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The book of Ruth

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THE BOOK OF RUTH

Thesis

Submitted to

The College of Arts and Sciences

UNIVERSITY OF DAYTON

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for

The Degree

Master of Arts in English Department

By

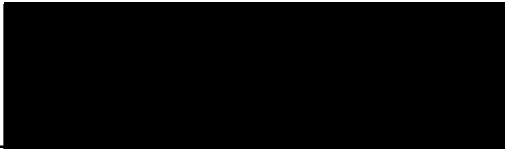
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UNIVERSITY OF DAYTON

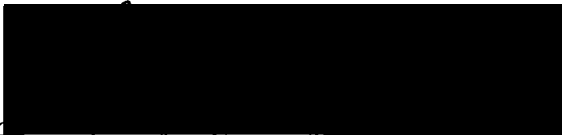
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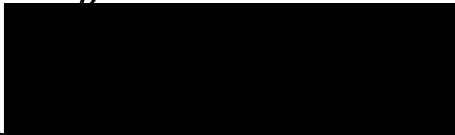
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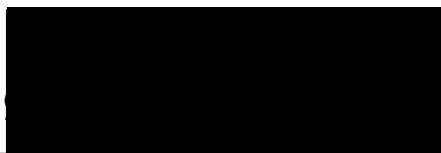
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Chair, Department of English

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ABSTRACT

THE BOOK OF RUTH

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The following is a collection of poetry exploring the intersection of politics and relationships. These poems also explore popular culture, issues of womanhood, and writing. These poems are in the tradition of female poets like Denise Levertov, Sharon Olds, and Denise Duhamel.

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I would also like to thank Dr. Bryan Bardine and Dr. Tom Morgan for their help. Their suggestions for revision helped me to reach the potential I knew I was capable of.

I would like to thank my parents, brothers, and my fiancé for their unfailing support in whatever endeavor I choose.

PREFACE

At this time in US history many changes are taking place. In addition to all the changes occurring in the US, I am starting a new chapter in my life as a newlywed and teacher. In order to understand and grapple the changes I am facing as both a member of the United States and the personal changes I am undergoing I have written a collection of poems examining and wrestling with all the changes in my life. The work in my thesis was produced after reading and studying poems by Denise Levertov, Sharon Olds, and Denise Duhamel.

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INTRODUCTION

Over the past few months, I have built upon poems that I wrote during my first semester of graduate school. The poems that I wrote while taking a creative writing course with Albino Carrillo were poems that explored the following subjects: politics, economics, social justice, growing older, and relationships. As a young woman who is about to embark on a new life in Chicago as a married woman and teacher, I sometimes get overwhelmed by the change not only happening in my life, but happening in the world that I live in and because of this tendency to become overwhelmed I use writing as a means to understand the change in my life and the world.

When I began to write poetry as a graduate student I looked back on my work as an undergraduate. During my final year at Bluffton University, I completed a project in poetry to gain Departmental Honors. In this project, I reflected on five different American poets and wrote poems that were in conversation with theirs. For example, one of the poets I studied was Walt Whitman and so I wrote a poem in conversation with "When I heard the Learned Astronomer." Although I am proud of these poems, I wanted to try to move beyond them when I began writing poems in Carrillo's class; while many of my poems were inspired by other poets, I also developed my own voice and style much more than I had in previous poems. However, when writing these poems I found

myself exploring some of the same poets that I had worked with for my previous project in Bluffton. I still treasure these poets and have learned much about poetry from them, but when I began the second leg of my thesis in January I decided to study completely new poets. The poets Denise Duhamel and David Wojan have helped me to form my voice and style in this project and they have helped me to delve more into the realm of my imagination when writing. For instance, my poem "Don Draper would never wear Sweatpants to Class" is about the character Don Draper from the television show "Madmen" and imagines Draper as a student in my composition course. Reading the poems of Duhamel and Wojan gave me more direction for writing a poem like this because many of their poems place figures of popular culture into new and exciting situations. These poets have also helped me to move past my proclivity to write prose poems and into writing poems that use line breaks and stanzas. I believe that poetry should be playful and fun- as far as I know, there is now rule stating that poetry must be somber and sad, and Duhamel and Wojan have helped me to develop this point of view.

