

## Donut Cheat on your Diet

The sun shined bright, the breeze blew cool, and children played in the park. The perfect beginning to the most horrific day of my life.

The trouble began around noon. I sat on a bench in Locust Shade Park, watching the little ones cavort in the playground. I liked to do that. It reminded me of when my kids were that young and rambunctious. Back before a heart sickness took Elenor and my world greyed with age.

Across the park sat the ice cream truck. The merry jingle rode the wind alongside the sweet smell of chocolate. The temptation was almost too much to bear, but it was a far enough walk that laziness held me to my diet. All for the better. I had stuck to it for the better part of a month, and every day was a struggle. I took every advantage I could.

It was then, staring at the trucks with a watering mouth that the first one came down. The damned thing dropped right into my lap. An éclair, with dark chocolate frosting.

I was so surprised I just stared down, unable to move. Where had such a delicate, delectable confection come from? The icing looked thick and decadent, the dough crisp yet internally soft. On one end, a white spot bespoke the creamy center that awaited inside.

My hand made a treacherous move to scoop it up, then my logical brain asserted itself.

No, no, Jeremy Baker. You mustn't cheat on your diet. The doctor says the diabetes will only grow worse if you continue to gorge yourself. You mustn't eat that doughnut.

I frowned at the delicacy that had fallen so daintily into my lap. I wanted to listen to my logical mind. I wanted to obey Doctor Williams. I did not want to die.

I scooped up the confection and took a bite anyway.

It screamed in my mouth. A kaleidoscope of flavor and sweetness bursting with flavors of chocolate, cream, and-- I discovered to my utmost delight-- powdered sugar. It was no ordinary doughnut. No, it was a gift from the heavens. A delicacy straight from God's bakery!

I looked up toward the sky in rapture. I was caught in the throws of my forbidden, sugary love affair. I almost missed the others, falling-- no, floating, not falling but floating-- down from above.

Not just éclairs, but bearclaws and jelly bellies, glazed and cream filled, an assortment of doughnuts dropping from the sky. Descending, as if the God of Abraham had looked down upon me sitting on the edge of the park and decided I had been such an ever good servant. As if the Lord of Hosts had decided today was the day when my

gluttony would stand up and be counted among the satiated.

I rose from my bench and stumbled across the park with arms outstretched. They all came down around me, some small enough to fit in the palm of one hand, some large enough to require two. Each as delicious looking as the next.

As I danced among the glorious rain of sweetness, the child a few feet away picked one up to take a bite. It spewed jelly into his face and he dropped it, backing away. His little face contorted in terror and he screamed, wiping at the jelly.

No well-minded adult can ignore the frightened cries of a child, and I am no exception.

I raced to his side. I thought perhaps he was allergic to the flavor of jelly, but when I reached him I saw on his face not an allergic reaction, but a burn. The jelly was hot. Hot enough to steam in the summer air. Hot enough to scald his young face.

I scooped him up in my arms and used my shirt to wipe away the remaining jelly. I stomped on the donut-- which had somehow started to roll toward us-- and felt the heat of it even through the sole of my shoe.

I ran to the bus stop-- the nearest shelter-- with the young boy clutched in my arms. He quieted when I sat on the metal bench and propped him on my knee. I examined his burned face. It would be red and swollen for a time, but would heal.

I turned my attention beyond the safety of our cover. The other children from the playground were gone-- runoff to find shelter of their own I hoped-- but the doughnuts continued to rain down. The ground was covered with them. Thousands upon thousands, all different kinds, filling the air with the thumps of their arrival and the cloying scent of confectionery perfection.

"I want my mommy," the boy sobbed.

At the sound, donuts began to roll toward us. They rolled of their of own accord, and it was then I realized they truly were not normal doughnuts. Delicious they might be, but they were also intelligent, and of malicious intent.

"Hush now," I whispered to the boy. "What is your name?"

"Allan," he replied. His eyes flicked to the doughnuts rolling toward us. "Don't let them get us, mister."

The boy was right and I started from under cover as fast as my old bones would allow. The doughnuts rolled after us. An ever increasing tidal wave of baked goods behind and to our sides. Some tried to cut us off but I stomped through them, the bottoms of my slacks becoming slick with their warm innards.

Why, I wondered, had the éclair not burned me when I bit into it?

It must have been unprepared for assault, I decided. I felt the warmth of them now, on my feet and ankles. Had the eclair been ready, I might have been burned as the boy was.

The park was wide and open. We fled across the field, stomping as needed to break through. In my youth, it would have hardly been a chore. At the age of sixty seven, my distance running days were well behind me. I hoped the doughnut invasion was confined to the park, and was not a town-wide event.

When we reached the edge of the grass, my hopes were dashed like crema in a microwave. The street was littered with baked goods, and a wave of them immediately rolled toward us. That's when I knew there was small chance of getting away. I cast about in search of something-- anything-- I could do to spare our cruel fate. I found only one option.

I ran, gasping for air, to a mailbox-- one of the big blue ones-- on the corner and pulled it open.

"Slip down inside. Be careful not to cut yourself on the metal," I told him.

He slipped his little feet through the opening and sank down to his neck. Then he paused and looked up at me with wide, blue eyes. "But what about you?"

"I've lived a good life. A long life. Now it's your turn to have a chance at one."

With that, I shoved his head the rest of the way in and slammed it closed. I draped my body over the box so the things couldn't get inside, and squeezed my eyes closed.

A wise man once told me there is nothing more terrifying to someone on a diet than a doughnut. In that moment, he had never been more right. My bowels-- normally as regular as an Amtrak schedule-- turned to water as I felt the heat of them close on me. My pulse pounded in my ears like a drumbeat, in synch with the thuds of their descent.

I thought of Elenor and our sons Jack and John. I thought of my time in the sawmill and the good men I knew there. Most of all, I thought of how nice it would be to enjoy just one last bite of--

My eyes opened with furious revelation. I needn't die on my belly under a mountain of baked goods. I could die on my feet, defending the little mailbox against the invading confections.

I pushed off the box and spun to face my onrushing doom. I raised my clenched fists to the air and loosed the only battle cry I could think of.

"I go nuts for doughnuts!"

They rolled at me. I charged at them. We made battle where sidewalk met curb. My shoes, socks, and ankles burned from slippery, hot goo. Their bodies exploded under my descending heel. They sprayed streams of hot jelly and cream. I snatched them from the air and bit with ferocious delight, cackling like a madman as I discovered they didn't heat until they touched the ground.

I can't tell you how many doughnuts were squashed that day. Only the Lord of Hosts could count them all for a certainty. What I can tell you is that I continued that way, raving, chewing, stomping, until I heard the tanks rolling down the street.

When the National Guard found me, they reported I was covered in first degree burns and jelly. They said my eyes were wild and my thin hair crazed. They said I never stopped trying to eat the doughnuts out of the air, even after they restrained and ultimately tased me.

They swept through with rock tampers and flame throwers, crushing and bursting the alien doughnuts. Who could have imagined aliens existed and manifested in this dimension as malicious doughnuts? Not I.

Not I.

They rescued the boy and returned him to his mother. The park was cleaned and repaired a few weeks after. I still go down there most days, but my old bench is gone. In its place they erected a memorial to commemorate the brave men and women who fought in the battle of Locust Shade. I like to go and sit in the sun on a lawn chair and read the plaque.

It's the only time I cheat on my diet.

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