

## “casuals”



All I wanted was a cigarette.  
We weren't allowed to smoke.  
He knew where to go.

We swept sidewalks together.  
Raked sand together.  
Talked about life together.

His window was across from mine.  
I think he saw me changing once.  
Maybe more than once.

He was getting dishonorably discharged.  
I didn't think he was a good man.  
I didn't think he was a bad one, either.

I had been two weeks since I landed in Monterey.  
I only wanted a cigarette.  
He knew where to go.

I bought the Southern Comfort and bottom shelf gin.  
He carried them with him to his room.  
I didn't think anything of it.

We raked sand together.  
We ate lunch together.  
We watched movies together.

We sat on a makeshift bench by this ditch  
by the installation fence.  
We drank and smoked and laughed.  
I taught him Farsi and he taught me Russian.

Russian for “hello” and “goodbye.”  
Russian for “This is allowed.”  
Russian for “This is not allowed.”

I think he saw me changing once.  
He tried to kiss me on the cheek.  
I told him no, my boyfriend wouldn’t like that very much.

We smoked some more  
We drank some more.  
We laughed some more.

It was 2130.  
I had to be in my room by 2200.  
He said not to worry, I’d be back in time.

I insisted and tried to leave.  
I fell to the ground.  
He didn’t help me up.

I only wanted a cigarette.  
He kissed me on the mouth.  
I did not kiss him back.

I was immobile.  
Paralyzed.  
Drugged?

He kissed me again.  
And again.  
And again.

I did not kiss him back.  
I had a boyfriend.  
All I wanted was to smoke and drink and laugh.

He grabbed me by the ankles.  
Pulled me over the ditch behind the Army barracks  
by the installation fence.  
I could hear soldiers coming back to their rooms.

I was paralyzed.  
I always thought I would fight.  
Fend him off with car keys stuffed between my fingers.

I looked up at the tree branches above me, my watch  
said 2147.  
That was the last time I prayed to God.  
There were leaves in my hair and dirt on my arms.

There was something less than a man between my legs.  
It looked at me with hate in its eyes.  
We swept sidewalks together.  
God kicked back and swigged a PBR  
While I was raped behind the army barracks,  
over the ditch by the installation fence.

He helped me up.  
I couldn't stand on my own.  
How sweet.

I vomited by a tree.  
I was disgusted with myself and him and God.  
I wanted to drown in Southern Comfort and bottom shelf  
gin.

He walked me to my barracks building.  
How sweet.  
I made it to my room by 2200.  
All the girls watched me stumble down the hallway.

I was so violently alone.  
Taps wailed outside the window.

I left my hat by the bench by the ditch by the installation  
fence.  
He brought it to me the next morning.  
How sweet.

—Staff Sgt. Ashley Garza, U.S. Air Force  
July 2013