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English Rose

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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.”