

Watching Amá Make Buñuelos

By Estella Gonzalez

“Christmas is for the babies” Amá says
pouring hot, liquid manteca into a glass bowl filled with flour.
Her tender palms, calloused with factory work,
start an avalanche that rolls into the hot pool of fat.

Grainy sludge oozes gray through latticed fingers,
while one hand grips the rim of a golden glass bowl,
a cradle for oranges, bananas and mangoes.
Today, the bowl births buñuelos, Christmas

treats, on the Formica table with its blonde wood veneer.
Amá sprinkles a light snow of flour before slapping
down the dough’s bottom, fingers dent its smooth skin—
hard hands rip the dough into four baby balls.

She powders each face, gently, before
slapping their cheeks flat with outstretched palm.
Amá’s brown fingers stretch out the dough
like a spring coil—

Each finger massages, leaving shallow dimples.
Whenever Amá fists the soft bolita, it crawls away,
a little, before pulling back, slapped and distended.
By now Amá’s mouth curves down, an upside down *U*—

heavy grunts escape, as a baby tortilla forms
with gasps of lard and enriched flour breaths.
Another bolita grows wide and thin with each
spin of the rolling pin, with each rotation.

Amá scoops chunks of lard from the red and white
box, plunking white clumps into a yellow skillet
roasting on blue flames. Amá dunks the thin circles of dough in-
side a scalding oil bath—blistering, popping, browning.

Like a partera with forceps, Amá delicately tongs, rotates each disk,
pulls, then stacks gently onto a nest of white towels.
Still oily, their faces soak up her sugared cinnamon.
I snatch one from the top, bite down.
Amá nods, whispers “Feliz Navidad mijita.”