Recognized Language

<center>1</center>

Languages roll out our mouths like passing smoke. But English
grinds Arabic to white sand. Now Baba keeps Arabic

for scoldings, dirty jokes. To talk behind our backs, calm
his crying sister on the phone, oceans away. He tells me, *Tudhkary!*

I can't explain to him how I only remember some things:
sun-bathed maize that burned my skin, dyed dresses

sold for school pencils, my great-grandmother's blind eyes
glopping honey directly from the hive, circle of bees

around her head a buzzing halo, without fear
of the sting that comes with sweetness.

<center>٢</center>

Where did my old words go, my first words? Sometimes I dream
in Arabic without understanding. I search everyone's pockets,
leave them hanging like panting tongues. I try calling Arabic back
like calling wild horses. If I find them wandering in an abandoned
field, sitting on an ancient turtle's back, dancing naked in the woods,
I swear I'll fishnet pronouns so fast, swallow adjectives whole,
knock verbs back with a satisfied burp. Tonight, I'll light a fire to
eat the dark, make myself inviting so ghost tendrils of my
missing words float back to me, get comfortable again on the
cushion of my tongue.

<center>3</center>

To be read from right to left, after Marwa Helal

deep themselves bury words lost My
.soil American in
boil blood Mama's makes It
sound wrong the with wail I when
.mouth my in
reflection my like, off little a feel I
shrunk *wa* stretched, door car a in
accent the want I .back them want I .wide
.*lugha* sing-songy my, back
Arabic in *yabki wa yadhak* to want I
bloodline my taste, hard down bite I
.forms tongue my words the in

ع

As a baby, I crawled to the old men,
their hands dripping blood.

        One took the head of a slaughtered goat and made it talk

so I would laugh. I lifted ivory limbs
from a pile, not knowing in my small hands

        I held the bones of the one that went *baa baa* every morning,

not knowing I held bones at all
as I tapped them against each other

        like drumsticks, smiled at the clicks they made,

somehow recognized the language.