

**UVic Diversity Writing Contest 2012, Second-Place Poetry Winner (tied)**

**By Erin Cotton**

**Sensing Femininity**

The smell of burning popcorn

Is the smell of oncoming confidence

As the stillborn stubble is aborted from my face

It smells like freedom set on fire

It feels like purple ink

Flowing in my veins

When I take my my little purple pill

Labelled E for womanhood

Oh, purple placebo

But sometimes placebo for confidence

Is better than the real thing

The Mississippi curves of my new found body

Feels like paddle-boat travelling

With one hand trailing in the water

Singing songs that never were your own

Until you claimed them

Hear the off-key wind chime

Of a voice looking for wind in its sails

Looking for an Odyssey

Looking for it's own journey

Yet still yearning

For the sound of homecoming

See the floral attraction

Of a body appealing to a love sick mirror

Used to rejection

Used to the strange reflection

Of self-image into self-worth

There is an aesthetic to my leg hairs

Worth admiring

It reminds me

We are not far from primates

We are not far from primal desire

We are not far from personal radiance

Just look in the mirror

And see yourself for who you truly are

Locate the poor quarters of your body

Finally breaking free from an overbearing centre

Centred in high-rise disjointed utopia

Burn the buildings down to match heads

My body is all match heads

Ready to light at the lightest touch

There is no more depth pressure on my skin

No more cinder blocks resting on my diaphragm

My insides are bursting out my lips

I can't find the heart once caught in my throat

I find it finally at my centre, finally where it belongs

This is what it feels like to be free

From a dishonest mantra

Repeated like an oily prayer

There are no more Hail Mary's

Wringing me through wishing hands

There are no more midnight desires

To be someone other than who I am

There is only a single stroke of declaration in my stomach

A calligraphic constitution of the self

I am woman and I am beautiful

You can't take that away from me

You can't take the female out of me

You can't make me someone other than who I am

This is who I am.