Pathos Lit Mag

Editor
Laura Pieroni

Copy Editor
Madeline Stevens

Events Coordinator
Madeline Enos

Contributors
Jason Allen
Jordan Barnes
Joel Strong
W.L.C Jacob
Melissa Basey
Briana Witt
Dirk Marshall
Josh Gross
Alex Fyne
Rachael Cate
Summer Sheldon
Jason M. Calabrese
Andrew Tully
Kiyomi Anderson
Madeline Stevens
Brandi Campbell

Pathos is a student group at Portland State University. All writers and artists are PSU students. To get involved or for submission purposes e-mail pathos@pdx.edu and for more information check out the website: www.pathoslitmag.com

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Undelivered Invitation
by Joel Strong

Jerry called upon Marla
in a time when calling
upon a lady meant paying
a messenger to deliver
an invitation to join a
gentleman for an evening.
He wrote the invitation on
his finest stationary – heavy
paper with his name and
address preprinted at the
top.

***

Mr. Jerry Carroll
126 Hill Avenue
Dearest Miss Moyer,
You are invited to join the gentleman Mr. Carroll
at his estate for a dinner of finely roasted duck
hunted at his hand. Dinner will be served with
boiled potatoes on the evening of 23 August.
Signed,
Mr. Jerry Carroll

***

But the messenger found
Marla’s mailbox overflowing
with invitations from the
wealthiest bachelors of the
area. He could not find a
place for Jerry’s invitation
in her mailbox so he took
it home. He opened it as
he sat alone in front of
his fireplace that evening.
"Oh, Jerry," he said.  
"Marla won't be joining you for your fine dinner of duck and potatoes."
He let the invitation fall to the floor into a pile of undelivered invitations to the loveliest young women of the area. "And you, Marla, are a dirty whore with your mailbox stuffed full of invitations."
Becoming a Step-Father
by W.L.C Jacob

Sneaking all around the room
Right in front of me-As if I would forget-
Hiding glow-in-the-dark crayons
Throughout the tiny apartment.
Five minuets of placing, replacing
Slipping them up his sleeves, then he yells-
“OK, find 'em, if you can!”
What am I to do? I owe him that much.
His mother would search to no avail
Coming up amazed and empty-handed, but
I ain’t his mother. He jumps in
Front of the TV, shaking, I lightly
Say no, he remains vigilant, pleading.
I am not his mother, hardly his father-
How are we anything to each other?-
“Behind the TV, in the cupboard, under my chair,
Beneath the rug, under the dishwasher, and one
Up your sleeve; that should be all.” He ran
To everyone as I called them out, then
Turned to me, “You missed one.”
by Melissa Basey
Untitled
by Briana Witt

I think vertically
From my brain to teeth
My brain is system of card cataloging
And the slots between my teeth are used for
Horizontal depositing
My mind is the mother of my body
My soul is the womb that I use to breed it
And it has been born more than once today
Quiet please
I birth silently
I place prints on posters
In order to spread one thought
Mechanically
I stand waiting for my posters to be hung
Then I run my hands over the scars
On the walls that they’ve been ripped from.
crack hole.
(syllabic-form_)
by Dirk Marshall

I put my gum in a hole
in the wall here.
I imagine the rats rolling it along the pipes,
tiny hands scented by lingering mint.

I list off their grand treasures:
bent rusty nail,
a few ciggerette butts,
a family of old staples,

my beloved overchewed passenger.

I blow this kiss to rodents
here, through my hole
that you shall never know
its how we pass the time.

in turn, you list off our inventory:

two crushed packs of menthols,
empty bottle,
three and a half wasted hours,
a pledge to call in sick again,
with hands scented with lingering mint.
The car hit the little girl right below the knees.

It was an old European style convertible, low to the ground, zipping down the street like a rocket ship. The girl floated above the car free from gravity like an orbiting piece of space debris. The driver slammed on the brakes, but it was too late. Her face had smashed the windshield into a crimson fractal, careening her skyward into a triple flip over the car, a human bowling pin trailing a single thread of gore like a grisly tether. Those watching would later say they were sure she’d be dead by the time she hit the ground. But she wasn’t. She hit with a thud and leapt right to her feet, running nonsensically like a headless chicken, weaving patterns akin to crop circles and screaming like her bone was about to crumple and poke through her skin. It was.

A man from the sidewalk cafe tried to assist her, trying to predict her erratic path enough to intervene and pleading for the girl to sit still. He told her he could help, that she needed to sit down, that an ambulance was coming, that it would all be all right—but it was futile. Earlier cultures would have labeled her possessed. Then she suddenly crumpled onto the sidewalk she’d been trying to reach in the first place and pounded her fists into the concrete, gurgling gibberish and tears and gasping for air as the skin on her knuckles thinned.

