

Blue Hued Florence (2024) by Darren Neave

My Grandmother, Florence has just arrived, she had been residing in Gloucester, unbeknownst to her daughters and to myself and the rest of the family.

There was a confirmation email, which had found its way into the junk folder.

I never thought to leave a key, she would have to wait for me, under the carport.

I jumped on a number 53 bus, at least it was on time and I was able to gawp out the dirty windows at the Lincolnshire landscape. The route skirts the edge of the Wolds and in mid January it feels like an unmade bed, after a restless nights sleep, uninviting in its crinkled and crumpled layerings; pallid with a frigid demeanour.

Florence hadn't been around for years and I decided to try and locate her after a coffee and a conversation, with my mischievous Aunts, who often giggled about their childhood memories involving their brothers; the smelly socks that were thrown out of the window, a recollection about one of them pissing out of an apple tree to startle their siblings, another about the headstrong donkeys trying to avoiding capture for long weeks on the sand.

One encounter before Christmas had them reminiscing about my late father's cool yuletide composure with last minute shopping sprees. Navigating the crowds and never letting the recipients down. His usual gift for his mother was a sapphire-blue bottle of Bourjois perfume - Soir de Paris.

I instigated her arrival by bidding for her in an online auction, the early morning ones are better as no-one else seems to compete. She arrived via economy postage; double bubbled wrapped in a recycled barcoded box that had previously hosted a 3 in 1 camera tripod with selfie-stick attachment. I applaud re-use. I scissored the tape and held her to the sunlight that was coursing through the kitchen window blinds.

Florence wasn't full but her glassy blue bell-shaped body still felt weighty and smooth. The liquid inside looked darker and inky. Upon examination of the contents within the deep hue glass, I was reminded of Mark Rothko's late life field paintings, a blueness found in post-war ecclesiastical stained-glass windows. She was neatly topped off with a tarnished silver stopper, which rasped as I carefully rotated. I resisted the urge to untwist and remove the top. I sat her down on the cluttered kitchen work surface. I decided to take her to Lincoln and to meet the Aunts and see whether they recognised her after all these years....

'That is mum, that is her scent' It was sweet, floral and slightly fruity. A springtime blossomy fragrance. Instantly reassuring, like a walk down a bright country lane in early April. Warm in the sunlight yet listless in the shade and under trees. Lush green buds exploding on hawthorns and there, tucked under the hedgerows the resilient and shyness of the violet, which percolates unhurriedly from the bottle too. My Grandmother seeps down these quiet roadways and deep into our lungs. A softness prevails. A warmth and familiarity transpires. Both my aunts smile and I see them caress the tranquil planes of that blue bottle. They sigh.

Soir de Paris (Evening in Paris) by Bourjois is a Floral fragrance for women. Soir de Paris (Evening in Paris) was launched in 1928. The nose behind this fragrance is Ernest Beaux *. Top notes are Violet, Peach, Apricot and Bergamot; middle notes are Iris, Heliotrope, Rose, Ylang-Ylang, Lily-of-the-Valley and Jasmine; base notes are Amber, Sandalwood, Vanilla and Musk.

My mother always mentioned that Florence had soft, soft skin and that, I had inherited my human rind from her.

Lovers often comment about the suppleness whilst stroking my downy arms, whilst spooning, under thick duvets. The scent of last night entrapped, moist human condensation steeps and ferments. Slightly noisome but never wholly unpleasant. Male perspiration is musky and balmy, more pronounced in furry crevices or released from underwear, pulled down slowly after long days working. Perhaps, next time I will unwrap these experiential mansmells.... and how a little perfume becomes erotically evocative.... (?)

*It must be noted that Ernest Beaux also created Chanel No 5