As I've worked on these poems over this past semester, I have discovered a new way of writing. My writing is no longer solely about politics or relationship, but embraces the personal and political in juxtaposition. I feel at home among writers like Duhamel, Levertov, and Olds, but I find inspiration in things that could not be further from poetry. For example, my poem "Tipping Point" was written after watching a documentary on a man with a sleeping disorder and listening to a "This American Life" program about people living in homes infested by bed bugs and finding themselves afraid to sleep. I have noticed that in my life and poetry I tend to find strange connections. These connections make for poetry that can be challenging at times to write, but always satisfying when I read the finished project.

It is my belief that poetry is never finished. There is always more that can be revised. However, I am proud of these poems and the subjects that they explore. My style and individual poetic voice has grown and I no longer have to depend upon conversing with past American poets; instead, I write poems in my own voice, style, and subject matter that simply echo influential poets.

PART ONE

"America I've given you all and now I am nothing"- Allen Ginsberg

Giving up the Ghost

Tonight is the last night I will hear from you. I will curse you, drinking my glass of merlot while the heat rises in my cheeks. I want to celebrate- lift my glass and laugh, but I can't. I know you will never go away.

Tomorrow, I will try to forget you as I make my coffee and warm up my car, trying to shield myself from the cold and memories of you. As hard as I try, I won't forget you. I will try to push the memories of the past 8 years from my poor brain, pushed to capacity by images of dead civilians and faces of foreclosure. You will sneak in places I least expect you like an unwelcome party guest enjoying the food and drink meant for others. You will be there when I sign my first mortgage. You will be there as I nervously shift in my chair, interviewing for a job. You will be there when I stand in front of the classroom, trying to undo the damage of thoughtless testing. You'll snicker like the Cheshire cat, changing faces and forms, but will always be there.

FOUR DOLLAR LATTE

*"We're all in this thing together, walking the line between faith and fear"- Old Crow
Medicine Show*

On the way to your house I stopped to get a four dollar latte.

I know I shouldn't have, but it was Friday and my body

Craved coffee. The cup was warm in my hand,

Anticipating the caffeine, I left the counter

Happy and ready to take on the three hour drive.

But as I left, the cashier asked the man behind me

How he was doing. He said he was doing terribly.

He said he had just been laid off. The stubble on

His face looked about three days old. The bags

Under his eyes were deep and told me stories

Of sleepless nights and worry. How stupid of me

To spend four dollars so shamelessly on something

As simple as espresso and milk. How flippant of me

To worrying about my wedding while others

Worry about their water bills. I tried to picture this man

Driving home and flipping through the classifieds. I tried

To think of him as being happy and free from worries,

If only for a few hours.

I thought about my students

Who believe the jobless choose to be jobless- how would

This man answer them? Would he admit that he was lazy,

Or that he didn't have a positive attitude? Would he tell

Them that he didn't try hard enough? I wanted to tell him

We're all in this together.

POLLY POCKET

Somewhere in China, Mattel is shutting down factories.

Workers rise with the sun, watch it lift the veil from their city,
and depart just as it dips and skips across the sky.

They listen as people in pristine, precise white uniforms
scold them about doing their jobs.

In Wal-Mart a young mother walks like Kate Moss on a
runway. She walks past the food, the clothes, and towards
the toys. Her red lacquered nails finger the packages, push past
the piles of Barbies, and select a Polly Pocket for her five year
old daughter. Later that night, as she stirs the skim milk into
her Starbucks coffee, she complains to her husband that it's
impossible to buy anything from America.

I wore my "Peace is the answer" shirt to instigate things.

Leaning in lawn chairs with uncles and aunts that only
visit once a year, talk fell on politics- illegal immigrants

taking our jobs, people in China taking our jobs. But when
I hold a mirror up to their faces, they will blush like children
caught in a lie. They will turn their heads and hike towards
the nearest Wal-Mart.

HEAT ISLAND

Toothpaste dancing in my mouth, NPR announces that Phoenix, Arizona is suffering its worst heat wave in years. The city is a heat island- during the day, the heat builds up in the blacktopped streets and rises up at night, seeping through the city like a red wine stain seeping through a rug.

