

“Kissing in Vietnamese”

by Ocean Vuong

My grandmother kisses
as if bombs are bursting in the backyard,
where mint and jasmine lace their perfumes
through the kitchen window,
as if somewhere, a body is falling apart
and flames are making their way back
through the intricacies of a young boy's thigh,
as if to walk out the door, your torso
would dance from exit wounds.

When my grandmother kisses, there would be
no flashy smooching, no western music
of pursed lips, she kisses as if to breathe
you inside her, nose pressed to cheek
so that your scent is relearned
and your sweat pearls into drops of gold
inside her lungs, as if while she holds you
death also, is clutching your wrist.

My grandmother kisses as if history
never ended, as if somewhere
a body is still
falling apart.