

Second Blessing

Warm, glazed circles of deep-fried dough line up forever on the wax papered counter. The scents of sugar and hot pastry greet my first grade self after a day of lessons and mean kids and shared secrets on the playground. The coat that's meant to be hung beneath the stairs remains unbuttoned as I am bewitched by the blessing of my mother's just-fried doughnuts on an autumn day.

I sink my teeth into the web of my mittens, dragging them from my reaching hands as I step into her kitchen, windows steamed and Mother's auburn hair curled from solitary hours of creation.

They are huge, these doughnuts, much larger than the ones I buy my grandchild now at the grocery. She's used the wide-mouth canning jar to cut them, made them enormous, thick and dipped to perfection in powdered sugar glaze. Forgetting the sibling squabbles from the walk home, I reach up and wrap small fingers around the nearest treasure. The sacred aroma, hidden in airy caverns of pastry, explodes up my nostrils as I take that first bite. Not-yet-dry glaze slides onto my fingers, oozes down to fill my palm as I pry apart those delicate, still warm passageways and insert first my tongue and then my teeth within them.

I stand, palms glazed, and watch my mother deftly drop great circles of dough with tongs into the hot fat, lard rendered from our own hogs. I watch her eyes narrow in focus on the sizzling pastries, until the slightest hint of brown triggers a swoop of tongs to flip them in the almost boiling fat. She scoops a handful of centers, holes to be fried, glazed and snuck into our pockets on the way to the barn, and slides them without splashing among the frying doughnuts.

When she appears the most distracted, I stretch to reach the next warm pastry in the row, withdrawing with a pout when the tongs rap lightly on my knuckles. “Just one for now. You haven’t even taken off your coat.”

The scold shuts down my dreams of second blessing, and yet the next time Mother greets us with warm doughnuts after school, I will reach for a second one again. It is what first graders do, and mothers do, and it remains a sweet, sticky memory to follow me into old age.