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This issue of Pathos is dedicated to my dad, Mark Pieroni. Without his encouragement and support this project never would have never gotten off the ground.

~ Laura Pieroni
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Pathos:

Pathos Literary Magazine is a student group at Portland State University. All the editors, writers, and artists are PSU students.

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If you would like to submit your creative writing, art, comics, or photography for a future edition of Pathos, please e-mail them to: PathosSubmissions@hotmail.com
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Madeline Stevens
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A bath for the broken.
by Rex Marshall

Well, it's
heartbreak and a toaster for the
bathtub
It's old photos in flames and
sharp blonde hair cutting the underside of your fingers
and soon you have no fingerprints,
Sliced off like ham in a deli. Without prints you
lose identity.
Then there are postcards and coupons,
old calendars with painful familiar handwriting
marking the day when you hold your own
wrinkled hand
before you get into bed, maybe,
kneel with prayer
kneel with submissive pride
kneel on top of the scabs of what she once promised.
say your vows to yourself
make a promise
raise that toaster high and
plug in a hair dryer, too.
nostalgia.
by Rex Marshall

Winter is the mouth of nostalgia,
for the cold replay of warm memories
Smiles alive again-flickering candles
lining the clay walls of the catacombs,
spiral descending but well lit by
encouragement, helpful hands like silk
brushing on collar bone, pushing, guiding
clapping, glory bound and celebrated
a lung full of sweet air
promises of the good old days
of the innocent bike rides and picnics
and then
the sole of the shoe reluctant to remove
from the cave floor,
Fly paper. Hot tar on a desert day. American
movie theatre floor.
The candles, disturbed suddenly, epileptic
dancing before dying and then dead
dark abandoned wishing well.
those lights now slumber like myth and it is
time to brace and flex and
prepare for the dirty movies, the amateur film
no one ever throws away.
Chalky and brown, the walls of the catacombs
suddenly lit with
the washed white glare
of days long dead
the projector clicks a cold staccato
what you have seen once you will
see again
machine gun frames punching out of
the steaming projector and clicking and
endless.
Rick walks through the airport in a semi-erratic rush, almost leaping over the lean mimes surrounding him in congestion: head and torso pushed forward, eyes in strained observation, and a stride that would gratefully knock down an elderly woman. Rick with his closely shaped flattop. Rick with his sprayed on tan.

"Yea, so George said this trip would increase my chances at promotion to Head Stock Adviser, so I figured ‘what the hell!’.” His speech echoed with mock and displeasure. His cell phone acted as a bullhorn stretching across the seas. Rick with his capped teeth. Rick with his chin job.

French accents in multiple translations echoed over the intercoms selling products, announcing terminal departures, and directing those left behind by cancellations. As he continued, with his acid black trench coat rustling behind him, Rick scanned the airport for a pub. Rick with his creatine induced build. Rick with his hairless, boy-like body.

“You know I didn’t even want to come to this country! I mean, come on! What’s really in Paris anyways?” Rick did a huff and shrug while ignoring the eyes pressed on his obvious American demeanor. Rick with the fat sucked out of his neck. Rick with his calf implants.

"Hold on a sec Karl - Hey buddy,” Rick motioned towards a concierge, “Where can a guy get a drink around here?” The man with his wire framed glasses stared wide eyed and mouth gaped at Rick’s forceful animation. “Uh, o-over there monsieur.” With a flip of a coin and half smile Rick nodded, “Thanks chief!” Rick with his shaved testicles. Rick with his waxed and bleached anus.

He jumped on the escalator and headed down to the bar. “I’ll tell you what’s gonna be the first thing I’m gonna do! I’m gonna order some fucking French fries! How about that!” Laughter erupted from him, interrupting the wine drinking and cigarette smoking of the native patrons. Rick with his plucked eyebrows. Rick with his nose hairs removed by electrolysis.

“Sorry buddy, we do not serve French fries here!” A man of equal proportions behind the bar rumbled in a derisive French tone. “But we do have freedom fries!” Hysterics echoed throughout the courtyard directed at Rick’s solitude. Rick with his facials. Rick with his manicures.

