claim to power over me
That you don't even know is there
But I do.
Because I grew up in the parts of town you make it a point to drive completely around
My neighbors walking home after cleaning your houses
After having fled from the economic conditions that produced such cute
Little dirty faces
But I will pretend to be one of you, because it has its perks

I hold this secret inside me

That I am not you

I am the other color

Ah, I'm a nice safe Latina girl

No need to worry about having to strain to impress me

Tell me how you feel about those gringos

About how ignorant they are, how they underestimate you

Mistreat you, call you names, and treat you like you were not human

And it is very likely that

I will just smile and nod

Because I have no idea what you're talking about

Since they don't ever treat me that way

Since they think I'm one of them

But I won't tell you how it was that I got to be accepted into the culture that ignores you

By being light-skinned. By talking like them. By taking on their name.

By assimilating into their cultural mindset

By becoming a walking, talking model of their "successful education"

By forgetting who I was.

By succumbing to the unspoken expectation of self-erasure.

Because if you know I play with the privileged, things will change between us

I hold this secret inside me

That I am not you

I found a way out: I pretend to be the other color

Ah, I'm an unsafe radical

Laying bare my existence in the margins

For all to see

And none to understand

For I am not you

I will always be looking in from the outside

Seemingly of both worlds

Profoundly in neither