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English Rose

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English Rose

Lorna Van Gilst

In Blanca's spotless kitchen
on Tuesday afternoons
we sit and chew on language
Her table simply laid
white plastic tablecloth
a center jar of perfect deep-red blooms.

We put the words of English on our tongues—
short. . . tall
young. . . old
small . . . large . . .
and then we try
thin . . . thick—
So difficult to say—

Put your top teeth into the tongue and blow . . .
los dientes en la lengua . . .
thin. . . thick. . . think. . . thirty . . . three—
I speak deliberately—
But Blanca's lovely rosebud mouth . . .
cannot form a sound so vile—
Tin . . . tic . . . tink . . . turty . . . tree . . .

We try again—once more I demonstrate—
but Blanca's tongue
is tired of fricatives,
and it is time for me to go.

We close the books,
I pack my bag
bend down so slightly
for the cheek-brush farewell kiss

Then she selects one perfect deep-red rose—
“Tank you,” she says, handing it to me.
“Tank you for teaching me.”