“Hold on Karl, I’m dealing with some real pieces of work here!” Rick turned towards the barkeep and attempted to order a drink in the worst
possible French ever enunciated, along with French fries. “I listened to that Learn French While You Sleep CD you gave me for the flight. Boring fucking language let me tell you!” Rick with his Hummer at home. Rick with his underpaid secretary.

The barkeep stared at Rick with horror. Immediately he picked up the phone and dialed for security. Just as soon as he put it down, the police came from the shadows of the courtyard with pistols and batons drawn. Rick stood without words in front a wall of enraged law enforcement. Rick with his illegitimate child. Rick with his cocaine problem.

“Uh, Karl I’ll have to call you back. Something came up.” Like a dog with its tail between its legs, like a kid ready to piss himself; Rick put his hands behind his head and turned towards the barkeep. “What did I do?” demanded Rick shakily. Rick with his KKK meetings. Rick with his religious zealousness.

The barkeep shook his head and crossed his arms. “Stupid American! You just told me you were going to assassinate our president! That’s treason! You’re going to swing you fucking American pig!” Rick with his rings of melted down Aztec gold. Rick with his collection of Indian scalps.

“It wasn’t me! It was that CD, I swear!” In unison, all the bar patrons and police officials spit on Rick and his designer suit and fashionable loafers. Rick with his technological dependency. Rick with his café lattes.
Cityscape
by Laura Pieroni

Panoramic windows for viewing
city lights and city dreams and city obscenities
whimsical blue drapes can’t conceal
a god damn thing
and the cars roll down the toilet bowl freeway
until the crash, smash, mash of bodies
thrown or crumpled
out of or within their tin can cars
but no one moves or blinks differently
continue seasoning your chicken
raw and bloody in some parts
slippery with e. coli
then nights, the moon hangs low, yellow
and soiled against the backdrop of cityscape
and it all looks so fucking fake
like a bad set for a low budget movie
and you wonder why you’re even here
and the existential bullshit questions rattle
and bang through out your brain in early morning hours
when you should be sleeping
and dreaming your nightmares of amputating
and when you walk to class two men will stop you
to ask “hey girl do you wanna take a hit?
We made a bong out of tin cans! No?
Well how about some Windex?”
And you’ll smile and keep walking,
because fuck,
life looks awfully good from the other side of permafried.
A Woman of the Future
by Jason Allen

I know she exists, maybe far from this room, but somewhere just as real. I'd be willing to bet she has a better view than mine, and more than one plant growing on her windowsill. Maybe she is reading this right now, months or years after I am typing, drunk enough, or bored enough with drinking with a cologne salesman to read a love letter from a stranger. She is a stranger, and she means more to me than theories of success. She is all that I sleep beside when I am alone, or when I am next to another woman who wore her disguise. Since I have not yet been graced by the lines of her face, or subtle curves that appear as she leans on an elbow, or the mysterious lyric in each fold of her clothes; because she is still invisible, I am plunged inside the haystack, and have felt only the wrong needles. There is no map, no name in the register at this hotel, no reason to think that she wants to be found, and no reason to think she wants to be found by me. I have known bad years and moments of revelation inside them, and offer a few sweet words. Quiet songs that paint the page a color I need. This may not be enough to fill the days of a princess. Lucky for me, she has never known her own beauty. Lucky for me, she is only renting the blindfold.
When She Had Kissed the Curve of Your Mouth
Nicholas A. Kaeser

Last night
When she had kissed
The curve of your mouth
Leaving the faint lipstick traces.

When
The muted lamplight shuttered
On your blinking face,
Revealing the mornings wrinkled vine.

Did you notice how
The path of her dribbling eye
Had outlined her cheek and smile?
That it had traveled a miniature mile?

Her naked fingers
Tracing a descending star.
Her bare feet
Protruding in the moon’s whiteness.

