

DACIA PRICE

Glazed

Start with a single doughnut on a plate. There are sprinkles in all the right places. The dough is perfectly browned, fried, not baked, because who wants a baked doughnut anyway? The plate is nice too. Ceramic, probably. With painted flowers that are meant to be kitsch but came out a little too modern, a little too pretty. I've dressed it up so I can take a picture of it. Post it online. I'm trying to be ironic. *A look at this amazing artisan doughnut I just grabbed from Dunkin Donuts* kinda thing. As though that's where all the master doughnut makers now hang out. And they probably do, because one can only tolerate questions about organic, naturally sourced ingredients for so long. And suggestions on future flavor combinations, like basil-jalapeno-Mexican-chocolate-with-a-Vegan-ginger-glaze. If I were a doughnut maker, I'd hide out at Dunkin too.

I'll take the picture and pretend it's a joke. But I'll eat it anyway. I'll also eat the other two in the bag I've stashed just out of frame, because I can't ever buy a single doughnut. It's either three or a dozen. I'm sure there's some deep-seated reason for this, but I don't know what it is. Probably something to do with my parents or my early childhood experiences. That's what people think, isn't it? That your issues developed in childhood? That innocuous fall from the monkey bars is why you can't drive across bridges. That time a bee stung the tip of your finger is the reason you have trust issues in relationships. Those clothes your mother made you wear for camp are why you have insecurities about mirrors and the color blue. That kind of thing. I must have had some moment before I can remember about doughnuts. Doughnut holes. Custard filling. Glaze.

In elementary school we would get pizza lunch once every few months. It was a big deal. You had to order it in advance. There were forms to fill out. Decisions to be made. Did I want two slices? Three? Four? In a school when most kids either packed their lunches or went home to eat, catered pizza was An Event. It was probably Pizza Hut pizza. Or frozen. Generic at best. Definitely nothing special. The pizza we ordered for delivery at home was probably way better. But this was School Pizza. It was delicious just

because it was there. And at some point between second and third grade, the pizza started coming with a side of old fashioned glazed doughnuts. I have no idea who thought that was a good idea. Two doughnuts with two slices of pizza sounds, in hindsight, like a belly flop into gluttony without an exit strategy. They came wrapped in plastic on waxed cardboard and shined from the cheesy pizza grease, as though they had been packed inside the take out box alongside the pies.

I don't remember caring about doughnuts before then. I can't even remember having a doughnut before then, though I'm sure I did. It's not like my parents cared about that kind of thing. We ate McDonalds and Dairy Queen on the regular. I'm sure they fed us a ton of doughnuts on Sunday mornings when they craved take out coffee in those disposable styrofoam cups. (This was the 80's, remember, before the environmentalists made everyone give up the foam in favor of paper and plastic.)

And bagels. White flour. Lye bathed. Reflective. An inch of cream cheese that spilled into the hole and out the side with each bite. That's more like what I remember. But doughy circles with holes are just about the same. Trade the cheese and lye for frier oil and sugar and you've basically turned one into the other. You see what I'm getting at here, right? I've got food issues. Though those other examples I gave of bee stings and bridges and mirrors, they're true too. I've got issues with food and trust and self esteem and self control. But mostly with food.

I once did a modified water fast for an entire month, just to force myself to stop blindly filling my mouth. It was actually amazing, and I lost like ten pounds. And my pants fit better and my body felt lighter, but my brain was a foggy mess. And I still couldn't walk past the doughnut rack at the grocery store without accidentally filling a bag with three old fashioned glazed. One day I carried it all the way out of the store without noticing until I got to my car and felt the paper crinkle against the door. The keys tangled in a hand that was weighed down by the bag of groceries and, now, doughnuts. I felt terrible. Not only had I contaminated my fruit and vegetable purchase (because by this point I was juicing to supplement the water-only diet) but I hadn't even paid for them. I briefly considered running back in. Handing them over to the cashier, or putting them back on the shelf. But that would mean explaining. It would mean admitting I had a problem. Instead, I left them sitting on the curb. A gift, I told myself, for the next homeless person who came by. As though homeless people should be grateful for an unmarked

bag of questionable bakery items. After that, I entered and exited the store from the other side. Away from the breads and pastries, the gateway drugs of sugar addicts and alcoholics everywhere.

(I should add here that I also drink too much.)

The water fast didn't last much longer. Maybe a day or two. My heart wasn't in it. It took me another week before I ate my first doughnut though, and I considered that a win. At least, I thought, I'd beaten that self control issue.

