Entering an American Classroom

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M. Carmen Ábrego

Entering an American Classroom

entering the beige
latex classroom
looking
at glossy white
faces.

never
seeing one of my own
faces.
¿dónde estamos?

looking to my left
and to my right
and now and then
looking behind me
and what i see each
second is something
I’ve seen before,
¿where are we?

when i was six i
pee in my panties.
i cried out
for el baño!
squirming like a worm
putting my hands
between my legs.
my mexican
pee-pee is warm.
making
my mouth
taste like copper.
¡por favor!
I heard a
burst of laughter,
cracking the shell of
innocence.

the teacher,
pointing her index
finger in my face.
I followed the direction,
up and down.
becoming dizzy and
I was under her spell.
she says bathroom
repeat after me . . .
ba-th-ro-om.
i say baño . . .
baño . . .
ba . . . room.
looking down to the
milky floor
seeing the yellow orange
urine.
feeling its warm
stream on my legs,
leaving a chill
over my body.
from the corner where I
was made to stand.
i repeat
the new word.

at six I learned my first
american word.
bathroom, bathroom.
at forty
i speak
english too well.
yet the memory remains
a stain
in my life
when entering an
american classroom.

ni modo,
i am still the only
person of color in
the classroom.

this poem is dedicated to the
children of color in “Las Americas”