



no, dear

No, Dear

Issue 14

SPACE

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Joseph Bradshaw

Poem

the kids these days—
they don't care about personal space
Me, I'm a FREAK about it

Jeffery Berg

FROM THE BLACK LAGOON

I could have been Kay in a white swimsuit
in blackish water. The Gill Man
unseen, nestled in wavering aquatic plants,
looking up at her.

In a black phone, a therapist's voice
sounded small: You have a fear of men,
you should avoid alcohol. I am a man, sometimes
bulky, sometimes bearded, sometimes
a starlet in peril. When an old woman

from a workshop returned my poems,
there, in blue pen, was her assessment:
I cannot comment upon your work's merit
or shortcomings because in these poems
there is too much darkness.

When I wrote an email to my remedial math teacher
that I was in love with him, he wrote back
to come see him. In his office, he berated me.
My legs shook. I glanced at his corkboard at the photobooth
strip of him in his crewcut with his radiant girlfriend
and then I stared down at his Kermit the Frog Pez dispenser
perilously close to the desk's edge.

The remedial math teacher suggested therapy.
I ended up in a campus room of gray carpet
in blue plastic chairs with a group of a few gay male students
led by a red-bearded straight man. I spoke
little. We were we told not to acknowledge one another
outside the group. What could I have said
to the pale-skinned, skinny, blond, closeted Catholic Eagle Scout
when I saw him pass my table under the white bright light
of the campus Burger King? The heart,

the mind, the music. The workshop asked of us:
Are all three elements here?

A semester after the email, at the campus theater,
I glanced a few rows in front of me, a little to the left:
the remedial math teacher with his arm
over his girlfriend at a showing of *Gods & Monsters*.

Come back Kay, you've gone too far,
they yelled out from the boat.
Time to come home, they yelled out to me—
a child at nightfall palms on my face howling,
I moved through the woods as a woman.

Alexis Pope

i have probably never been more beautiful

than this city park sprinkler

my shirt clinging to my ribs

i repeat gurgled lullabies

easing no one to sleep

there is an answer

hidden in the public toilet it's

do not touch the floor

all my energies

sink through my toes

my blisters heal

w/in hours

in ten minutes

i'm starring

in the worst porno

you'll ever watch

it's just me

streaming law & order

wearing yoga pants

& drinking beaujolais

seriously

yesterday my voice carried

a million crickets

across the courtyard

& my casserole

was a disaster

whatever ticket you bought

wasn't worth it

this show

involves walk-hardened feet

& lots of kimchi tacos

this show

has superb character development

you wonder why

i always leave

you alone

at the bus stop

it's b/c they're not

dependable

my artichokes

are ripening

my mango juice

clots

INDEFINITE CRYSTAL

i'm not buying
any goddamn owl decorations
i'm not buying
your five year plan
we put everything we own
in storage
i refer to my
ladyparts as
sleepaway camp
i refer to my lust
as inclement weather
& when it's raining
i crack the window
to let the damp in

either doesn't know shit about her past
or she just won't tell you

she doesn't have one

not in the way that you want it

a makeshift

I will throw my crystal in the mud
There it's done
I have throwed it
I have throwed my crystal in the mud

because the night
figures

in matter

Integrating

O
the suffering of a man, I want to know what that feels like

Any man, I don't care, an assortment of men

astronaut men, necromancers, cavemen

men in this room

How much time spent in anger

just huge spools of it thank you very much! Why, me?

how've *you* been?

& so on

just huge, huge spools

pools of men swimming in prison

adulterous men, men with children

splitting atoms for sport

and if I can't have that for even a minute

I will take the desert-future-by-the-sea where the scorpion's sting

is a rite of passage, the landscape one of arid erasure

we'll grow our hair out to here

out there—

everything bleached albino seaweed salt flats and calcified coral

there will be no necrosis at the candy shop no one will colonize the moon or do
weird things to seeds.

civil talk

this café on Clinton in BedStuy replaced a Tiny Cup that held banjo players
and people with ginger beards. now the owner's black, though he's not from the
'hood. why'd you name it Civil Service?, we ask him. where're you from? we all
have dubious qualifications to be here. skin color gives away the freelancers with
macs but not much money, you know. we're not locals. foreign accents give away
the people of color on macs. not locals either. is it okay, though, if we're just not
white Americans? is it okay, if we're in mixed race relationships? is it okay, if
our friends who visit are people of color, even if our apartments are all white,
enclaves that happened just 'cause?