The ten pounds I'd lost returned a month later. I guess I knew that would happen. I guess I had expected it. I must have realized that fasting isn't really the best way to keep off weight, even if it is a good way to lose it. I imagined that the lightness of my body would somehow propel me forward. Like running forward. More literal than figurative movement, though I hoped for the figurative too. When I was wandering through the haze of fasting, I kept imagining how it would feel to run a marathon, cause that's what you do after a fast and with zero training: run a marathon. But I thought it. I believed it. Before I started the fasting, I even imagined how I might be able to run through it. As though the time I'd be gaining by not cooking and eating could be channeled into exercise. As though the reason I hadn't exercised before was a time issue and not a motivation problem. As though consuming no calories for weeks at a time would somehow leave me with an energy surplus, the perfect fuel for running.

And I used to run.

I used to do a lot of things that involved moving my body. Like taking spin and yoga classes. Like hiking and mountain climbing. Like having sex. Now I take pictures of my food and post them on social media while avoiding the scale in my bathroom and the clothes in my closet, and call that enough. Now I talk about running as though it's something I can still do, but choose not to. As though my life is too busy to make space for it. I mention it wistfully to anyone who brings it up, an *I wish I had time to do that race, but it's right in the middle of [insert excuse here]*.

Maybe next time, I say.

I have this totally skewed vision of myself in these moments. An image of the me I was at 27. All trim and fit. All youthful and energized. I look through pictures online. Those in which I'm tagged, because they feel more real, more authentic. In them she's laughing. She's engaged. She's thin. And no matter from which angle the camera has caught her, she looks good. Healthy.

There are no rolls, no too-small-pants stretched across thighs and bellies grown round from neglect. No acne blooms on cheeks. Forehead. Back. Her hair is still bright and blond, from a box, for sure, but cared for. Washed. Brushed. Twisted on her head in those messy buns that are meant to look haphazard but really take an hour to perfect, only they never took her an hour. She was always able to get it perfect on the first try. Now it takes me at least an hour, and most of the time I give up long before that. Most of the time I just wear a hat. Or leave it in a topknot that flops to the side and then falls apart a short time later. Often I don't even bother.

A few months ago, in a fit of overeating followed by some solid mirror hate, I decided that my problem was not embracing who I am underneath all the things I do as a result of the societal pressure to have perfect hair and skin and teeth. That what I need, is a return to the me I am, naturally. I decided to try and love this body, its skin, its hair, its size. And I meant it. But at the same time I made that choice, I also decided to go Vegan. I convinced myself, as I stood in front of the now-turned-against-the-wall mirror, that a Vegan diet was healthier, would prevent acne and greasy hair. And cancer. But really, it was because I thought that dropping the dairy and eggs might be the path to thinness. I stopped dyeing my hair. I got off birth control. I started hot yoga. And I ate a lot of bread. Whole grain, but also french. Sourdough. Pasta. Cookies. Did you know they make Vegan doughnuts?

It turns out that my hair, underneath the store-bought dye, is what my mom used to refer to as “mousy blond.” It's the color of sewer rats. Of refrigerator mold. Of concrete before it dries. No one walks into a salon and asks the stylist to give them the color of my hair. Mine is the exact color for which beauty companies developed their dyes. If seen on the street, I'd be the perfect candidate for a makeover. After all, you couldn't find much less cared-for, much less manicured. Some days I wished they would find me. Wished they would pull me into the store and scrub and polish and fix my edges. My details. Iron my lines and trim my excesses. But that kind of thing only happens on TV. And only to people who have friends that see them enough to write in their candidacy. My social circle mostly consists of old friends from travel and high school, reconnected online. And my dog. I get to pick and choose what they see. And when they see it. Maybe this means I have control issues too.

In an effort to follow through with my decision to “return to natural,” I went into the doctor's office and asked them to remove my IUD. It was the

one bathed in hormones. The kind that makes you stop having your period and promises to correct acne and PMS pain and mood swings. My ex-boyfriend told me I changed when I got it “installed.” That my libido vanished. He was convinced it was to blame for our breakup. *You were always interested in sex before*, he’d tell me. I didn’t have the courage to tell him that I stopped being interested long before the IUD. That the device just, sort of, helped, by providing me with an excuse. When you first get it in, you bleed a little bit, all the time. It was a good way of avoiding being naked with him. And after the bleeding stopped, we were in such a habit of not having sex that I didn’t notice when he started having sex with other people. When he stopped calling as often. When his tone changed. One day he was there, and then he was gone. It was actually okay with me. I didn’t have to put on makeup anymore. Didn’t have to shave. My dog and I could watch Netflix and eat ice-cream out of the container. I could go to bed at 8. Or 7. Or not get out of it at all.

