

Anosmia

did you know people with Alzheimer's start
 losing their sense of smell
years before the forgetting?
 it happens to nearly everyone
the doctors don't test for it so nobody even notices.
 imagine, sniffing a lilac bush and nothing, not even a sneeze
 or a simmering pot of bitter melon and pork ribs
 not the flash of recognition her tied-back hair only
hot steam and the exhaust fan's hum.
 I listened to a podcast once about eating after losing
 your sense of smell
 eating for texture instead of
memory: pineapple and crackers and
 crushed ice and no mush
no wonder olfaction is the first branch off the brain
cranial nerve one delicate tendrils reaching down
the back of the nose all those neurons waiting
 for that perfect combination of molecules: a nudge
 toward that return to the homeland eight years ago,
faint stink of algae from my aunt's koi pond
the ocean that smells like any other ocean but different
the perfume wafting out of my dead grandmother's jewelry box
herbal sharp impossible to replicate
except somehow here a whiff
half a second in a stairwell this
shopping mall cigarettes and piss
and inexplicable familiarity