Packing my simple lunch, the *Today Show* buzzes from the living room about the race to the Artic. With the solemnity of a child at church I listen as the reporters explain that there will be no ice cover by 2050.

Knowing that, who could drive a Hummer back and forth to work like a selfish parent spending money on themselves but denying their child food? Knowing that, who could buy food processed in New Zealand and flown to Middle America? Knowing that, who could jet set to New York once a month?

My peanut-butter sandwich stares at me from its place on a paper towel. My potato chips and grapes are neatly laid out in their plastic bags. The oil rises up from the tile floor, soaking my feet, invading my brain, choking me- my God, please don't let this be in me too.

JEFFERSONVILLE

It's hard to sleep
in mid-America. Images of price tags
roll through our brains
like trains on the track.

At the Jeffersonville Outlet Mall

the parking lot is lined
with Jeeps and Suburbans
as the sunshine downs
on the last day of August.

The Jeffersonville trolley
ambles through the parking lot
every fifteen minutes ensuring
overweight shoppers that they will make their way
from the Gap to Old Navy.

Signs proclaim all clearance items

are an extra fifty percent off with the exuberance

Cubans would use if they found Castro dead.

Mothers with strollers roll

through the aisles, cooing

along with their children

over half priced

khakis at Banana Republic as if they are singing a lullaby.

A small town between two cornfields, the rows of stores painted white with
ceramic pots of

flowers sitting by benches the color of hospital walls. Each row of stores as
straight as beans in a

field as Air Supply plays on the loud speaker. Women in their forties

walk out of the Coach

outlet seeking jeans and jackets like cavemen seeking food.

RICH AND POOR

For Matt

We sat and talked about the poor, glasses of Cabernet
in our hands. In musical speeches, we dissected
the distance between rich and poor. I laughed at those
who still huddle in houses
hording money like children hiding candy
under their beds.

But then, we drove away and had to stop for gas. And as I stood by the pump
with you,
watching as the numbers crept closer towards thirty
the man at the pump next to us asked for a few bucks. Their tank sat as empty
as school hallways on a Saturday morning.
Their wallets were bare. The wine and weed
still filled my head with little air bubbles,
but you opened your wallet and gave three singles.

At the register, he is asking for three dollars worth of gas.

He is walking back to the car, his girlfriend crying in the backseat and

him trying to fill the tank with one gallon. All our talk about the rich

and poor echoed in my ears. My cheeks burned.

My eyes turned to the floor.

We could not stay. We were too ashamed,

like students caught cheating on a test.

FREEDOM

A bumper sticker announces that "freedom is not free" from the back of a pick-up truck as we speed down I-75. We accelerate to get a closer look. The eagle stares at us as if watching salmon in a stream.

The eagle accuses me of not giving enough for freedom; suddenly forcing me from the safety of the Jeep to hand over my dollars and quarters. The line creeps out the door, meandering through the hallway like a snake slithering around a tree. I get out my wallet, ready to pay for freedom. Another step. My skin itches with the fervor of a mosquito bite in July. My shoes stick to the floor and the register announces my turn. I run out of line, never turning back to face the eagle.

Passing the truck we laugh. I sigh and turn my face towards the sun- it's blank as snow on this hot day.

INTO THE LIGHTS

"I'm thinking about the big one, WWII"- Josh Ritter

Looking up at the October night sky, I counted the atomic stars and listened as you talked and laughed about nuclear war. You calculated the many countries that could collide, like a mathematician you listed the ways that our homes would be turned into the dust they came from.

We stopped at Waffle House. The coffee coursed through my veins, soothing my throat, eggs and hash browns were laid out before us like a treasure, and as I smiled at you the fear overwhelmed me, like a child that does not want to go to bed because of the dark. Shockwaves ran through my body like coffee. The lights shone as vividly as the eggs and hash browns on the table. Your hand let go of mine as we said goodbye with our eyes. Our skin turned to ash like the dust that we came from.

Looking up, I watched the lights change from red to green and back again. I squeezed your hand and took another bite of eggs.

KING HAROD

I don't care if it rains or freezes 'long as I got my plastic Jesus- Plastic Jesus

In secret offices tongues wager:

in one King Harod is planning to kill

all the first born sons in Israel.

