

Three Poems

Jehanne Dubrow

Zippo

You hold the metal box, and flicking back
the lid, you hear a click. Or shutting it,
you feel the old, familiar thunk, the clack
of brass on brass. Or sparking it, the flit
of burning in your fist, you picture some
lieutenant who holds a lighter just
like this. He's standing watch perhaps—boredom
and the dark go on and on, a nervous gust
of wind. This pointed flame allows his eyes
to acclimate to night. Or he's on leave.
A thumb against the flintwheel helps disguise
his fidgeting. Or else he's home. You retrieve
the lighter from your pocket, make it flare,
and lift your little signal in the air.

Khakis

For twenty years he wore the matching shirt
and pants, a military-issue tan,
the color hiding oil stains and dirt,
the grease that leaked from pipes, the jerrycan.
The cruiser underway, he often sprawled
in metal spaces, checking for the spark,
the septic spill. He crawled beneath the stalled
machinery to fix the ruined dark.
Today he started wearing something new—
a button-down, a pair of trousers bland
in their pale brown. No ship at sea. No crew.
Only this dull uniform of plaid and sand,
his chinos smudged with ordinary mirk,
the drab complexion of civilian work.

Challenge Coins

Not currency, but not quite valueless,
these rounds of metal shaped to look like change,
and oversized, intended to impress
civilians with their shine, their gleaming range
of finishes, each one enameled, sketched
with an insignia or rank, the names
of aircraft carriers, a motto etched
in lines of gold. They're used for drinking games.
They're given out to sailors for a task
well done. They're giant pennies, souvenirs
to keep beside one's keys and pocket flask,
to hold, a way of counting out the years.
Not currency—it's hard to understand
their worth, the weight of service in the hand.

Jehanne Dubrow is the author of seven poetry collections, including most recently *American Samizdat*, and a book of creative nonfiction, *throughsmoke: an essay in notes*. Her work has appeared in *Poetry*, *New England Review*, and *The Southern Review*. She is a Professor of Creative Writing at the University of North Texas.