I had the doctor remove the IUD because I thought, after all this time, that maybe my ex was right. Maybe it was to blame for my mood swings. My weight gain. My skin problems. *Besides*, I thought, *I’m a woman, and I deserve to feel what it feels like to be a woman free of a men’s need to control my reproduction!* I’m a feminist, too. It’s one of the titles I give myself. And this felt like the kind of thing a feminist ought to believe. It is true. I should know how it feels to be without synthetic hormones, but the real reason I wanted it out was because I wanted clear skin. And to not get cancer. I was pretty sure both could be corrected with this natural lifestyle to which I’d so recently ascribed. More fruit and vegetables. More whole grains. No hormones and chemicals. Organic. And yoga. Hot, detoxifying yoga.

What they don’t tell you, when all these naturalists tout their back-to-nature-healthy-lifestyle, is that all the blood you didn’t bleed during the four years you were plugged by that IUD will come rushing out of you like a dam burst at the moment of its removal. That no amount of pads, or tampons, or super absorbent high-tech underwear, or a combination of all three (and you can bet I tried that combination) can contain the torrent. I bled for 22 days straight. I gained ten pounds. I stained every pair of pants, every sheet. Every towel. I sneezed and had to run to the bathroom to clean myself up. I seriously considered getting those adult diapers boys in 9th grade biology class joked about. *Who cares*, I thought, *it’s not like anyone will see them. It’s not like anyone will know.* I imagined myself on the couch, in a diaper, eating ice-cream and drinking wine, and wasn’t immediately appalled. Was actually sort

of resigned to this new phase my life was entering. There's something kind of comforting about achieving a level of not caring that would enable one to wear a blood-soaked diaper while getting drunk on a couch with her dog. *It's kind of admirable*, I thought. *Being this in touch with what it's like to be a woman.*

Yoga is really tough to manage in a diaper.

And the heat of hot yoga class does amazing things to the aroma of a woman who's been bleeding for 22 days.

But really, it was the cost. \$15 a session was just more than I could afford. And after bleeding through my shorts for the second time, I thought they were probably grateful for my waning attendance. It was probably for the best. Who wants to see themselves reflected in a million mirrors while contorted into roll-inducing poses anyway?

My last class was four weeks ago. After it was done I stopped at this wonderful artisan bakery and bought three doughnuts. I ate one and a half and threw the other one and a half in the trash. *Progress*, I decided, *is learning moderation.*

I went back to the doctor and asked him to write me a prescription for birth control. *I'll still bleed*, I thought, *only I'll also stop for a few weeks in between.* And maybe those more gentle hormones would fix my skin. And if I could stop my skin from growing into the giant bumps and boils which it always wants to form, it'd have a harder time growing into cancer, too.

Right?

I guess the rollercoaster of hormone delivery and then abstinence and then delivery again wasn't really the best thing for my body, or my skin. Or my mood. I gained another five pounds in the first week, despite the Vegan diet. My chest became coated in small red bumps. The kind you get in adolescence when you're a mess of puberty and growth and learning how frequently to bathe. My last pair of jeans no longer fastened, and I developed a deep love for leggings and sweaters that reached my knees. And I thought this was a fair trade for ebbing the flow of a period that wouldn't end. Except that my face erupted in the kind of acne one can only imagine in nightmares in which all your teeth fall out before your skin bursts and melts and then drips into the sink, bubbling and smoking and jolting you awake to frantically check that your face is still in its right shape, your teeth still firmly adhered to your gums. Only when my hands reached my face they met a landscape both rocky and puckered, punctuated by mounds no amount of concealer can hide. Thankfully, I had long hair. And bangs. And sunglasses.

It's the sugar, I thought. I'm sure of it.

If I could just get rid of the sugar in my diet I'd be able to finally lose the weight and clear up my skin and balance my hormones and run that marathon. I read about what sugar does to your body. About how it fuels disease and lethargy and depression and cancer and how it hides in places you'd never expect, from the bottom of your pasta sauce to your wine glass, your whole grain bread to your smoothies and tea. I learned that sugar and honey and agave and white flour are somehow all the same. That eating a sandwich—even a Vegan one—is basically like ingesting a few tablespoons of refined white sugar as far as your body is concerned.