The plastic Jesus sways in the November wind

and we sing halleluiah.

The little Lord Jesus, laying his head

in the inflatable crib-

Mary stands beside Him, cloaked in nylon.

Three wise men offer cans

filled with gasoline.

CIVIL LIBERTIES

"I'm not going to pay income taxes if the U.S. goes to war with Iran."

For Matt

Along with you

my eyes skim the screen taking in the words

as Chris Hedges proclaims his resistance.

I picture him living under a bridge,

a lien against his home,

repo men hauling away his furniture.

He put his ear against the door

and heard that we'll lose civil liberties.

I told you I was scared.

Our doors are broken down.

Dark figures approaching, tapping us on the shoulders.

One figure picks us up by our feet, the other our arms-

they swung our bodies jump rope style and threw me into a train car.

Someone huddling in the corner asks what I did.

I shrug my shoulders and start to cry.

You kiss my forehead and tell me not to worry.

I shrug my shoulders and pull the covers tighter.

PART TWO

*"My madness is dear to me. I who was almost always the sanest among my friends,"
- Denise Levertov*

Tipping Point

It would be easy to fear sleep:
Our bodies, completely disabled
Like cars that won't start. Our minds
Devoid of thought or creation.
Anything could happen.
As our eyes twitch with dreams
A thief with good taste could
Steal our favorite books or music.
Our animals could start talking while
The sun is still visiting the other side of the earth
And we would miss it all because we've lost
Consciousness for seven to eight hours.

I want someone to be the protector of my sleep
And make sure I go to bed every night at the same time,
Take a nap at four o'clock, and quit drinking coffee
When the clock strikes five.
It could be the tipping point between a good poem
And a bad poem. It could be the difference between
A Freudian slip and finding the word I'm looking for.

It could be easy to be afraid of sleep:
I could miss the latest news or a movie
Being show on insomniac theater.
But I'll try not worry the next time
My head hits the pillow.
It could be the tipping point.

What Eve was Thinking

It's hard to know what Eve was thinking
when she took the first bite of that
apple, or fig, or whatever kind of
fruit God had forbidden. Before
she took that bite Eve didn't have to worry
about getting pregnant, or getting fat, or
waking up at 5:00 am pacing the floor
of her bedroom trying to get her mind
off of her searing cramps-
as I find myself doing this morning.
I try to think about the alternative-
either pregnancy or menopause-
neither are attractive options,
but they don't make me feel better
about the pain radiating from my
belly to my calves. Rather than make
my peace with womanhood, it is easier
to turn my heating pad on high, pop
my fourth Tylenol in two hours, and
close my eyes.

Drinking Cokes

It's hard to picture parents as people, to understand that they had a life before you. I

picture my mom as a high school student, sneaking out of the house, drinking Cokes with friends, and wondering what to wear to school the next day. I picture her fighting with her mother in the same way we fight and her driving away to blow off steam. I see her talking to her girl friends and making plans. I want to tell her to stay there. I want to tell her that the sacrifices and decision making can come later.

We think that they have always been old. We expect them to make the sacrifices inherent in parenting. We see them like a portrait, never changing and ever present. We don't know that they once lived a life free of decisions and we don't see when they're mind's eye drifts back to that time.

LIST POEM

After Denise Duhamel

1. I feel like copying someone.
2. I feel like being original.
3. I feel like adding my voice to the conversation.
4. I feel like adding my voice to a different conversation.
5. I feel nervous for about ten minutes every day before I teach.
6. I feel worried about the economy.
7. I feel like I'm probably not worried enough.
8. I feel trashy when I buy a five dollar bottle of wine.
9. I feel guilty if I buy a bottle of wine that's more than ten dollars.
10. I feel like going in to Starbuck's and asking if I can just *have* a cup of coffee.
11. I feel like turning off my cell phone all day.
12. I feel like I should probably check my voice mail box more often.
13. I feel intimidated around tall people.
14. I feel like a giant when I stand next to someone shorter than me.
15. I feel nervous when I stand next to a pretty woman.
16. I feel like telling you to calm down.
17. I feel like telling you to grow up.

