

*and in need of covering up with flowers and incense.*

Sprung from bodies:

freshly scrubbed, sweaty, musky, oily or greasy, burnt hair, scratched skin, dry elbows -

*When you enter a friend's house for the first time you immediately know them better as this is the source of their smell, their central holistic smell you couldn't know but now that you're in it, the bottleneck condenses: it's their pantry, their dinner from the night before, their soft couch with their skin cells and visiting dust mites, their pets or no pets, room corners and neighbour waft, ink, coffee change, skin cream; these small ingredients together, this curious composition, this keystone that wasn't missing until now. You think someone should bottle these into home sprays, like fragrant friendship bracelets, pen-pal spray-and-sniff, but not even the most devoted friend could enjoy these animal smells divorced from the bodies they belong to*

Effects:

Sleepy, calming, meditative, uplifting, energizing, brash actually, a shame, so dreadful -

And projections:

Cherubic, lightweight, you purposeful steady eddie, smooth sailing, mysterious midnight, after hours, not-so-easy mornings -

Scent is the frustrating attempt to claim and name the inconsistent clouds of vapour that pass your nose, a noun to describe the seizure and capture of something more akin to a verb, while 'smell' is comfortably humble, accurately childish, dual-purpose, a smell/to smell; smell is your avenue and your allowance to invade spaces and ignore boundaries. But who has the bravado and self-assurance to follow a smell around, never keeping it, a path chasing a void, a memory, or something you could never say?

If these and other words fail, there are other ways:

Memories, anecdotes, frustration or despair, romanticism, the higher ground, onomatopoeia.

## Words and phrases to help you describe a smell to a friend

written  
by

# Michelle Fu

about  
the  
smells of

*Strathcona, Keefer Street,  
Georgia Street, Chinatown  
Vancouver, B.C.*



PLEASANTRIES TO FIRST AGREE ON:  
sugar sweet, sourness, fruits such as  
green apples, real orange juice, pine  
trees, Pine-Sol, bleach, rained on



dog, dank rags, dusty rugs, old clothes -

Then geographic cliches:

Salted cold like East Coast wind, dry crispy crunchy yellow prairie grass, wet westerly pavement and dense greenery -

*The smells of waking up in your old, old apartment are your partner and your dog, the rug you neglect to vacuum, if the window is open and the weather is nice, the warm spring bushes and flowers you can't actually smell but imagine you can because it's sunny outside so it must also be fragrant, mint halo, mouth foaming, the granola is sweet, smells sweet, you're walking now, smelling for REAL the bushes and flowers you imagined earlier, the incense of the Buddhist temple, sometimes pungent but if you're running late then a faint diffusion, and you get to the tree, the one you've been meaning to bring your friend by who can identify mysterious trees, because you love this tree in the spring and after a rain, the sappy resin or resinous sap you think is the culprit; it oozes a brash olfactory flirt when you walk by. Also you love this tree because your partner thinks it smells like urine or something equally acrid, gets annoyed when you slow down and try to smell it more, keeping a safe distance as you try to know it better, try to keep it, make it last.*

Immaterially:

gentle, sprawling and wide, soft, sharp, cloying and sticky, dense, small, faint, settled -

Or being bound to buildings:

like mud, stale air, high ceilings, atmosphere, rubber shoe soles, all-purpose spray, empty, lingering, unoccupied, overcrowded -

*Through the shifting alley bounty, sometimes subtle, often operatic, to the back entrance, the first order of business is assessing the musty smell of the barely sealed floor, occasionally smelling like the earth-dirt of memories from camping, and then other times smelling like the rot-dirt of an approximated grave from a TV series; you kind of like this weather-dependant lottery (nose on the daily defense), even if the smell is more often than not offensive*

## NATURAL AND SYNTHETIC, POPULAR AND WEIRD

In this group we place descriptive notes such as powdery, earthy, and some unusual smells which could be found in perfume compositions.

