

OFFICE SPACE

By Thompson Scribner

[Interior office. A cubical, with a phone, a rolling chair, and a wealth of hiding places. The OPERATOR sits alone.]

[palpable longing]

It's starts with a bubble.

Just one.

A singular bubble. Forming on the bottom of the pot.

[phone rings. It rings twice, then stops. Off stage a voice is heard, inaudibly answering the phone.]

And then it starts to rise.

Floating, weightless, incomprehensively light.

Splitting the molecules to the left, the right.

[the phone rings again. It rings 3 times, then stops. Another offstage voice is heard, picking up the phone.]

Sometimes, it sits just under the surface. For a moment. It's peaceful there, almost perfectly light, but safe. It can't stay there.

[the phone rings again. 1 and a half rings, then picked up]

Eventually, it—

[the phone rings again, 1 ring, then picked up]

Event—

[the phone rings again, 3 rings, and then the operator grabs the phone]

NASA operator. How can I direct your call?

Transferring...

[hangs up the phone]

[a burdened silence]

[the phone rings again, and the operator throws it across the room. From the other side of the stage, a phone, the same kind, slides in directly to the operators seat.]

I wanted to be an astronaut.

I built my vessels out of cardboard.

I tied my headset to my temple with a decommissioned neck tie.

I used to pray.

[the new phone rings. The operator rips the phone off of the chord, and tosses it behind them. A hand reaches out and grabs the chord, attaching a new phone to it and placing the phone back in place]

You can be whatever you want to be.

You can go to school, get good grades.

The best grades

You can outwork everyone, you can care more

Want it more

You can do everything right.

[the phone rings. It stops. Silence. It rings again, a new tone of ring. Silence. A third tone. The operator picks it up]

NASA operator. How can I direct your call?

Mathematics or engineering?

A or B?

Doesn't matter all that much.

Transferring...

[they hang up the phone]

Water still boils in space. Did you know that?

Actually, it boils *instantly*.

You have to create artificial air pressure to even drink water.

Or else it evaporates.

On earth, when the water boils, it starts with a bubble.

One small bubble, and then another, and another.

They rise up in a pattern, following each other toward the surface.

Rising

Reaching

Popping

In space, there's only ever one bubble.

And it just grows.

It doesn't rise. There's no gravity.

It has nowhere to go.

So it grows.

[several phones appear on stage, and different hands all reach to answer it at the same time. The operator picks up a phone as well]

Dialing out. Give me the black room.

[dial tone occurs, 4 or 5 times, the phones all hang up, except for the operators phone]

There's no one in there. Not unless there's an active mission going on. Which there hasn't been in 4 and ½ months.

[hangs up, dials again]

Dialing out. Give me the cock pit.

[the phones all get picked up, and instantly hung up]

They just don't send up the monkeys like they used to.

When I was 11, I was an astronaut.

[the space changes. We are among the stars]

I touched the moon. Every saturday. Except during the new moon. Then I went to polaris.

Or neptune.

Or jupiter

To get stupider.

I went to college.

Got stupider.

Got to NASA.

Picked up the phones.

Went to the moon.

Got scolded.

[the phones all pick themselves up, and voices come out]

[the voices] IT IS A PRIVILEGE TO SERVE YOUR COUNTRY

[the phones hang themselves up, violently]

And so it is.

In college, I worked nights at a hotel.

[one of the phones picks itself up, and speaks]

[the phone] Marriott Suites, would you like a reservation?

For two whole years, I never saw the stars.

A part of me hoped that they'd disappeared.

That I wasn't the only one who couldn't see them.

For two whole years, I missed the sky

*[all the phones pick themselves up, and speak over each other in
a disorganized cacophony]*

Marriott Suites, would you like a reservation? Marriott Suites, would you like a
reservation? Marriott Suites, would you like a reservation? Marriott
Suites, would you like a reservation? Marriott Suites, would you like a
reservation? Marriott Suites, would you like a reservation? Marriott Suites, would
you like a reservation? Marriott Suites, would you like a
reservation?

I could have forgotten all about it.

Except

At the end of each shift, I made the guests coffee.

And first, I boiled the water.

With every bubble

Every pop

I remembered what I was suffering for

Losing sleep and sustenance for

Losing my religion for

I saw the bubble growing and growing and growing and growing
And I went home, and I went to sleep.

And I went to school

And I went to work.

Knowing one day, the stars would be expecting me.

[the operators phone rings. They stare at it, expecting something to happen. It doesn't. It keeps ringing. After far too long, the operator answers]

*[they listen. There's nothing on the other end]
[into the phone]*

Was I better off then?

A lightyear away from where I am now?

2 lightyears from college

24 lightyears from birth?

[the other phones all pick up, listening intently]

I see the stars every day now.

I talk to them on the phone.

And I wonder

Would I be better off never having seen the stars

Knowing now that I'll never touch them?

[one of the phones, far from the operators reach, starts to ring. They try picking up their own phone, but the phone continues to ring. They stand and walk to the phone, but it stops ringing just moments before they reach it. Another phone, on the other side of the stage, starts to ring. With more urgency, the operator reaches for it, but the phone stops again before they can answer. Simultaneously, another phone rings, the operator lunges, but is too late. This repeats until the operator pulls every phone off of it's chord and throws them all into the wings.]

[the hands appear and replaced the chords with new phones].

[the operators phone begins to ring. They stare at it for a moment, but then the phone ring starts to shift into the sound of water boiling. From center stage, up out of the ground, a bubble starts to form. It grows, and as it hits its critical size, it begins to float. Before it gets to high, the operator walks to it and pops it overhead]

[end of play]