18. I feel like driving out in the snow to get a tattoo.
19. I feel like getting high and watching a movie.
20. I feel like staying in and doing homework.
21. I feel like writing a children's book.
22. I feel like being a stay-at-home mom.
23. I feel like being a stay-at-home mom is a terrible waste of an education.
24. I feel like going to a restaurant and ordering a big steak, but I'm a vegetarian.
25. I feel like guilty about still watching MTV.
26. I feel like checking to see if *The Hills* is on.
27. I feel cutting my hair short.
28. I feel the need to make things as simple as possible.
29. I feel like dropping out of grad school.
30. I feel that my professors can probably tell that I don't care when I'm in class.
31. I feel like going on to get a Ph.D.
32. I feel like everything is material.
33. I feel like I've lost faith in writing.
34. I feel guilty when my parents tell me they had kids when they were my age.
35. I feel even guiltier knowing I'm not going to have kids for awhile (knock on wood).

36. I feel like there are so many things about me I don't want them to know.

37. I feel like there are so many things about me that they should know.

38. I feel like dancing.

39. I feel like a white girl when I'm dancing.

40. I feel like I should learn how to do the electric slide.

41. I feel like playing rap music really loud.

42. I feel like *no one on the corner has swagger like us**

43. I feel like telling you to take dance lessons.

44. I feel happy when I'm cooking.

45. I feel most alive when we're driving on the highway.

46. I feel sad whenever I eat poached eggs (but I love them anyway).

47. I feel terrible when I'm told I'm selfish.

48. I feel like working on not being so selfish.

49. I feel that I swear too much.

50. I feel articulate enough, though.

51. I feel like drinking *one more cup of coffee before I go.***

* "Paper Planes" by M.I.A.

** "One more Cup of Coffee" by Bob Dylan

THE KNIFE

A blonde stands
naked in front of a doctor.
He rests his hands
on her hips
with the ease of a lover, proceeding to mark
every inch that needs cutting and trimming
as if she is a piece of clay and he is a sculptor. He grabs
an inch of fat from her side,
marks it. Frowns as he notices
her turkey neck, marks it. He outlines
the slope of her inner thighs,
hoping to leave
no sign of womanhood
when he's done.

The blonde and I switch places.

The Chianti I'm drinking is full of sugar

mounds of it

float in every glass- it swims

in my veins, clumps together, ends up

as cellulite on my ass. Suddenly the doctor is marking

my body- marking my belly,

my sides, and my thighs. He frowns

as if I am a student who does not

complete a test on time-

he marks more

until my body is a roadmap

to some place better, some place happier, some place brighter.

The doctor is ready

to take me to the cutting

room table.

I am ready to be put to sleep,

to dream of the knife.

STILL

"You'd think after all this time, I wouldn't be surprised"- Sharon Jones and the Dap Kings

I have traced your palm with my finger so many times I know
every curve, dip, and crease, just as cars know Mountain highways
so well they never have to slow down. But it still astounds me
that your hand fits in mine like a picture fitting into a picture frame.

It still amazes me that when you close your car door
tears spring to my eyes like a child sent to bed without dinner.
And it's still startling, that you search my face
in the way that painters search the sky.

BANGING COFFEE POTS

"A thinking woman sleeps with monsters. The beak that her, she becomes."-Adrienne Rich

Twenty was the beginning of it all- tumbling through the years, through paper work, and towards a life outside of dorm rooms. At twenty-one Guinness first kissed my lips.

Twenty-two was the year I found a ring on my finger.

Twenty-three will be the last year I write my maiden name on top of poems. Twenty-three will be the last year that I can wake up at noon and not be met with dirty dishes, grimy tile floors, and piles of laundry as round as sand dunes. Twenty-three will be the year before *I wake up banging coffee pots into the sink.*

WAKING

Engaged with Denise Levertov

I woke up

with my body

remembering yours,

the way a glass remembers

remembers the swirl and twirl

of the wine that once filled it.

GIVING AWAY CADILLACS

"I am seriously waiting for Billy Graham and Elvis Presley to exchange roles"

Lawrence Ferlinghetti

Billy Graham wipes sweat from his forehead.

He stands blinking in the sun, waiting for the
right words to come.

