

How to Make Tortillas

How does my blood dilute
the further I'm removed?
What is the most I can make
and what is my stake
in a background barely remembered?

And I recall my mom,
the words coming out of her mouth,
"We're from Spain, not the South."
But what does that make
my great grandparents?
Born in Mexico
and wed in San Antonio
raising twelve American born kids
on a farm outside of Houston.
From them to my grandpa
to my mom to me,
where ends the line of authenticity?

Grandpa went to school
forced by rule
to speak in English,
and would not pass the language
down to his children.
And even when spoken to in Spanish,
he would smirk
and reply in English.

Can an identity once denied
still remain on the inside?
Can these white hands
reclaim a past
that might not be mine to take?
How does my blood dilute
the further I'm removed?

My grandma struggles to remember
how to render a pig's head
for homemade tamales.
The ones at Christmas are store bought,
the process forgot.
She tries to make tortillas
but the memories don't last.
They never taste the same
since her husband passed.

Can these white hands
reclaim a past
filled with gaps and holes?
How does my blood dilute
the further I'm removed?

My great aunt shows me
her metate and molcajete,
barely used.
You don't need them
when ingredients are pre-ground for you.
If the process can change
maybe the authenticity doesn't have to
as you move down the line.
I ask her for guidance
and she tells me the steps,
but jokingly says,
"You won't try to make this."

Can these white hands
make tortillas
or do they make a reproduction?
If making food is a production,
a performance of instruction,
am I playing a role
that I'm unprepared for?
Am I trying to evoke
the presence of the past
to come through me
and into this tortilla?
Food is a tradition
but I create my own.
Food is community
but I am alone.

How does my blood dilute
the further I'm removed?
And is it just blood?
Is it how you're raised?
Is there something more?
Is it something you ask for?
Is there an authority
who decides what is and isn't?
Who can answer all the
questions that have arisen?
Can these white hands
make tortillas?