**Honest Poem** *after Ruby Francisco*

Jen Gayda Gupta

I am watching the mountains, sipping coffee from a mug when my father-in-law calls from the dark, fire lighting his grainy face, and he says good morning and I say good night. Today we celebrate a festival; so, he holds out sweets, taps them against the glass of his screen, and we hold out our tongues to pretend to receive them. I told my in-laws that I am learning Hindi; so when we add the aunts and uncles to the call they command me to speak, *bolo bolo*, and I say a stupid word or two like thank you or hello, and they laugh at my pale pronunciation, and I feel a bit like when I was four and performed a dance for the preschool talent show and the grownups laughed, and I thought it meant I did a bad job, but my mom promised it was because I was so cute. You are so cute, says my husband, while his family shows us the unfamiliar architecture of the home I still have not visited. They pass the phone from face to face, and each time I am told *bolo bolo*, but I don’t know who is who; a year later and the world around me has stayed familiar, has kept us on the other side of the screen where my useless tongue doesn’t matter all too much. I get angry when we hang up, and it is easiest to say I am mad at my father-in-law, his pushiness, mad that I have been laughed at, but this is an honest poem, and so I will say I am mad that I grew up with these trees, mad that language has always gotten lost somewhere on the path from my brain to my tongue, and soon we will board a plane, and there will be nowhere for me to hide. I will be told to touch the elders’ feet, be told *bolo bolo*, and I won’t be able to hang up or busy myself with the dishes or hide the fire on my cheeks. I am mad that I won’t know the names of the plants or how to work the shower, and I will not have the words to be honest when I see them—to say I am trying, that I have pierced my nose and I have taken the classes, but I am going to get everything wrong, everything except for loving their son. I don’t know how to pray, but when they ask me to pray I pray to be in their arms, pray for their unfamiliar landscape, pray that I do something right.