

Sentimental Education

By V. Penelope Pelizzon

The new hormones built me a sense of smell
3-D, architectural.

I could measure rooms' volumes
by the density of perfumes
curdling in the air.

From down the hall behind three doors
tight shut, whiffs of my lover's shampoo
queased back to the bedroom, florid pink jellies
slicking down to sugar
the biscuit of his nape.

Cheese scraps pared and scraped into the sink
baited complex traps of stink
set to spring in the apartment's heat.

Strange metamorphic creature --
half mutt nose / half mouse terror
at whom the least reek
bared its teeth.

A lick of margarine
barked and bit, metallic.

Even bread wasn't innocent.
Its yeasts were simply waiting till I started sniffing
to ferment.

I'm a dog, I thought.

But some part of me couldn't stop tugging
as far as my sense's leash would allow

and it was almost worth the nausea's swallow
to leave my body there
below the sheet, and follow a draft out through the screen --

past the porch, the yard, the rot-spiced knot-pine fence
hunched over its hibiscus crutch; past the live oaks'

mushroom-musky nets of moss; beyond
the on-ramp to the overpass, the freeway's scorched

oils and vinyls, chlorides and smokes, and the airport's kerosene; out
further than the shrimp boats rocking toylike on the swells

to where the salt skirts of a rainstorm
just beginning to gather in loose bellying folds above the gulf
dragged their hem in the sea and grew
damp with a clean ozone ruffle.

I asked to stay awake through the procedure.

And for a week or so after
as the hormones faded
was visited by ghostly odors.

Water drying.

The iron in stones.