The auditorium in Memphis brims over like
a coffee cup. Graham does not see faces but
quick blurs as if looking out on Monet's
"Water Lilies." From the back wall, he sees
black hair moving around like flies swarming.

In the heat, Graham lifts his glass of water,
feels it course through his veins.

The black hair moves closer.

Graham's eyes brighten- Elvis is walking through the crowd.

Elvis never stops. Never hesitates.

He swaggers to the stage and up the stairs.

Graham moves to the left, listening to Elvis speak.

His southern drawl soothes the crowd like a bedtime story.

Graham picks up a guitar, strumming along to stories of

Elvis giving away Cadillacs.

ROY ORBISON

"Jesus He loves His sinners and heaven is honky-tonk"- Ray Lamontagne

Most people hope to hear God say
"Well done good and faithful servant"
when they get to heaven. I hope to hear
a man in black say, "Hello, I'm
Johnny Cash" and then introduce me
To June. From the corner of my eye
Jimmy Hendrix sits rolling a split
and without even asking he hands it
to me, smiling and saying God
never meant for the stuff to get
such a bad rap. I would sit on a cloud
and philosophize with John Lennon,
lean over and whisper to George that
he was always my favorite Beatle.
I hate the sting of whisky, but
I'd make an exception if I could sip
Southern Comfort with Janis Joplin.
Jerry Garcia's gray beard would
gleam in the sunlight as he tells stories
about his long, strange trip. Janis
would put down her glass of whisky to
sing a song with Jerry about his days
with the devil. I could
share a beer with Hank Williams,
listen as Richy Vallins cried

about his lost love Donna, and
sigh as the Big Bopper explained
how he got his nickname. Elvis,
with his sequin suit and slick hair,
would swagger over to join the
conversation. Just as he walks over,
he shuffles away upon seeing
two eyes staring back at him behind
dark glasses and hearing the unmistakable
bravado waft through the air.
Even Elvis, with all his swagger
cannot follow him. He may not be sexy,
but damn that man can sing.

PROPELING

You darted across the road

tail wagging in the wind.

I caught my breath as you

safely landed in the green of

the lawn like a pole vaulter

landing with a thud on the

blue mat.

What propelled you across the

road that day?

You were filled with the same

energy that made you walk up

to my door, meowing with each step.

It pushes us both forward.

SCRUBBING

Last night, your anger fell on me-

like coffee onto a white rug.

Leaving a stain that will not rub clean

no matter how hard I scrub.

THE BOOK OF RUTH

"The spores were our witnesses"- Sharon Olds

In Las Vegas there is a little Chapel, tucked away from the casinos and hotels, just like a black dress hidden in the back of the closet. There, I will walk down the aisle and say the vows to my beloved- no roses in the background, no ice-sculpture, no crying uncles and aunts who wander in and out of my life like bad dreams. The smoke billowing like clouds will be our minister and the dice our witnesses. We will recite the Book of Ruth to each other and when we walk out of the church it will be to the sounds of our own footsteps on the wooden floor, just as when I was handed my college diploma the congratulations did not ring in my ear the way a waitress, in clearing tables, finds that she has been stiffed her tip.

MAP

America, America, my home sweet home- America the Beautiful

We turned over

in your bed.

You traced

the slope of my hips-

a hiker wandering

through the Appalachian trail.

I searched your face,

feeling the stubble

and lines of your smile,

like a deer stepping to water

in the great Northwoods.

The flag hung over our heads,

upside down and backwards.

It's a secret that we can't tell.

We moved faster like cars on highway 61

speeding towards the coast.

WITHOUT MY HELP

My hands are wrapped around the pot

As the wheel spins.

Sliding over the cool clay,

removing excess as clumps

of clay form under my fingers.

The clay spins on its own.

the sides become smooth

without my help

I sit back and watch.

