

Sketch

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Inner Notebooks

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Inner Notebooks

Your photos spill
from journal pages
years past
pushing from my veins in late autumn,
and you rush over me hot rain in my lap glistening again
across all of my skins.

I was left alone at seventeen
with you gone to war,
left without sleep
unable to stop
the night rhythms
the incessant advance of tanks
your dozer always the one
scooping land mines.
When you finally returned
for a month's leave,
I clung to the scent of cigarettes.

Smothering breaths of menthols
curled me into your chest,
as proof
that you had re-entered
my world,
the desert
would no longer
swallow
you whole.

I had the man smells coarse
deodorant soaps, sweat-musty canvas
atop rubber softsoles
of used up hiking boots,
and warm menthol fumes
that seeped from plastic seals

in your pocket
through button-down
cotton
shirts

Sometimes I shied
from the twining
of our limbs,
my constant rooting in nearness,
and your flinching away,
the busted bones lacing your spine,
still healing.

Polypropylene webbing burns and
rope callouses
landscaped slender fingers.
Hands using middle and index fingers,
coaxed your Ford into first.

Hands palms moist,

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fingers artist-long

*braided my bangs
and the frames
of my glasses
onto drying pages.
Your sketch bookfilled,
months worth of mirages,
hunger recorded
its own crackling surfaces,
and you sketched in secret
in a bucket loader
in a tent.
Blacktop pressed heavy
on sand, runways
were built, you sketched,
concealed men at war with others of themselves,
stood empty
in an oil slicked desert.*

That September,
home with me,
you were July weather
stifled,
balmy.
We lingered on,
a feverish collage
from the notebooks
airmail
thirst
The changes
in you burned
with the season,
my callow greens smoldered
in the residue.

And one day,
I helped you pick
out tall woolen socks,
we loaded down the bed of your truck,
and you drove south back to base.
I kept your winter coat,
 the heat of summer
 faded out
slipped into the seams of my attic
my most-packed boxes.

Cherri Donath
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