

virginia webster

Eulogy for a Space Shuttle

for Skip

*If in this sleep I speak
it's with a voice no longer personal*

-Adrienne Rich-

When I was ten my mother
lit the burner on the kitchen stove
I remember seeing the crisp blue flames
from where I sat and how
I startled when a lumbering moth
crackled in a swift puff.
She used to tell me how moths
would fly into a candle's flame, but
I had never seen anything die that way.
So I asked her why it flew into the fire.
She told me it liked the light.

I wondered years later
after I felt the bump of a desert hare
beneath my car one night
wondered what it thought of the two bright lamps
moments before the weight of them passed over its body.
It was the eyes I remembered, darting toward me
the bright panic, blind yellow.

And one day there was talk of men on the moon.

I was watering my marigold seeds when I saw a rocket
on the television, counting down to liftoff.
A book I read said the fear of flying
was really the fear of sex, the fear
of the fuselage erecting, of it holding,
the fear of falling.
I think of that now. How could they
not have been thinking that: giant straight thing.
And the power of the blast loud white noise.

After, when I looked down, I saw
the white-green tip of a marigold pushing up
into sun passing through the curtain.

I think if a scientist could explain
the inert seed cracking into space
stirring from sleep into a jagged mouth of light
then I could say that the light we follow
pulls me for that reason too, how
one day I came to sit at the helm of a ship
pointing toward the sun.

It must have been like this before
seeds moving from womb to womb
one dark space opening into another.
The light is brighter here than I had expected
the clouds are not as soft.
But the edge of heaven is blue.