we go to the Block Association meeting to make our street beautiful. all of the
attendees are white. we go to the community gardens to volunteer. the leader
is a black woman. all of the volunteers are white. we go to the laundromat. the
people doing their laundry are black. the people dropping off their laundry are
white. shouldn't be this simple; of course it's not. you have to see it from all
sides. yeah, that's right. spring comes, more and more light-skinned people walk
the streets, a vintage shop opens. bob's red mills appears in the nsa supermarket,
next to goya. see it from all sides. driving development. bringing jobs. "black
spaces are always under threat," says a friend who lives here, "we're used to
them shutting down." we go to Bedford Hill Café on Franklin, all of the patrons
are white. we go back to Civil Service café. they serve really strong coffee. we sip
eagerly, we sip too quick, we burn our tongues

8992

I say I'm diseased

He says with what

I say with everything

He says so what I say

I don't know I don't

want you to catch it

He says it's not always

contagious I say you don't know

that He says trust me I say

ontological
dissonance

He says is up

to me I say be

honest I'm crazy

He says I Love you I

say who says he says me I say

I love you he says I know I say

it's murderous loving with a

halved body He says I'll take what

you give I say too selfless he says you

don't know selfless I say perhaps he

says trust me I say how much is liability

he says: I have enough saved up

past life self-portrait

circa 1979, Atlanta

this basement :: damp cement

little girl & her curiosity come tumbling down steps into a familiar darkness. a family of hands fumbling. the soft sound of bible pages. a prayer? a mumbling. a hardening. a dumb clumsy thing this voice—a cobwebbed water heater boiling (secret)ion into spit.

this place meant :: damn semen

penis grows amid the bush. a wet whisper: *come here*. a zip. unzip. a fuzzy taste tickling. a dingaling. dangling. push. a strangling. a dank stank gathering. mouth. a festival of dirt. tongue. a festering—blur & blurt. stutter & spurt. what can bloom but lies?

displacement :: damned, see men

i do not belong here: this place: basement. cement. semen. see men. demon. damn. damned. sham. shame. shamed. damn shame. this place. dislodged. misplaced. dislocated. replaced. displaced—is that my mouth

balled tight & honest as a fist?

namesake

sometimes they fuck up—fit you with a name two sizes too small & it scrapes your shins
& chafes your spirit down to sawdust & sometimes the name too old for you—already
rust in the mouth of a newborn torn from some grandmama's past her fast legacy
simmering in the ground & sometimes the name don't sound right in your bones
gathers in the joints and aches before the rain come & vibrates your spine toward curve
& sometimes the name you don't deserve—too grand for all your regularness it blots
you invisible & sometimes the name is perfect but of course they fuck it up—
emphasize the wrong syllables say it too slow or without enough energy to make it
glow & sometimes they fuck it outta you—graffiti it with brutal memory & one day
you wake knowing it must change—tired of its tannins purpling your tongue & your
mouth a silent bruise.