Part Three

"What you call love was invented by guys like me to sell nylons"- Don Draper

Don Draper would never wear Sweatpants to Class

Don Draper would never wear sweatpants to class,
unlike my students who stumble into their seats in sweats
and pajama pants in the middle of the day. He would
sit in his grey flannel suit- hair slicked back
and a glass of whiskey in hand. He would light
a cigarette- a Lucky Strike, of course- and say
something insightful, squinting his eyes,
shifting his weight, and looking around the room.
He would never look down to get out of
answering a question. No. He'd look me straight
in the eye and give his opinion.
The other students would be inspired.
They would start wearing grey flannel suits,
drinking bourbon whiskey, and smoking- Lucky's,
of course. As evidence of their metamorphosis,
Don would fly off, like Mary Poppins- off to change
another group of Freshman from careless
teenagers to thoughtful booze swillin' adults.

Joan Holloway Sits Down to Read *A Room of One's Own*

After Denise Duhamel

Joan Holloway sits down to read
A Room of One's Own with a
dirty gin martin by her side.
She called in sick to work today,
but really she just wanted a day
to herself- without her fiancé
or her boss telling her to fetch
a cup of coffee, make copies,
or fix dinner. She puts her
feet up on the couch and
takes a sip of the martini-
her eyes open wide
as the gin and vermouth leave their mark.
Despite the gin, her eyes scan the pages
quickly as Wolfe's words leave their effects.
She feels dizzy.
She feels light headed.
She feels like a child who just learned a secret.
Joan identifies with Wolfe- a woman shuffled
Around like cards. She pushes the images of
Sneering men in glen plaid suits like she
Pushes through the revolving door,
On her way home from work for the last time.

Peggy Olsen goes to a Dance Class

Loud salsa music plays
women's hips sway to the beat
that pounds through the air like thunder-
Peggy Olsen stands in the back of the room
in a full skirt and high collared blouse-
everyone else in tight spandex pants and tank tops.
She looks around, eyes squinting,
mouth pursed. Peggy's neat,
prim ponytail is free of sweat while
everyone else in the classes face and
hair is shrouded in sweat. She watches
from her perch by the idle exercise bikes
as the women dance a modified twist-
finally, a dance she recognizes.
She stands up and smoothes her skirt
and takes her place in a row of dancing woman.
She does the twist and a smile creeps across her face.
She follows the instructor's next move into
a grapevine to the right and then the left.
Peggy feels the blood rise in her face and the beads of
sweat form on her forehead- she pauses and shakes
out her prim ponytail. Before she knows what's
happening she is shimmying in the front of the class.

Next Sunday

Don tells Betty to shut her fucking trap
as they stand in the kitchen talking
about whether or not they move
back to the city. Don made a decision
and said it was final. Betty was feeling brave.
She took a leap and told him she really missed
the city. His eyes squinted and he told her
to shut her fucking trap. The words hung
in the air like the word bubbles in the comic
strips that Betty liked to read on Sunday mornings
when everyone was still asleep and she could
spread the newspaper out on the kitchen table
and enjoy a cup of coffee and the kind of silence
that only exists in the early morning. The words
stung her, but she didn't want to cry. She took a
cigarette out of her gold case, tilted her head to
the left and lit her Lucky Strike. Betty looked at Don
and wondered how she got her. She took a slow
inhale feeling the nicotine calm her nerves. She knew
it was just a matter of time until Don started to call her
a child and spoiled, so she took another inhale said
"Ok, Don," walked outside and dreamed of the next Sunday.

MONDAY

It's hard to be the only good guy in the room,
at least that's what Harry thinks when he's
surrounded by men in grey flannel suits,
joking about cheating on their wives.
He's considered other jobs- sure, he
could find a job at a newspaper,
a government job, or go back to
school and be a professor. He
likes to think about what kind of
teacher he would make- drinking
coffee all day instead of whisky,
wearing tweed jackets instead of suits,
and growing a beard. He looks around
the smoke filled room. The ice in the
glasses of whisky clink together as the men
try to shake out the last drop of whisky before
pouring another drink. The room has a soft glow

from Lucky Strikes, but if he looks closer, he
sees the bags under their eyes and the strain in
their voices. If he looks closer, he sees himself
ten years from now with the same bags under
his eyes and the same strain in his voice.

Harry excuses himself quickly from the room walks to his office
to collect the framed photo of his wife, College diploma,
and the ballpoint pen his parents gave him upon graduation.
Harry smiles at the secretary in a way she has seen other
men smile. She knows that she won't see him on Monday.

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