

as if I'm listening
to a distant me
reverberate, *fathoms*
I say of marriage,
the darkness wide, percussive
as a mine.

How young
the plebes all seem,
laughing when I say
fuck,
and afterward, in line
for autographs,

they ask
about my wedding ring,
how much it cuts
the skin,
the kind of bruise commitment
leaves.

Their collars gleam
with golden anchors.
Already they're weighed
down. I tell them *light,*
I say, *you'll barely feel the burden*
of this thing.

iii. Andrews Air Force Base

I spot him right away,
the pilot rigid
in his flight suit, still zipped from crotch to neck—
all of him sealed and insular
—arms crossed,
until at question time, his hand
shoots up
no doubt like one of the planes he flies
too fast I bet,
so that his wife worries
about this need to push the edge of speed
and sound, so that she can't stop
cleaning,
stop dragging the stringy mop across the floor,
or streaking the Windexed glass
with disquiet.

I hate this guy. He hasn't said a thing yet,
but I know what's coming,
the sentences
that soar on wings of certainty—I've met
his type before.
Later, when I watch
the video, I can see it on my face,
a smile meant disarm
hostilities,
my best defense in moments such as these.

It's terrible and lonely and difficult,
I say, meaning I think to be married
to a man like him or any of the men
in this room, or for that matter, my husband,
who've sworn to protect against threats foreign
and domestic, against poems perhaps,
those tiny detonations made of words.

iv. Walter Reed National Military Medical Center

The poem is not
a body, although

enjambment comes
from the French

to put a leg across,
each sentence twisted

at the break.
The sterile rooms

through which we wheel
are called stanzas.

And what are words?
—prosthetics made

to bear the weight
of what is lost,

the improvised blast
at the volta

which is another way
of saying turn.

to what's familiar,
 both of us trying
 to determine our places relative to land.
 She's nodding now. And I believe

we've reached the same conclusion,
 that reference points
 keep moving out of reach,
 that when I say vessels

I mean boats and bodies,
 that there's no more imperfect union
 than marriage
or the marrying of words.

Ramrod

Perhaps I wanted an officer, only I thought I said a man,
but sometimes transmissions have a way of breaking

at the place one needs precision most of all,
so that whoever read my message at the other end,

put in a form for officer when all I asked for was a man—
the gap between what's right and what is written

like a squad's request for more white pills
and the metal pails delivered weeks from now.

Instead of a man, I received a regulation figure,
stern and straight from the box, gilded at the insignia,

not to be touched for its brightness, so shined
it was best to leave to the actual thing

standing at attention on a shelf, the little spine
gone ramrod—a device, I learned, once used to shove

the bullet down a barrel, to tamp the powder,
to guarantee the spark at the peak of battle,

when the infantryman could barely hold the musket
steady. Ready aim fire. Cruel to consider

the body an instrument, the tool it could be,
how easily it entered common speech—sometimes

the ramrod sat unpurposed, heavy enough to serve
as paperweight or to prop a lazy door.

A Row of Ribbons

They're laid in lines,
 on plastic backings,
 so many stripes of service,

thick horizontals,
 fine verticals that signify
 campaigns, as if duty

could be turned to strips
 of variegated braid.
 Some are studded

with metallic stars—
 pierced, we might say,
 with longing for the celestial,

perpetually remote.
 Gold and silver, bronze,
 and all of it unreadable

to civilians—except
 as a kind of cordoned off
 achievement.

To us they're only rules
 and bars of color,
 each one a regulated streak

of a body belonging
 to a greater one.
 But ask my husband,

and he'll point to awards
on his chest, which are
to him an ocean,

or a certain sea
where his ship
once swept for mines.

What if these were enough
for the widow, the mother
of the suicide—who,

presented with medals,
would frame them
beside a folded flag,

touch these things
until they became more
than grosgrain

and base metal? Today,
I pin them on
my husband who seems

immobilized
by my hands fumbling
not to hurt him,

the ribbons hard
despite their apparent silk—
they don't bend

to fit the wearer,
who is after all, part
of a vessel which is part

of a fleet in its gray deployments.
Suppose for some there's peace
in these rows,

citations fit each to each,
how every sacrifice already
knows its place.



JEHANNE DUBROW the author of five poetry collections, including most recently *The Arranged Marriage*, *Red Army Red*, and *Stateside*. Her sixth book, *Dots & Dashes*, won the Crab Orchard Review Series Open Competition Award and will be published by Southern Illinois University Press in 2017. Her work has appeared in *Virginia Quarterly Review*, *Pleiades*, *Hudson Review*, and *New England Review*. She is an associate professor of creative writing at University of North Texas.