The driver was on his knees in the street, whimpering prayers to a God his black heavy metal t-shirt inferred he probably didn’t believe in two minutes ago. He said he was sorry, that he was afraid, that he’d do anything to save her—though he was doing nothing. He just whimpered, oh my God, over and over again, rocking back and forth and staring at nothing at all.

Traffic ground to a halt around the stopped car, and others got out to catch a glimpse of the ragged flap of flesh sitting on the sidewalk, bleeding from the head and flashing her tibia at passersby. Probably Drunk, they muttered to each other.

“How can 9-1-1 be busy?” Someone shouted from the cafe.

Best show in town, someone thought to themselves.

A waiter ran into the street frantically waving his arms at a cop who was passing by on a side street. The cop leisurely pulled his car around to a legal parking spot behind the cafe and sauntered around the scene, making comments into his walkie-talkie, eventually squatting down to
ask the little girl what her name was. She put down the paper bag the man insistent on helping had provided for her to breathe into, and nearly choked on the word *Alice*, then quickly put the bag back to her mouth. The cop stood back up and went to talk to the driver, who had converted and was now slightly more composed for the effort.

Across the street, a group of tiny, guilty-looking, slightly grubby faces were watching from the shadows. They huddled close to each other, as skittish as minnows when adults got close to them. They whispered nervously, holding council. A chubby boy in a baseball cap tried to break ranks and step forward into the street, but was grabbed by the shirt collar and hauled back into line. After that, they began to melt progressively further back into the darkness. By the time the ambulance arrived, her friends had abandoned Alice altogether. And by the time she was loaded into the ambulance, even the man insistent on helping was re-seated at the cafe having his coffee refilled by the waiter, and commenting on the sleek lines of the convertible as an overweight man in coveralls hitched it to a tow-truck.

*Not something you see every day,* he said to the waiter, who responded that he preferred the bus. No insurance required. The man laughed and didn’t leave a tip.

The next day the paper read: accident reported at *2300 Siskiyou blvd. Ten-year-old girl taken to hospital for minor injuries.*
"The Happy Milk Maid" by Alex Fyne
The Privacy of Land
by Rachael Cate

Cutting and ripping and tearing
down icicle canyons late at night
in flight like these words--
bounding, crossing over: the breach
of hillsides in heat
locked and unlocked with a key that screams
"Infinity for sale."
breaking by law into our own ancient grounds,
pieces of sweetness we steal we feel and
this is the bell that tolls out loud the violation,
the stolen sounds of rolling,
passing and trespassing, shuffling, crackling of hidden fires, broken
stones underfoot,
all coming to crescendo--
leaping brashly onto banquet tables,
happening like thieves:
without regret.
over chain links
through signs
into and not around the walls,
that implant and bring to seed the only notions that will grow so
stiffly—
demanding
of me of us in voices mimicking our own,
"Who do you think you are?" and
"Who am I to think that I
could press my breasts against the sky
or prepare myself to die
on private land?"
Only Daughter
by Summer Sheldon

I. At the rim of some canyon
with the back of my pants grasped
firmly in my mother’s fist
I lean joyfully toward wonder.

II. Remember when we went blueberry picking
and while we loaded the buckets into our van
and the unshaven old man answered your question of how much? with
an offer of exchange for a kiss
And you, in your polite panic
offered my kiss instead
and I remember
gripping the plastic bucket between my 10 year old knees
watching the green juicy flesh of the fruit squish out of their black and blue
skins
while my mind struggled with your words about surrendering my self
I took this lesson well
And incorporated this truth into my life about
laying down my anger and self-defense
for softer swords
like reason and wit and
the lie of a rubber soul.
And then when in fifth grade I went to camp
and came home sick
because an older boy had followed my young vagina into the corner of the pool
And I got out and told someone, politely,
that I didn’t want to swim anymore and
I followed my tummy ache to the tree house
where I waited for them to call you
But they never did
and when I came home and you knew there was something wrong and it took you
days and days to ask
but you finally did
And I told you that I was angry and wanted to scream
And you told me about the time your cousin took you under the bush
and that that stuff just happens and
You were sorry
but you didn’t scream bloody murder
about how that boy had taken something precious from me
nobody did
everybody was so fucking polite about the fact that I was not my own
and so I forgot about how that boy had hurt me
Until a couple of years later I woke up at my friend’s house hearing
the breathing of her brother and his friend in my room
and I felt their fingers searching beneath the covers for my voice
And when they found it
they cut it out with a knife and stuffed my tongue down my throat
and in the morning on the way home I was so sick you had to pull the car
over
three or four times so I could throw up
and you could tell there was something wrong again
and when you finally asked I was a little more reluctant to tell you this
time
but I did
and then you told me about the man who was your neighbor when you
were a little
girl growing up in the new suburbs of Minnesota
and how he had a movie projector in his basement
and how all the neighborhood children would go over
every Saturday morning and watch cartoon movies and you never
thought
it was strange that he
wanted one of the little girls to sit on his lap during the show until
it was your turn
and then you didn’t want to go the next Saturday to watch movies and
your mom, wanting the house rid of kids for a few hours, asked you why
but you were afraid to tell
until several weeks had gone by and
you still wouldn’t go back
and so they made you tell and your mom told you and your sisters
how you should politely say
no thank you

