

## WE THANK THE VETERAN FOR HIS SERVICE

is what the woman from the VA said  
when I asked about the paperwork  
for my mother the morning of  
my father's death. The veteran had  
a name, eyes the color of honey, blood-  
bruised arms (in the end). No one  
thanked the veteran for the honey.  
They wanted the corneas—a thing  
you cannot see—instead. The veteran  
is no thing. One time, on a business trip  
to Texas, the veteran was Al Pacino—  
at least to a fan for whom he signed  
an autograph. Once, the veteran was  
a pitcher, scouted by the Yankees  
in '63. He didn't make the team. Now  
his rotator cuff is someone else's.  
The veteran is thanked for this  
in a letter from his donor recipient.  
But he cannot read without his honey  
eyes, through the blue urn's thick  
ceramic wall. Back when he *could* see,  
the veteran spied the Son of Sam  
leaning on an elm outside his house  
in Queens Village. He told the story  
after Berkowitz was arrested. No one  
believed. The veteran was golden  
tongue, prone to exaggeration. Now  
the veteran is an unmade body: cornea  
and rotator cuff, spun bone and char.  
He is a box of unpaid parking citations,  
birthday cards, bet tickets from the track's  
glossed concrete floor. He is Ruffian  
and Foolish Pleasure pins from the 1975  
Match Race at Belmont Park, an old  
Metropolitan Life ID, locks of his kids'  
hair in tiny plastic bags, devout keeper  
of all things past. We thank the veteran  
for his service.