

JULIA MCDANIEL

**Making French Pastries for Rural Floridians**

For seven dollars an hour, I cut slapdash squares, dipped them in oil,  
prayed they would pillow up and crust.

Alicia's hand on the small of

my back as she shimmied by, bobbing her body  
to the hip-hop spouting from a speaker she'd clipped,

oh-so-precariously,  
to the ceiling of the shabby truck.

I watched

the beignets as they bathed, puffed up. Laid them bare on hatched wire.  
Alicia placed their collapsing backs inside thin paper cradles

then laced them with powdered sugar. That whole summer,  
I wanted to work past exhaustion. To be excused from feeling.

To leave my body

stooped in labor. I wanted

each hour exactly as expected—  
attractive families still in church shoes, tipping

generously, slathering Nutella on their toddlers' desserts  
while Alicia played her part and snapped their pictures.

Yes, I simply wanted. The wet breath of the truck growing

thick with salt and cinnamon as the sun broke brighter

and hotter against the aluminum siding.  
When no one was watching, I licked batter from

the blade. I stayed for spare change

because Alicia laughed and peeled stray strawberry strands from her neck  
as she pled, *Smack the beignet harder, like your lover's ass,*

over and over again as I watched  
the dough's gentle drowning,  
my shame a sinking that would not ask for air.

In this town it seemed  
only Alicia was out, and I would have let her say nearly anything  
just to hear that kind of want aloud.