

The German word for dream is traume.

The coal-dust hushed
parameters of the room.

Outside, my mother stitched
whole dresses for \$3.00 a piece.

I slept in a bedroom
which faced the street.

A cheerleader was killed
in a drive-by that year.

She died in her sleep.

I watched the headlights
sweep overhead.

*

It felt like skin.

It did not
feel obscene.

When that boy
tongue-kissed me

and wiped
his mouth,

it was a coming
into knowledge.

*

When my mother whispered,
Has anyone touched you there?
I had to pick.

Alan, I said.

I was seven.
The training wheels
were coming off.

Between the couch
and wall, the ceiling was white
with popcorn bits. The boys stood

and watched. I lay there,
my eyes open like a doll's.
Someone said, *Let me try*.

He pulled down his pants
and rode on top,
then abruptly stopped.

The boys laughed,
said *Shhh*
and stood me up.

Split

I see my mother, at thirteen,
in a village so small
it's never given a name.

Monsoon season drying up—
steam lifting in full-bodied waves.
She chops bắp chuối for the hogs.

Her hair dips to the small of her back
as if smeared in black
and polished to a shine.

She wears a deep side-part
that splits her hair
into two uneven planes.

They come to watch her:
Americans, Marines, just boys,
eighteen or nineteen.

With scissor-fingers,
they snip the air,
point at their helmets

and then at her hair.
All they want is a small lock—
something for a bit of good luck.

Days later, my mother
is sent to the city
for safekeeping.

She will return home once,
only to be given away
to my father.

In the pictures,
the cake is sweet
and round.

My mother's hair
which spans the length
of her áo dài

is long, washed, and uncut.

Cathy Linh Che, from *Split*

POEM TO BE READ FROM RIGHT TO LEFT

language first my learned i
second
see see
for mistaken am i native
go i everywhere
*moon and sun to
ل letter the like
lamb like sound
fox like think but

recurring this of me reminds
chased being dream
circle a in
duck duck like
goose
no were there but
children other
of tired got i
number the counting
words english of
to takes it
in 1 capture
another

//

قمرية و شمسية*

"poem to be read from right to left" is written in a form created by the poet called The Arabic.

The Arabic is a form that includes an Arabic letter with an Arabic footnote, and an Arabic numeral, preferably written right to left as the Arabic language is, and vehemently rejects you if you try to read it left to right. To vehemently reject, in this case, means to transfer the feeling of every time the poet has heard an English as Only Language speaker patronizingly utter in some variation the following phrase: "Oh, [so-and-so] is English as a Second Language..." As if it was a kind of weakness, nah.

Marwa Helal, from *Invasive species*