And you said to yourself,
As the path of burnt sun beams
Carrening by,
Bent upon the last light of her eye:

You said: behind all starry wakes
Lies a stillness of sleep,
A self-tinted, animated,
Thirst.
Little Bo-Peep
by Madeline Stevens

she’s wearing her rainslicker again,
forgetting what her face looks like.
they say if you’re not going to get stoned,
maybe you should take pills. so she plays
the laugh track, the extent of her audience
participation, she hasn’t cried in four years.
she’s burnt pale, cynicism spilling
over the lines.

and maybe she’ll run,
and maybe she’ll die young, and maybe
she’ll just study law.

she can’t decide whether it’s okay to
find God in the tone of her bedroom
(or not find Him at all because she has
no other choices anymore) it’s pink
with porcelain dolls and sexual
fantasies shoved away in the underwear
drawer. vulnerable hidden questions:
what happened to two? what happened
to counting sheep? what happened
to the quantum leap? good God,
what happened to you?

they don’t answer, battered and toothless,
they tell her to speak French.
et peut-être elle peut marcher sur l’eau
“i swear, it’s not because i’m fluent,
it’s because i’m memorized!”

she’s got voices in her head,
telling her what to do:
leave them alone; they’ll come home,
i wish i had them too.
Note passing for 4th graders
by William Scharmann

she sat
on my
lap topless
reciting a
monologue
about snow
flakes

earlier i
wrote a note
snuck it in
her back pocket

it reminded
her to say

romance dies
in the unrelenting
boredom of those
who forget
Against The Norm
by William Scharmann

i am writing this poem
in the hail

and it hurts.
“Can we control ourselves for once? 
Keep our hands off each other. 
Keep our minds on the sum of each other.”

The New Pornographers
“Testament to Youth in Verse”
Electric Version

We had kept our hands off each other for a year, at least. All the touching, kissing, and fucking had only been imagined—at least I had imagined it. Several times I’d touched myself, conjured up what she might feel like, taste like: smoke in the palm of my hand and fruit punch on my lips.

But the levee broke under the safety of her soon departure to another country. We touched each other’s tattoos, looked wonderingly at a naked body we had only seen clothed. Her face, though, was familiar and I felt an urge to mask it, to hide it from view since it was a face I already knew, to juxtapose it with the body that had previously been a stranger to me, a body I was exploring carefully lest I change it.

Later on the porch, we were clothed again—her in my plaid pajamas and beanie. We smoked our cigarettes mostly in silence. Her profile was lit by the street lamps and the shiny, wet pavement. I had always liked her profile, cute and young—from the side she teetered on the edge of too young, in that exotic zone of ambiguous age.

“I’m so glad we fucked,” she said, exhaling. “We can finally be friends.”

But I knew we wouldn’t meet again. We had tasted each other’s cum, licked each other’s soul and climaxed, shivering and knowing.

She was gone in the morning. She hung a message on my door amongst my poetry.

Joel fucked me here
1/18/06
My bus driver hit a woman today. It’s not that he was a horrible driver either. I’ve heard the stories. Hell, I’ve even participated in them. The statements made between friends, relatives, and fellow work and/or educational associates. That all bus drivers are irate, drug addicted anti-socialites. Yea, I’ve said that before. How it’s mind boggling that these people are given licenses; how these socially emotionless cripples are aloud on the streets behind a ten-ton death trip. Guilty as charged...but not this time. This time was a little different. This time I had to take the side of the bus driver.

There were two lanes on a one way street. We were on the far left, cruising at speeds of roughly 30 miles per hour. In the right lane was another bus that had stopped to let out and pick up passengers. We had the right away. The light was green. So, our speed maintained its steadiness. Out of nowhere a woman walked in front of us. She was the city-business type. Neutral gray colors. Golden brown hair tied back. Sunglasses on a rather overcast day. She had a specialized coffee in one hand and holding a cell phone and newspaper with the other. Probably one of those financial reports of some sort. She was speaking to the air as she walked out into the middle of traffic. I would have confused her for a schizophrenic, homeless person if not for the cord connected to her ear outstretching from her cell hand.

We made contact and she went under. The bus did a little bunny hop and her caffeinated drink sprayed against the right front window. That’s where I was standing. I couldn’t help but think, “What a waste of a perfectly good venti-quad-restreto skinny-no-whip ½ vanilla 3-pump-choc mocha.” Then, I couldn’t help but think, “Did I just say that out loud?”, since everyone seemed to be staring at me.

