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Kissing in Mamaloshen

After Kissing in Vietnamese by Ocean Vuong

Grandma Freda kissed as if she could
protect me with her crimson tattoo.

She kissed my hands, my fingers
meant to turn pages, not stitch in sweatshops.

Each *kush fun lebn* to insure I'd be passed over
by plagues. No pogroms, no gas chambers

no yellow stars—only drops
of honey for her *shana madela*.

As if she could inoculate me from sticks
and stones, *No Jews Allowed*.

Her sugar cookies, apple cake, dill-scented
chicken soup were amulets, too.
When Grandma Freda inhaled my little girl
scent, she made me feel sunlit.

She sat in her pew on Shabbat,
bussed my cheek as I snuggled by.

I glinted with her imprint. Grandma Freda hugged
me with her full bosom, her skinny legs pulsing

rivers of blue. Her kisses a map to follow
when my body fades. Now, I paint my lips

crimson, leave red tattoos with my wrinkled
lips on the grandchildren bequeathed to me.

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