Clean Through

Two sides screened, where dogwoods might shadow him From morning sun? But instead he lies, a ghost on the bathroom floor, Invisible to my wife who cleans through him. The black and vanilla tile form a difficult bed. He lies, not my older brother, in the uniform of a soldier of a war Twenty years old. And he seems the same age. Nothing like my brother who was blonde, thinner, shorter, Who alone on a South Pacific atoll surrendered On a reef, his helmet miffed with one hole. The mica of jutting rocks silently watching an American stink Near a huge palm, as I have imagined it, with purple birds, Bowers of papaya bliss, the madrepores in moonlight like a choir Of children clinging to the enchanting stained-grass light, And nearby, a little indigene—I don't know how brown— Peering through leaves nearly as broad as she is tall at the soldier On his back kissed by ordinary combers. And now this body Who looks as if he may grab my heel when I shave.

Of operations, and holds his mien as dignified as a chief actor.

Does it remind him of the grave? This morning my wife enters.

But after the shower, his stare is damp. When I urinate,

He wears the medal of the South Pacific theatre

She washes through him. She wipes the mirror With a towel so old it is mostly waving fronds, But the dead private with the dark hair cannot speak

Or resemble anyone. He is below his image.

Why wasn't the living room selected? The porch in back,

Edward Locke