

## *Jacqueline Bishop*

### RECIPE

~  
*For your grandmother*

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That time of the year when the days are shorter, darker  
and cooler, when the Poinsettia, fire plant,  
its leaves incredibly red, surrounding  
and protecting the less conspicuous flower;  
was when my grandmother's brick oven  
became more active than usual,  
as grandmother prepared for that day,  
*Glorious* is what she called it,  
when all of us children  
would be dressed in white,  
in observance  
of the birth of her lord and savior.

~

The year I turned ten I started growing into my father's  
long arms and legs, his light eyes, his burnished  
brown complexion. I awoke  
one morning to an ache in my stomach,  
a crimson spot darkening my underwear.  
That Christmas grandmother called me into her kitchen ---  
walls blackened by soot;  
well-scrubbed silver pots dangling from the roof;  
Constant smell of pine and hickory.

She handed me, as an early present, a simple  
white cotton apron she had stayed up all night,  
by the light of the kerosene lamp, to make.

As I placed the apron over my head she began speaking to me,  
as she had spoken to my mother and all my aunts ---

as my Great Grandmother had spoken to her and all her sisters:  
“Here in Jamaica, there is never the dream of a white Christmas  
therefore, the pudding is not served hot.

Housewives make one mixture: bake a portion for the cake,  
steam the remainder for the pudding.

Raisins, currants, and stoned prunes  
should have been soaking for months  
in real Jamaican rum cut by port wine.

Spice may be added:

vanilla and almond flavoring,  
but this is not a *must*.

Fruits *must* be soaked in a glass jar  
With a tight fitting lid; avoid using  
plastic containers.

And,” she paused, before continuing,

“Always measure what you do.”

As I stood in the kitchen that first time  
doing what I knew I would be doing all my life,  
surrounded by the ambiguities of my childhood:  
a father long gone, a mother  
unavailable to me, I could feel my grandmother  
rise and to take up space in me, and I knew  
she was giving me something to take out  
into the world: something I would pass on.