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the next time the neighbor asked you to come watch movies
and I am not sure what I was supposed to learn from this story except
that there is no escape or defense or hope
so I might as well lay down my arms now
and surrender my body like a city without walls and
accept the fact that I have no real right to my own body
And so I did
Just as you did
But now you are angry
Now you want me to go back
and dig thru the ruins to find one
just one
of the uncountable times I have sat crying in my car too afraid to unlock
my
door
I am a city burned and built back upon myself a thousand times
there is no counting
no knowing
how many times I have smiled and politely tried to pry my way out from
under
them
with words that won’t offend
Now you want me to be angry
when it is you who taught me how to lay there
silent and blurry-eyed
choking on screams swallowed
waiting as they lay waste
to rebuild again
my life always half ashes
Now you want me be angry about one
just one
But if I start to scream now how will I stop
Scream
Don’t touch me
Don’t fucking touch me
until their ears bleed red pain
until they know what they have taken
what they have ripped from me like
trees ripped from the soil
my warm roots left raw in the air
as they fence and farm my black belly
unmindful of the fruits I already offer
So in the midst of this I have built for myself a world
I have carved out of this blackness a cave of beauty
and I have surrounded myself with old books, pressed flowers
quiet people
soft and fragile things
I mine attics and antique stores craving broken chairs, lost postcards,
chipped
mirrors
knowing that all beauty is destroyed on principal
and that somehow in this world
something has survived.

III. My mother and I lay side by side by side
in our too small bodies
in our too large bed
Buried beneath a down comforter she bought in another country
in another life
Two daughters.

She places my hand across her abdomen
concaved like a shallow bowl
My palm measuring the distance between her hip bones
spanning her womb
Comparing with my wider one
knowing that from that narrowness
My life was sprung.
"Parker" by Jordan Barnes
Untitled
by Jason M. Calabrese

(Part 1)
I will have a cigarette and green tea
after fluid sex with character flaws,
but in my dreams women have tired hearts,
- and no penetration will break that addiction.

And to think -
Of all these chemicals I only wanted that which fills your eyes
- and makes them bright.

(Part 2)
Never combine mercury and ether.
One will make you lose your mind,
The other will numb your pain,
and in the two of them you’ll lose youself,
and we’ll have fading perfume and the feel of ravaged paper
and glossy eyes -
- from undying love for that lucid dream lying broken in a body bag.
So You Were Saying...
Andrew Tully


You were saying something about I forget what anyway

Before the ugly elephants had snored so loud that
movie stars and make-up
dissolved and deliberated and groupies
shrieked like those shiny happy people speeding

through nights of one thousand points of lights
below the botoxed
horse faces strapped in harnesses
more expensive
than one month's salary a top
of the line Hummer

fully armored reinforced steel so our boys
in Baghdad won't fall down on the job
remember Grenada
I wasn't there thank
god your god my god whose god which
makes me fanatic
oh wait you're such a holier than cow
you good pope john paul george eats eggs benedicked
ahhnuld guvehnaturuh pinching all your pennies for
the indy radio bootleg station show pledge with wrong credit

card moral bankrupt well yeah so I ain't no saint either
never wanted to be but we both gotta dream right
it's un-American right long as yours stops where mine
begins like the guy who came home from vacation and

got himself sent to a country where they beat
his hands with electric cables cause
we would never commit such atrocity not anymore with
our renewed democracy and secure homeland
bullshit billboards and I'd like to fly away and blow it up

wait maybe it was before
then when I loved you

Find a new partner and do it again. This particular dance is called catch-up-with-everyone. You have to do it with each person in the room before you’re allowed to sit down.

“I haven’t seen you in so long!”

Change partners.

“Where are you working now?”

Change partners.

“Paul, you remember my girlfriend Rose.”

