

1.

If I were deaf, blind, insensible to feeling and incapable of tasting food, I could tell I was at the Portland airport by my nose alone. So many times I have come home from Beijing or Taipei after spending months overseas when I missed my family and the ability to blend in. So many times I sat cramped and red-eyed in the stale circulated air of the airplane, waiting anxiously with tears in my throat for the moment I could walk out that airplane door and fill my lungs with Portland air. The air in Portland smells better than anywhere in the world, especially coming from the dense, crowded mega-cities of Asia. People used to ask me what I would do first when I got home, and I would always say, "Breathe." This was taken as a joke, but honestly, the air, even at the airport, in Portland, Oregon, is heaven. I would take a huge breath through my nose, my nostrils flaring, picking up all the chlorophyll and anions and waterfalls and mosses as though they were welcoming me home, the small whiff of jet fuel in the back merely underscoring the miles I had come to be there.

2.

My mom always says that if you want it to smell like you've been cooking all day, all you have to do is fry an onion in butter and your house will be filled with umami goodness that makes your mouth water. It's a deceptive scent though, because sometimes all it is is a fried onion, and that's not much for a growling belly. Sometimes my mom's kitchen is all onion and no potato.

3.

Silver Falls and Wulai Falls are both glorious hikes that take you past multiple waterfalls; in both places, the air is full of anions such that you wish you could bottle it and spray it on your neck so that nature could sneak into your classroom a little. I remember when we were at Wulai and learned about anions (AN-eye-yons) for the first time. Apparently waterfalls, with their great crashing power, are capable of negatively charging ions, which supposedly have a great number of health benefits; all I know is they smell delicious. The air around Silver Falls and Wulai Falls is fresh, clean, loaded with water, sweet like the perfume of the tiniest white bellflowers or the smell of your clean hair when you get caught in the rain. Wulai is in a jungle, where vines and orchids climb all over the great trees; Silver is in the great northwest pine forest, where lichens and moss obscure the mighty trunks of evergreens. Orchid and pine needle are widely divergent smells, and yet the falls smell more alike than different, like a shower so large it could clean the whole world.