

Impressions

The older I get, the more haunted I become by the question of the ownership of generational, familial knowledge ...

I am reminded of these ghosts as I stand behind my five-year-old Dawn in the kitchen of our new home. She stands before me on top of a barstool so that we are almost — almost, but not quite — the same height. As my hands reach above hers to guide her little fingers throughout and into our bread dough, I notice how our skin is completely covered in dry, dusty flour, while our clothes are covered in a gloopy paste of a flour mixture. As our twenty fingers begin to make soft impressions in the dough, Dawn asks me, as she has many times before, why she can't try to do this on her own, to which I always tell her that I know that she *can* do it, but that this is something for us to do together— a tradition that I have carried out with her and that she can carry out with her loved ones when she gets older. The bread, I tell her now and always, tastes better when it is born out of the (shared) love of multiple people— a love that cannot stand on its own.

But in this moment of “shared love” I cannot help but feel sudden and vertiginous waves of nausea and guilt as I try, but fail, to forget the source of this tradition. It is in these moments when I try my hardest to forget that I am immediately transported back to my grandmother's kitchen, with its splintered and dusty interior, standing humbly in the outskirts of Ascension Parish as it has for the past seventy years. I am now the one standing in front of her, my bare feet atop a plastic storage container, while her veiny and nimble, yet strong, hands work over mine as we create deep depressions into the simple dough, our hands working as a single machine stuck in a monotonous loop. You have to push down harder, she tells me, So that you can one day do this on your own. I purposefully never listen to this: the thought of making the dough without my

grandmother makes me want to shrivel down into nothing. And so I pretend to be weak, pretend to need her support and her guiding hands, so that we may make the dough together as long as I am small enough to stand on this box before her— as long as my hands are smaller than hers.

And I am glad I did so, because now my grandmother is gone and I as well— as empty as the craters that we would create together, as impressionable as the dough we had once fashioned together into a living “thing”, except I am barely so. And now I feel like a traitor, because I carry out her tradition with Dawn but cannot bear to tell her the source of this loving tradition, nor can I bear to talk about her great-grandmother. But how selfish it is of me to steal the love language from my grandmother and to speak it as if it is my own, to have these conversations with my daughter in a stolen language, a language she ought to know the origins of.

But I know that eventually I will grow strong enough to discuss these things with her, that I will break out of the cast of mourning and selfish reserve and will tell her the things that we have created *together*... will create, together.