I don’t. Rose wants to shake hands. There’s a certain way you’re supposed to shake hands with a woman but I don’t know it.

Change partners.

“I can’t believe how much you and Andrew still look the same!”

This happens all the time. People are constantly surprised to find that you look like your twin brother. They can’t not mention that you look like your identical twin. Maybe I’m surprised too. I feel hollowed out. Worn out. Ground down. I should be much smaller by now.

Change partners.

“When are you getting married Paul?” they ask. As if setting the date will make a girl in a dress turn up. As if planning a wedding is some new cure for being gay.

The music stops. Sit down.

After the right amounts of words are spoken, a bride and Andrew ooze
up the aisle. Everybody nearly twists their head off to look backwards as they come in the door. It looks painful, so I just look straight ahead. My punishment is staring into a sea of bulging eyes - ready to pop. That’s how hard everyone’s trying to twist their own head off just to see.

The wedding dress can’t hide the woman she is. Big tits. Big waist. Big arse. When we were teenagers, Andrew would collect magazines filled with pictures of curvy girls like this. He’d pore over them. “Wouldn’t you love to have a go at that?” he’d say. I wouldn’t. I preferred the pictures of glistening, slender torsos of tribesmen I found splashed across the pages of National Geographic. I’d lay awake at night planning safari holidays in Zaire while Andrew whacked off with big girls in the top bunk.

Three scotch and cokes into the reception I’m feeling okay. Five scotches and I’m happy for Andrew. I’m kissing his fat wife on the cheek. It was a beautiful wedding. Welcome to the family. She’s so happy a tear leaks out.

Much later, I’ve lost count of drinks. Everyone’s slow-dancing. I can’t dance. My sister Tabitha leads.

“It’s been a fucking long day..”

She’s just like me.

“I know.”

On the other side of the room, the bride and groom dance like they’re underwater. The beat makes them ripple. The bride catches sight of us, and throws me a sly wink over her shoulder. I watch as it rolls down her big, curvy butt and gets lost among the shadows at her feet.

Tabitha smiles knowingly. “What’s it like being an identical twin?” she teases.

“We’re not identical. He’s married.”

Smile.
I awoke with the blade pressed gently to my neck, while her free hand caressed my cheek. Both of my arms were suspended, forming an X, splayed to the bedposts. Each wrist, bound with rope, suspended above my body and tied with intricate knots, had been pulled to a point of tautness nearly unbearable, but still slightly kind enough to allow the blood to continue flowing to my hands.

This was not the first time she had woken me up in such a submissive position, but the familiarity didn’t quiet the instinct to panic at all. She was off her medication. She must have been. Only in these polar temperatures did the knives factor in.

I looked into her eyes, and I swear that marble is a conduit. Her corneas could power a city. The knife in her calm fingers lingered at my neck, with the perfect degree of pressure applied to not pierce the skin. At least not yet. She was on top, and not about to get off. Or maybe she was. I had no way of knowing what psychotic music played in her head, behind the marble stare.

I thought back to the last episode, the last night when the fate of my jugular belonged to a storm of her emotional weather, and I relaxed. The blade was then, and is now, a prop more than a weapon, and it will never really come into play. She only wants to know that I am awake, to be sure of it, before she fucks the life out of me.
Upon a windowsill was a plant that grew downward.
It grew downward out of depression.
For through the window it would watch the plants outside
growing wild and free in the sun and rain.
Eventually its vines grew so long and heavy that it fell
off of the windowsill.

When it landed, soil splattered everywhere.
And among shrivelled brown leaves and the shattered pieces of a planter
lay a broken and twisted vine,
but no note.
Flashlight Signals
by Madeline Stevens

I.
because it gets to a point
where you are losing your virginity to
your own two fingers in the shower,
and it’s the only satisfaction
you can derive.

you nearly bit through your own lip tonight
listening to the songs he would sing her
if he could.
the lyrics he would have wrote,
the perfection that is only achieved through
an eighteen-dollar guitar recording
and fold out booklet of
paper one can’t buy at the office supply store.

they are the same songs you would sing to him
if you could rhyme,
the songs he would sing to her,
and the songs she would sing to someone else
and the songs he would sing to what’s-her-face
and what’s-her-face would sing to so-and-so
If.
if we weren’t all standing out on snowy porches
disregarding it simply:
“no, it wasn’t me; you’ve got the wrong person.”

