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## Chicomecoatl, I welcome you

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# *Chicomecoatl, I welcome you.*

by Paradise Martínez Graff

“If we are interested in building a movement that will not constantly be subverted by **internal differences**, then we must build from the inside out, not the other way around. Coming to terms with the suffering of others has never meant looking away from our own. And, we must **look deeply**. We must acknowledge that to change the world, **we have to change ourselves—even sometimes our most cherished block-hard convictions.**”

– Cherrie Moraga in *This Bridge Called My Back*

**H**esitant to cherish mis raizes gringas, my suffering, I tell Antonio, “By ‘White-Passing,’ I mean that I pass off as white, but I don’t refer to myself as white.” My voice now bangs on the walls, my volume, thunderous and surviving, pleading for help, but no one hears my call. *I feel too strongly*, to speak, so I stop.

I hold my palms together, as if ready to pray - for nourishment, for fire, to the Aztec goddess of maize, my skin and soul, Chicomecoatl<sup>1</sup>—I pinch my lips with my index fingers and Breathe.

We have been together for six months. Almost two full seasons, yet Antonio still reads my Latin lathered lips, my Rs rolled into handmade corn tortillas, as “güera.” Simply “güera.” No, he does not say “güera<sup>2</sup>” nor “güerita<sup>3</sup>.” To him, my freckled masa colored curves

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<sup>1</sup>Chicomecoatl/Xilonen: “The sprouting and harvesting of maize was metaphorically associated with ongoing cycle of birth, destruction, and regeneration of life.”

<sup>2</sup> Güera: Blonde girl

<sup>3</sup> Güerita: Blonde little one

whisper “*white*.” He does not use my words, to refer me as I would like, for we use different tongues. So in between my pause he says, “But you’re still white.”

A further paleness suddenly takes over me. My voice fades and my hands slowly fall on my quads as I sit at the edge of Antonio’s frameless mattress. I want to explain the pieces of Mexico within me - the southwest of California and Tijuana, where I grew up, and my Mexican parents - these snippets of my story that will justify my Chicana<sup>4</sup> identity.

I tell Antonio, “I know, I’m white. I receive white privilege. I’m aware of that, but I don’t refer to myself as white.” *I’m being loud again*. I pause, lower my voice, and raise my words. so as not to keep Peter – Antonio’s roommate upstairs – from texting him to keep me quiet again. I take a deep breath to regain my **strength**, to recollect mi historia, but I cannot find the words, only the feelings, only my experience.

I tell Antonio, “I didn’t grow up with English-speaking parents. I grew up with Spanish-speaking parents who migrated to this country from Mexico, illegally, and alone...I know I have white skin. I know why my sister tells me she wishes she had lighter skin since lighter skin and anglo features are idolized around the world. Okay? I understand, but when someone calls me white, it offends me. I don’t, and never have, identified myself with white people...My parents weren’t raised by white culture. I always saw white people as smarter

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4 Chicana: coined during the Chicano Movement by Mexican American women who wanted to establish social, cultural, and political identities for themselves in America.

than me, more capable, better speakers. That's what they taught us. My father's machismo, my mother's docility, and their aggressive behavior, followed them from the colonized lands of Mexico to the colonized lands of Southern California. Am I supposed to erase that reality because, to you, I am white? Tell me what that means, Anthony."

I Pause. I Breathe.

***White faces surround me. White spaces, include me, seclude me, you from me, and I from you...How do I begin this revolution, if we are divided?***

Anthony remains seated on his desk chair facing me, with his legs open, stationary - as he was when we began this conversation. He sits slouched, and repeats, "*Buuut youu're whiite.*"

His words sting. My eyelids shut down, quickly, like two steel doors. I shake my head quietly. My shoulders drag to the floor as my own doubts weigh down on me. I pull my heavy hands over my face and inhale in order to exhale anxiety.

He says, "Just imagine if I called myself Black-Passing."

"What?" I scoff.

"Yeah, I mean, I'm black, well no, actually I'm brown, but I don't act according to black stereotypes. Does that make me Black-Passing? Or imagine if a White guy grows up in a community predominantly inhabited by people of color. Does that mean he's not White?"

I acknowledge he has a point, but only to myself, for this is a point that requires further reflection. He wants me to think of myself, white complexion, freckles, mais coated skin, layered over HERstories<sup>5</sup> and absent HIStories<sup>6</sup> of RAZA<sup>7</sup>, that I so boldly stand for. But I refuse.

Before he begins again, I interject by mumbling, “Yes, fine, referring to myself as White-Passing is problematic. Can we not talk about this further?” Antonio’s gaze remains fixed on me until I look away from him and begin to pull school supplies out of my backpack. We say nothing. I read articles off a clipboard, glancing up at him from the queen sized mattress, a pile of clean clothes beside me, while he sits on his chair, slouched, and staring expressionlessly at his open closet. It takes him around ten minutes to move. He pulls out a sheet of paper, and begins writing.

When I’m done, I go to the bathroom. I take my phone with me, and skim apps while sitting on the toilet. I quickly recall having urged myself yesterday to reread today’s horoscope – February 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2015 – to see if anything it says aligns or follows the later part of today. I click on the pink Horoscopes box on my home screen, and hope the Wifi works, or my phone manages not to die. It opens and reads,

***“Look to others, especially a close partner, for inspiration today, as they may be***

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5 HERstories: recognizes that history was historically a male dominated field

6 HIStories: recognizes the pronoun in the word “history”

7 RAZA: A term used by latinos to identify themselves as a united community

***a foundation of new and original approaches to life and circumstances. You may find them somewhat abrupt in explaining themselves, but that's impatience born of the fact that they may see things very clearly at the moment. Avoid confrontation while getting the details of what they have to say, and don't take it personally, it's only intended to illuminate and help.***" It aligns, so I smirk. Seconds later, my phone dies.

When I return from the restroom, Antonio is laying on his bed glaring at the white wall perpendicular to his bed. His shirt is off, he lies on his stomach, hands on his chin, still pensive. I connect my phone to his charger and tell him in a non-threatening voice about my coincidental horoscope. When my cell lights up I call Antonio over to his computer where my phone is charging. He crouches down, and as he reads, I stare at him - his scruffy beard, sleepy eyes, calm cheeks, until he smirks.

He does, but says nothing, so we crawl beneath the sheets. We stretch our limbs around each other's contours, silently waiting on each other to speak. I kiss the outline of his nose, hoping affection will break his daze. When I ask why he's silent, he responds with, "You asked me not to speak." I look at him without words, eyes quiver, my words lost. I think....

***White faces surround me. White spaces, include me, seclude me - you from me, and I from you - How do I begin this revolution,***

***if we are divided?***

Antonio, unconsciously, was challenging me to collide the two narratives de mis jefes.

Padre - Chichimeca Jonaz, and Mexican, and Spaniard, and migrant, and Brown brow. Madre – Mazahua or Nahuatl or Otomi or Purepecha and Spaniard, and Mexican, and German and Japanese.

No, it was not my parents he was pushing me to think of. It was not Mother – a light skinned threat – una concepción – not planned, or desired, whose womb I existed in during the years she trudged alone across the border. It was I who needed me, to think of me and ask me what I needed. I have come to find Chicomecoatl, goddess of nourishment, fire, providence, energy, community, abundance, fertility or strength. In my mais colored skin. I have come to find that my internal differences “from the inside out, not the other way around,” ask me to question why I cried in Antonio’s arms that night and confessed, “I’ve always hated being white.”