What It Was Like, Being a Girl

bleached my best shirt out
in winter stood bone still

as if a gray sky were good as new
membrane posing as shell

why I did everything backwards
iced a cake before it burned

lies I never learned to tell
the girls with wool sweaters

& space for their desires
sliced into the snow

I trailed the one I wanted
to the art room's alcove

some boy said shut up & hurry
that door—you're letting in the cold

SPACE ODYSSEY

You and I are like the obelisk in the sand in the beginning section of Stanley Kubrick's 2001 Space Odyssey, which is called The Dawn of Man, which is actually the coda for it all, for the wildcats, the apes, all the pivotal functions of the film, the ancient past and distant future. They're all controlled by it, and in fact of all of human history depends on it as well, plus the human condition, and the Zarathustra and the Blue Danube too. Sometimes I wonder if in 600 years you and I will sleep floating together in a blue room full of mirrors. Sometimes I wonder if we will get to live once more as gorillas in the desert, blissfully at the end of it all, and it's disconcerting to me, how *HE WAS JUST TOO HUMAN* is a thing some people like to say about HAL 9000, Stanley Kubrick's super computer who has breakdowns (like you do) because although you and I would never kill anybody the way HAL kills the astronaut Frank Poole, you might tell me in a very strange way to *TAKE IT EASY* the way HAL tells Dave Bowman to calm down when he knows that Dave is catching on. Personally, I don't buy the *JUST TOO HUMAN* thing (when you say it about yourself) although being overburdened is a thing. I too sometimes love having mental breakdowns. Sometimes the only thing I love and hate about floating in space outside of the mother ship like this is that the chords could snap at any point. Towards the end of the film, when Dave is disconnecting HAL's cognitive circuits (Think "*MY MIND IS GOING, I CAN FEEL IT, DAVE,*") HAL talks about his teacher Dr. Langley and he sings the song, "*DAISY*" which is pathetic and heartbreaking, and it basically goes I can't give you anything but love. If I could go back to any happy place for a while, it would be back to the Griffith Observatory near the Hollywood Bowl with you. I wouldn't even mind if it were a Saturday night and we had to park two miles down Franklin Canyon and then walk the whole way back up in the dark past the lines of cars and the chaparral scrub on account of all the traffic because of course, that's how things go. In 1968, Stanley Kubrick and the makers of 2001 Space Odyssey could imagine _____

_____ but they couldn't imagine that people wouldn't be using CHRISTIAN NAMES (instead of last names) or that people wouldn't be marrying each other to form nuclear families for barbeques and having friends and their friends' kids over for fun on the weekends, and sadly that thinking is a little bit like mine. The specialist who helped Stanley Kubrick create HAL 9000 in a realistic way was a scientist named Marvin Minsky, and however that may be, I just can't tell if my thinking right now is realistic about the Griffith Observatory, and you, and me, but truthfully, I would like to go back there (you and me) to be amongst the meteorites again, great big chunks of them, giant models of the sun, *REBEL WITHOUT A CAUSE*, *DEVIL IN A BLUE DRESS*, *EARTH GIRLS ARE EASY* and all the other films that have been filmed there, the whole wild wide city down below, even more unfathomable, and us up there with all the other Angelinos crowded around the Star Pit, just watching that pendulum swing

Calamity

Everyday of my life I sat in a room and this was akin to writing: I sat and stared and wrote without lifting my hand, without turning my head, and stared into the humming of the room I sometimes called "prose" and sometimes called "San Francisco." That city was one of the places I'd been and simultaneously was one of the things I did while I was there. I did the place I was in, because the place was entirely itself, so to be there was to do it, and this was not something that happened everywhere you went, and rarely was doing a city the same as doing prose, as was the case here, and even more rare was the memory of that doing becoming the room you were in. I was in the room of San Francisco when it occurred to me to write, and write all my life. The room was separated from the rest of the house by a hallway; there was a hallway and at the end of it a place to go sit and write. I did every kind of walk down this corridor to arrive at the room of writing, and I walked with every kind of feeling, so that it wouldn't always be the same text I was writing. But, sometimes it was the same until later when it wasn't. The rooms in the house of writing had names like "white room" and "mud room" and "where we sleep" and "the table" and these were the stations the hand moved through while the body sat still and never moved, remembering a long-ago city, which both ceased to exist and went on existing in your typing, being dispersed, spread out between words. I wrote in San Francisco then stood up and shut the door. With the door shut, I closed the window, creating an airless space for description. I closed the window and made a spread of the pages of the book I was writing. It was the driest the room had ever been, and this dryness, this airless space without a hint of moisture, changed my thinking about what I was doing. I stopped thinking about typing and poured ink over the surface

of these pages then took my pencil and circled and first wrote my name then let my name dissolve in the ink and wrote my question on top of it. I kept writing and letting the script dissolve—one utterance on top of the next—now writing backwards, now making “sense” only in my mind as I let my hand do whatever it wanted (it wanted to write but no longer in the language to which it was accustomed) and still on that same space of the page, where, originally, I’d been moved to pour ink and draw circles. From the circles, I drew squares that looked like houses, and each of these houses resembled the house I was in, which made me want to write a novel. And the novel, as I began it, would tell the story about drawing in San Francisco, and would be in the midst of unfolding when I’d have to stop writing to draw, but it was all happening on that same space of the page where I’d poured ink and circled with my pencil.

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