

You don't answer. Sometimes that works. At this point you hope that it's one of those questions that don't require an immediate answer, that it's just one more exercise. That's the way it turns out. The minutes pass. The only thing you can hear is the sound of boots slipping off and dropping to the floor, and then feet dropping heavily on the nearby table that serves as a desk, and finally an expression of satisfaction, somewhere between a sigh and a grunt. The soldiers must have sat down, too; nobody is saying anything. Then, the sharp scratch of match, a cigarette being lit, its aroma spreading, a mild tickle of smoke visiting you. You're surprised that you have no desire to smoke. The mere idea claws at your throat and fills you with nausea. It must be your obsessive, overwhelming thirst: your body can't crave anything other than water.

Now they are bringing in a tray. You hear them taking their seats around the table, the dragging of chairs, the shuffle of papers being pushed aside and murmuring of anticipation and camaraderie.

— from "Consultation," a story by Ariel Dorfman