

Sketch of an Astronaut

I've wondered how far a man in a spacesuit can go in this little town, shaped for sleepy farmers and teens with buckets of turnips, who throw them off trucks at crowds of children. He has his own source of oxygen, so the smoke of Cuban cigars at the lodge or the gray clouds over the daily book burnings don't tear up his eyes or roll him over into a waiting line of coffins. Making so much of his big leaps at hopscotch, he plants flags in the housewives' petunias and plays golf among the asphalt potholes, disappointed the ball skips across lawns and fails to soar. When he chaperones the prom with our youngest teacher he buzzes his words through the white helmet, dwarfs her hands with his insulated gloves, and doesn't feel the hot pink lipstick through his visor. The neighbors find his boot prints, large steps for a man, at two in the morning outside their launch pads, where the astronaut creates explosive sounds with his mouth inside space cars that won't fire. Before he leaves he sits in a chair at the ladies' auxiliary, who a week ago drew their first naked man. No matter how much they plead the suit stays on. Around his massive head they sketch the stars.