The weird thing about all of this is not the fact that someone got ran over for not paying attention, but the fact that no one said a word. There was no gasp amongst the crowd. In fact, I believe I heard the bus driver mumble, “Stupid bitch”, and I can’t say I really disagree with him. People outside of the bus just stood there. Holding there caffeinated beverages, dressed in their neutral grays, talking on their cell phones. No one did anything. Even when the cops showed up, even they seemed complacent about the whole thing. They had this “I really have some where else
better to be right now” type of composure to their demeanor. 

Am I just as guilty? Possibly. I didn’t care either. I didn’t show any concern for the woman’s fate. Maybe because I was in the middle of a triangular sanity challenge. A weird choice of words for an equally weird situation. On one side was an old man chewing gum with a poppy jaw. Each snap of his worn down cartilage echoed in my left ear. On the other side was an overly sweaty obese woman that had the type of funk that made 90 degree Sunday fish markets envious. And finally, to put a perfect bow to my three sided claustrophobic box, was a young lad with oversized headphones playing some sort of anger stricken anti-white-devil rap, and he thought this was the perfect place to try out his karaoke skills despite the lack of any musical talent.

In a way, our victim was a hero, my hero, their hero. For if she didn’t ignorantly throw herself in front of our traveling freak-show then I would of had to kill one of these shits. I had reached a point of no return. Some one had to die, and thankfully our neutral gray wearing, coffee inflation drinking blonde friend decided to raise her hand and volunteer for the sake of the collective. Madam, my hat goes off to you. I am ecstatic that I do not have to be someone’s anal puppet as well as my fellow carnies who get to survive yet another sunset, unfortunately.

I did feel a slight sting for the death of her coffee though. Its rich creaminess, the subtle way that with every gulp you can actually feel your ass getting fatter from the empty calories. The prestige that comes when passing others, also, with the well known logo on the front of their 35% post-consumer recycled cup which begs to say, “Look! See! I’m one of you!” Yet, the economic stratification that comes from the demand of an emblem outstretches even my monkey arms. What? Come on now! Those fuckers can be quite expensive! Its not like I can get those everyday you know! I’m a poor college student! My money goes towards increasing tuition costs and over priced books! Don’t blame me, blame the system. I’m just a victim.
Sex is a sentence uttered as a single, stressed syllable near third base on the baseball diamond by the white-haired energetic boy to the pack of second-graders stirring during first recess. The other boys laugh with open mouths and squinted eyes and Frederick wants to laugh along, but what he offers is that cough-laugh of forced mimicry. He even slaps his knee, Sean’s shoulder, and Stephen’s, too.

‘Sex,’ Frederick whispers to himself in the school library. S-E-X.

‘Mrs. Barrie,’ Heather says, her pretty mouth curling up at the corners. ‘Frederick’s looking up sex.’

Frederick’s face flushes at the mention of his name and he jerks his hand back from the card catalogue drawer, ending the search for that mysterious source of cheerful arousal. ‘No, I’m not,’ his voice quivers. ‘I was looking up sunrise.’
photo by Madeline Stevens
For Example  
by Andrew Tully

Who writes letters anymore, who knows how or why, or when one would be appropriate, besides, e-mail is quicker and commitment-free, who are you to judge me anyway, because I see only dull points in distance, clouds pierced with distracting dots of ink milk,

ice soup: “I used to eat them up when I was younger, those yummy surrealist poems,” but the word lacks meaning, America tosses it around like lawn fertilizer, as though using it will improve the effect of what we want but lack the equipment to express.

