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JACQUELINE PERFUMERY

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“ I like to put the perfume in the crook of the elbow, see? This way, when you curl up and go to sleep, you smell it and it gets inside your dreams.

To dream in scent. Smelling the crook of my own elbow, still floral and sweet after eight hours, I feel fairly certain that my dreams will be populated with humming bees and gently bobbing blossoms. I think André would like that... not that he'd ever say so, of course. He affects an air of indifference—"You like it, you don't like it, it doesn't matter to me"—but I think he'd be pleased to know that the scent does in fact end up swaddling me in sleep.

André is the proprietor of Jacqueline Perfumery (along with his wife, for whom the store is named). Ask him about perfume, and he's likely to simply point toward a jumble of paper strips sprayed and scrawled with fragrance names and instruct you to tell him what you like. And really, I guess that's all that one needs to know. In André's words, "Perfume is like food—you may like this, you may like that... that is [your] privilege." Food seems to be André's favorite perfume parallel. A discussion of base notes, and top notes? Favorite fragrance profiles? No. We talk steak instead. Just as someone can have a wan, grisly steak at one restaurant, and a perfectly seared and flavorful steak at another restaurant, André explains, so too does a fragrance such as jasmine vary greatly in the hands of one perfumer to another. Where was the jasmine grown? With what else does it share bottle space? And so on. André knows where the jasmine is grown. He knows what qualities are likely to bloom forth from blossoms acquired from a species grown in India versus a species grown in northern Africa. He just doesn't see the point in discussing it with you. What does your nose like? What does your skin like? That's what he cares about.

*

I set to work sniffing around 25 or 30 of the scented strips strewn across the store's glass display case. Some fragrances curl around my brain and set it gently buzzing. Others cause my eyes to pop open, as if their complexity couldn't possibly be contained merely within the invisible regions of scent. Some cause my face to squinch up in pain as the pungent fumes hit my nostrils, while others gently nudge my lips into a sweet smile.

In the end, I have 5 strips set aside. A second sniff instantly removes one of the strips (*what was I thinking?!*) from contention. The remaining four are trickier, but two are particularly intriguing—one petal-delicate, the other spicy and between-the-sheets musky. Their intrigue—a mutable quality that brings roundness and depth to each—comes at a price. "Ah," says André, "you picked very fine perfumes."

"How fine?" I reply.

"Well, these two you set aside? They cost around \$50 to \$60. The two you selected? They both cost around \$250."

"I'm afraid my taste surpasses my budget."

Laughing, André spritzes the soft underside of my elbow with the ritzy perfumes and says, "Oh, I get plenty of people in here who, discovering the price, say 'Oh, that's too rich for my blood,' and they walk out the door. Ten minutes later, they come back with a whispered 'Just don't tell my husband, okay?' and end up purchasing it anyway."

Perhaps. After all, the promise of fragrance-laced dreams is quite alluring.

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Jacqueline Perfumery doesn't have a website. Why bother? "You need to smell perfume, not look at it," says André. The store is located at 103 Geary Street, with hours 10am to 5:30pm Monday through Saturday.

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