

I was born into a large, proud Irish Catholic family, and most of us held traditions and superstitions as part of who we were. Rose was our 4ft 11in, staunch matriarch and a force to be reckoned. None of us wanted to *fall out of favor* with her, not after witnessing the demise of one cousin following her troublesome behavior. We all knew you didn't get many chances before being shunned.

My thirteenth year would entitle me to a lesson making fadge with Grandma. This delicious Irish potato bread was a staple for my mum during childhood in Belfast and a must-have at our traditional Christmas breakfasts. Fadge felt like a huge family secret to me because none of my friends had ever heard of it. I would later learn every part of the British Isles had their version, most famously Scotland's tattie scones.

I was excited and nervous; the *fadge* we made today would be part of the batches served at our annual Christmas breakfast. It was my family's year to host, so I was extra anxious. Six aunts, five uncles, and forty-two cousins would attend, gourmandizing in four two-hour shifts of around 15 people, starting at 6 am. Grandma says, "this is how we know our early birds from the lazy lumps."

Some people overflowed into the other time slots and lingered, while others stayed until every last drop of Jameson was spilled. Family friends and those alone for the holidays would drop around. We Irish were a malleable lot when in a group of two or more.

The day finally arrived, and my cousins Maggie, Gen, and I gathered at Grandma's. My Uncle Alex was ten months younger than us but would be annoyingly hanging about, regardless.

"So help me God, Alexander! I'll box your ears but good if you don't calm down!" our Grandma yelled with such ferocity we all thought we were doomed.

"Alright then, grab an apron, and the first task will prove if you genuinely have the temperament of an Irishman." Grandma pointed to two ten-pound bags of russets, and she was rewarded with sighs and moans from her brood.

She handed each of us a paring knife and a warning about sharpness.

Gen promptly dropped hers, and we all chimed in, "ooh, looks like we're getting a gentleman caller."

As if on cue, Alex barreled into the kitchen and demanded one of the sharp tools. Grandma sent him out to play with his slingshot instead, thank goodness.

A few hours and many callouses later, we put our potatoes on to boil and took a break. Grandma had the teapot ready, and we all scrambled after our favorite biscuits from the familiar ancient Jacob's cream cracker tin. The trick was to avoid the stale ones.

Maggie broke the silence, "Did you hear about Kelly?"

I responded with, "Ya, she's going to be grounded until we're a hundred!"

"I don't really like her anyways, she's a total bit.." Grandma cut Gen off.

"Keep your tongue, keep your friends. Finish up and I'll drain the spuds.'

We were each given a large steaming bowl of potatoes with portioned butter, salt, and flour.

“Mash until you get a nice light sticky but stiff dough,” Grandma instructed.

“What?” Maggie said.

“Don’t over mash but no lumps, aye.” We nodded in unison. “The secret to perfect fadge is to smash em’ while they’re hot.” We promptly got busy.

We put the potato dough on heavily floured boards and used tall, greased glass tumblers to roll out the mixture. A Royal Albert Old country rose saucer was our guide to measuring a perfect circle, which we then cut into four wedges. We had three griddles hot and ready to fry the triangular pieces to a fine golden brown. I could hear our stomachs gurgling in anticipation, and I was looking forward to the tasting part.

Grandma fried each of us a sunnyside egg to top a fadge piece. She set out a steaming pot of Earl Grey, a jar of homemade raspberry jam, and extra butter. We sat and enjoyed the fruits of our labor and tried not to think about the mess.

“Mmm, scrumptious,” said Maggie, wiping flour across her forehead.

“Ooh, delectable buttery goodness,” giggled Gen.

“Marvellously ambrosiac,” I added, not wanting to be outdone.

“Yum-yum,” Grandma joined the word fun and we all had a good laugh..