Next time collect belongings: lint balls in your pocket, gummy pennies, and the endless Lewis & Clark quarters clinking between index and thumb, pull the lining inside out, overhead until your hair stretches skull like canvas, by which time your crotch will experience sharp pains as the pants’ seam obstructs the blood to your right leg, though since you’re right-handed, no choice remains but to stop this exercise, where did you get the idea that carrying out such an unnatural act would relieve stress, or even begin to make someone else happy for a change?
dangling tiptoe
by virginia ulrich

we all have a weakness always looming like a tiny little sliver waiting for the right moment to splinter

and so i sit in the palm of the first hot day and lackadaisical breaths don’t even afford me the courtesy of self-wrought denial

loneliness in bountiful stride taps rickety nightshades against my window

loneliness clatters witch spells in the tongue of shakespeare afternoons

loneliness only takes one gulp a bitter bite to explode nail-biting souls

loneliness seeps water through closed doors drenching even pleasant memories in stagnation

loneliness humbles weak feet to the submissive posture of dangling tiptoe

it’s not weakness, it’s a fear
Bike squeaks
telling me
it's tired.

photo by Madeline Enos
School Schedule
by Edmond Lot

I hate my job, do something about it
Finish reading the godfather
See advisor. Transcribe method to get my transcripts
Register here from there
But first pay my four-year-old library fee
See boss about new schedule
There goes that thing I needed
Get a beer, get car towed
Homework, out of home work
Write an essay, then get paid and buy the book
Get a beer, drive home,
No, yes officer
Get arrested
then walk home in the rain
Late to Shakespeare
Buy more books, these I don’t need
Why is my laptop broken
Pay tickets
Remember to pay electric bill
Write essay
Why did my electric get turned off
Bumb into exgirlfriend
Laugh, silence, avoid
Buy last of books
Finish term
Get a haircut
Rinse, lather repeat
blurred yellow
by Madeline Stevens

in my dream we are
running away and i
am wearing a bronze
crushed velvet skirt
that is at once short
and long, coming both
to my thighs and ankles,
and my bleeding ankles are
playing with the fabric
and the dust and sun
where we are waiting
for your friends and
their car. i say something
about wearing something
else if i had known
we were running away
today when your friends
show up and we are
squished in the backseat
that goes on for too long
with three other boys.
but the boys know when
i sing a disconsolate
elliott smith line
it means they should
turn away so we can kiss.
and they do, and we do,
and there is a truck
following us that makes
all our hearts beat, but
we lose it after a
stop sign, and we all smile,
and it’s dusty and sunny,
and kyle is there and
he has all these ex-girlfriends
even though he’s lonely
in real life and soon
i will not be required
to wear a bra.
and it feels like the dream
where we invented
permanent floating
soap bubbles and laid on
the cedar porch or the one
where i was walking along
the highway carrying
a motorcycle over
my head with my best friend
from middle school:
sunny and dusty
and like someone
very cherished is humming
softly somewhere
in the background.
later i will cry
in a bookstore, feeling
lost. but not until
the dream changes.
it can hardly be
considered part
of the same sleep.
photo by Laura Pieroni
Laughter Circles
by Steve Kauten

twisted
a summer dream
the vultures, they ate me
too soon they would whisper
too late I would sing
as the night turns to dust
purple haze
rising
sickening
no mercy
no help
no time
a fading friendship in outer space
it never existed but for a moment
laughter circles
a kiss
a design
a thought
the mystery man
waits for the end
Merced, CA
by Gabriela Barrera

Merced,
A city no one
knows, where few visit.
A dried up oasis
in the Central Valley.
A blink-and-try-to-miss-it
exit off the 99.

Merced,
a seedy midnight
trick stop of a town,
defined by its distance
to places people go--
275
miles to get to L.A. from

Merced.
Reeks of rotting fruit,
cannery exhaust,
cheap weed and gasoline.
You need a hot shower
to scrape yourself from the smell.
The high school kids here call it

Merdead.
Pregnant teens and gum-encrusted pavement.
Nagging bums and potholes
litter the roads. Meth labs
fill houses and shopping carts
float in the rusty river.

Merced
tries, ignores decay.
Look at its fresh paint,
turn your eyes to the new
multiplex, outlet store,  
Thomas Kincaide gallery.  
But these things don’t hide the real  

Merced.  
They can’t cover up  
the graffitied walls,  
the painted girls walking  
Main Street, everything that  
is the shouts, the shittiness  
the shameful brittle spine of  

Merced.
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If you are interested in being involved with Pathos, or just have questions, please e-mail us at: pathosatpsu@hotmail.com

If you would like to submit your creative writing, art, comics, or photography for a future edition of Pathos, please e-mail them to: PathosSubmissions@hotmail.com