

## **The Astronaut Kisses Saturn**

*I thought the attractions of being an astronaut were actually, not so much the Moon, but flying in a completely new medium.*

—Neil Armstrong

When the man who wanted  
to be an astronaut holds a bottle  
to his aching lips like a kiss,  
drinks deep the amber warmth inside  
until it goes down where the hurt starts,  
he thinks about space—silent as a curse  
but sparkling with the souls of the dead,  
or like a million wishes for the taking,  
him as a boy watching on the porch,  
trying to decide, his parents fighting inside.

He thinks about the way the bottle  
might float in front and away from him  
in space, avoid his grasp, resist him.  
Or the way he couldn't chain-smoke Camels,  
because you can't light a match with no oxygen.  
He thinks he wouldn't feel deadweight heavy,  
could get out of bed for once, weightless.  
How even with all that dark he'd catch a glimpse  
of light—more than now—in the marbled giants,  
and even tiny, he wouldn't be insignificant like here.

Soon the astronaut is sloppy swimming  
on the dirty carpet—hair, cigarette butts, stains—  
like there's no gravity. He's laughing and crying  
like he sees the moon. He's talking to no one,  
saying he can see why God made it all,  
looking through the empty bottle like it's a helmet,  
eyes wide, almost panicked to take in what he sees,  
mouth still open like a kiss as he swivels, swerves,  
stumbles to caress the watery color around him,  
glowing rings like Saturn around his world.

\*Originally appeared in *Harpur Palate*