History of Flesh

My mother wears sunscreen every day, tells me to do the same. Our skin,
darkly freckled, Ashkenazi, which she says means I should never sunburn—
I have, however, been reddened outside, singed my hands while swimming
and cried on my mother's chest as she sunk my palms in a bowl of water
for the night, ice rising like chunks of submarine.

I was born an eternity apart from the war, the child's child of those who ducked
just in time, spared themselves the sensation of being cooked. My mother believes
she is a Russian princess, somehow, and means to map our history. Jews
were not princesses there, her mother says, and there are none of us left.
She wears the grief of escapism like fur.

A distant heat, left middle of my palm, itches at night. I rub it over my stomach,
soothe it with the light scratch of a birthmark, maroon and mountainous, reaching
up from just above my left hip. Cancer is a relatively slow death, but relative
only to that which we'd like to imagine. I fear my own skin and its own valleys,
stains that threaten to seep and spread, disallow me to sleep in the sun.

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