

I ask my younger sister

By Cristina Rose Smith

I ask my younger sister,
“Do you think people see you as a woman of color?”

“No,” she says, “It’s like this:
I’ve only ever had two traffic tickets.
The white policeman marked me down as ‘Hispanic’ on the ticket;
The Hispanic policeman marked me down as ‘white.’”

“And we’re really not even women of color,” she says.
“We’re half or less. Remember our last name is Smith
And Grammie’s family is from Spain.
That’s white. “

I look at her “anglo” nose and know it looks much like mine. I note her brown
shoulders. I consider our pear shaped bodies. I see

*Our full lips,
Our wide feet, and
Our almond eyes.*

I try to tell her about the name for women like us – *mestiza* –
I try to talk about Mom and Dad’s unspoken shame at being made fun of as kids
Because they weren’t white skinned,

how that shame passed on to us –
the shame of being people of color –
how they wanted us to be all-American –
shave that upper lip, go to school, speak English, don’t be like those Mexicans –

how I feel white-washed.
Don’t you feel the same, sister?

But she can’t hear me.

I don’t tell her about the altar for our ancestors I have set up in my apartment.

I tell her, “It’s not like I’m going to start wearing traditional Mexican clothes like Frida Kahlo or name my children Filipina names, whatever those are.”

I don’t tell her I *want* to dress like Frida Kahlo.

But all along, what I don't tell her, is that

I really just

want

to

cry.