“hmm.”

a ray. entirely unromantic.
the little dot to mark the beginning,
and the arrow extending from it
to represent the never ending lines of handheld
Edison and Duracell

you are “ellipsis: dot. Dot.. dot…”
you are the beginning.  
(and he is number two—how fitting.)  
if there was something you could do  
to reverse the cycle, you would.  
“tell me what to do,  
tell me how you want me,  
tell me who...”

turn around, turn around (the same songs),  
there is no one,  
and he drinks liquid cocaine,  
and he is who you spent your  
(count it) one-hundred-and-fifty dollars  
on that prom dress for.

funny how his throbbing passion  
(always erect) feels distinctly  
like two wiggling fingers:  
Jupiter, Saturn

(enchante to plunge out your insides  
, ma chere)

II.  
because when finally it gets to the point  
where you’ve got what you want,  
and for one moment  
your timing is finally right,  
and he says your name  
with that engrossing fascination  
like a fairy tale accent

syl-via  

something happens; sunlight twirls.  
and you try to live in the moment,  
scoot things around and hang yourself
on the walls. Inhabit it because it’s all you’ll ever have

but it’s only the arrangement of letters, and he is an English major.

it is him, you see, (and his possessive fascination with her) not. you.
Magnesium
by Brandi Campbell

His body is like a squeeze bottle, ketchup or perhaps mustard, which excretes it's diarrhea into the sink of his dormitory bedroom. Perhaps if the bathroom was a little closer to his room, he would not feel hesitant about walking down the two long hallways to get to the bathroom. But that is not the case. He hears me in the room next to his, rustling about through the particle-board walls. He knows I hear the blasts. He hopes I think he is washing dishes and has a very narrow opening in the bottle of his soap. Or, as mentioned earlier, my mind could wander to ketchup or some other condiment. He thinks I could assume that he was in the mood for a late night snack and decided to make corn dogs (tofu, of course). He looks in the sink. There is mucky brown everywhere, like tea mixed with pudding. The magnesium he's been taking is not in agreement with his digestive system; it gives it gas and ass blasts. This he cannot help. He needs the magnesium to feel better. He runs the sink water and the diarrhea washes away down the drain fairly quickly and easily, because it is so loose and watery. What are left in the sink are little, very little, pebbles. They're about the size of a pinhead. He touches them and they feel like grains of sand crunching beneath his fingers. They must be the magnesium, broken apart throughout his body. He takes a lemon-scented bleach wipe and rubs it all over the sink and faucet after he's washed the magnesium granules down the drain. His tummy feels much better. He's able to write in peace. My rustling stops as I drift back to the land of nod. He'll see me in the morning and giggle to himself, because he knows I know his secret, but he probably doesn't know that I know he knows. It's amazing what can be reflected betwixt two people living side-by-side in a particle-board walled dorm—such intimacy. I know his every secret, every secretion, every whimsy and woe. My neighbor needs his precious magnesium tablets to sustain life.

Missile construction takes place in a sandy granule desert of some Middle-Eastern plant, mixing and combining magnesium to construct bombs and explode them about the homes of their neighbors. An essential alloy component for any efficient destruction device, magnesium is wanted in these places, in these times. Like a finger in a sink, the missiles crunch upon the sand to destroy the tiny crustaceans of life and desert-
dwelling absurdity within. A giant lemon-scented wipe might do a better job, but who would have such hands to wipe away the bacterial growth on the skin of the earth with such efficiency? I couldn’t imagine a lemon-scented wipe so large. All would be gone, clean and lemony fresh.

I see my neighbor walk home from Safeway after class with a large bottle of Drain-O in his hand. I wave hello and ask him how he’s been. He’s fine, fine, just fine. Everything’s going great and his classes are superb. We exchange intimate goodbyes while turning separate corners. I hope he doesn’t have to call the plumber. He’d be much better if he had a sink with a garbage disposal. Cleaning supplies work wonders, as will his Drain-O. He returns to his room and places the foamy substance down his clogged drain. He wasn’t able to brush his teeth this morning because the sink was so clogged. These pipes are old, he thinks, and they need very careful planning before washing anything down them besides water. I must work late and don’t come home until his drain has been cleared. He sits alone. I sit alone. We work steadily on our respective homework assignments. I hear his pencil moving about as I type on the keyboard, punching punching punching for the sake of punching. I wonder when he will be compelled with the urge to kaboom once more.

A baby in Lebanon awakes hearing blasts late at night. These are not blasts of diarrhea; they are explosions in the city and sky. Magnesium: essential element in every living cell, essential element in creating hell. One should much rather prefer soiled fabrics of under-garments than soiled fabrics of society.

Late at night, in my dorm, I eavesdrop on my neighbor. How lucky I am to have such a fascinating neighbor. How lucky we are in our dorms to only hear squeeze-bottle body blasts.