Why didn't they teach us this?! Why isn't this common knowledge?!

I spent days obsessively searching the internet for more data, more studies. I read about cancer patients who cured themselves by kicking their sugar habit. About obese people with life-threatening diseases that heal themselves and lose all the weight by omitting sugar. I found an interview with a dietician in which she said that sugar is more addictive than cocaine.

I didn't sleep. I examined every food label. I pulled out all the items from my pantry, my fridge, and began tossing them into the trash. I bought vegetable starts and potted herbs and began growing my own produce on the window ledge. I started making deals with myself, like: *you can have sugar only in your morning coffee, 'cause it's just a tiny amount, and it won't hurt.* And then: *okay, you can have a glass of wine or a beer only on days you run.* And then, *only on days you run more than four miles!* Except that four miles became harder and harder to maintain, turning into: *only three miles.... On days you walk a few miles.... On days you leave the house.*

And then last Tuesday Trump won the election and I drank three beers and ate a pint of ice-cream and went to bed and didn't get out of it until Thursday morning.

I had a job Tuesday. I'm pretty sure I don't have a job anymore. I probably should have called to explain. I probably should have pulled myself out from between the blankets to write an email.

They may have worried. Or not. It was kind of liberating to not care, but also a little scary. Because I'd never Not Gone to Work before. I'd never Not Gotten out of Bed for so long. I'd never felt so detached. So apathetic.

The thing about apathy is that it makes you not care about sugar or meat or the scale in the bathroom or your face. It makes you watch hours of Netflix and consume vast quantities of mac and cheese. It makes you pile dishes in the

sink and not answer the door, or check your mail, or pay your bills, which can't be paid anyway because you unceremoniously quit your job and can't muster the courage or energy or motivation to call them and explain.

And how *does* one explain? *I'm sorry I haven't come into work this week, but Trump won the election and I couldn't get out of bed?* I know this new millennial generation is changing our understanding of work/life balance and quality of workplace environment, but I think no-showing-because-Trump-won is pushing the boundaries of tolerance and understanding to an as-yet-uncharted place. After all, everyone else managed to come into work. Everyone else managed to get dressed. To shower. Everyone else was able to take their disappointment and fear and anger and put it into a neat little package to be gently opened at lunch or break or over cocktails after work, carefully removing argument and reason and examining, together.

Commiserating. Rallying. Planning. They were able to wrap it back up when they were finished and tuck it away in order to move on to other topics, other tasks. They were able to find the energy to, say, go grocery shopping and cook dinner. In the same day. I can't even find the care necessary to change from dirty pajamas into clean ones.

I once saw a man sleeping on the shoulder of the interstate in the middle of nowhere between Southern Oregon and Northern California. There were trees and grass a few feet from the road. It was a hot day. I thought, *Why would he choose to curl up on the cement, the asphalt, when he could sleep in the shade of those trees, in the coolness of that grass?* I remember thinking, *I ought to call someone. 9-1-1 maybe?* But there was no reception and I didn't know where we were. I kept thinking, *What would I say? There's a guy sleeping on the side of the road? Did that constitute an emergency?*

But I think it did. I think I understand now, how he made that choice. I think he needed someone to call for help. To put a hand on his shoulder and suggest he move to a safer spot. To offer him a glass of water. Or a ride to a new place. I wish I had been that person for him. I wonder if he's still there. I wonder if he made it. I wonder if I will.

This morning I cried for a while, thinking about him. And myself. I showered. I put on clean clothes. Sweat pants and a hoodie, but clean. Fresh. I drove to the store thinking I'd get an orange. Nothing special, just an orange I could peel with my fingers and smell the oils on my skin and feel the juice burst in my mouth.

I bought a bag of them. All brightly colored and loose-skinned and I felt

the beginning of a tingling of joy at the promise of eating them. And as I carried them to the cashier, I passed by the bakery and there was the rack of doughnuts, all perfectly shiny and new, and, without thinking, I filled a bag with three. One sprinkled and two glazed old fashioned.

Dacia Price's short stories can be found in *Pacifica Literary Review* and *Toasted Cheese*, and is discussed at *Ploughshares* (web) and *NewPages*. Originally from Toronto, ON, Dacia is currently bouncing up and down the west coast, writing stories and climbing mountains.