

## Faint Traces

Reverie it is. Deep, nostalgic, a wandering walk in the fog. All brought on by the magical tang of my twilight cologne bottle smashed inadvertently on the floor.

The aromas are rich and tantalizing. The dominant scent is wood, enticing of the outdoors. A trace of bergamot for the exotic, leather for masculinity, and topnotes of primrose to entrance the female of the species. Altogether, an amalgamation of emotion induced by scent. The yin and yang of parfumerie, soothing yet arousing, peaceful but antagonizing, an opportunity to sit and luxuriate in olfactory reverberations, if not for the body in the tub.

It was a plan of perfection, and I would have evaded all authority if not for my carelessness. How casual and ordinary it initiated. Trim back the cuticles. Shave the growth of a day and part of an evening. Pomade my perfect ("distinguished," she said), silver locks. The turn to retrieve a simple towel, and the translucent container of evening augmentation of personalized presence tumbles end over end and shatters on the faux Italian tile floor, fragrance wandering throughout the

temporary quarters, and eventually to the door, and I am quite certain, down the hallway and into the nose of hotel management.

My enemy has been at last vanquished. Years have I battled him, truly aeons it seems, and in the end, he lies in repose, the early stages of rigor mortis manifesting. He would have been gone by just after midnight, along with every trace of evidence, and now instead my clumsiness has foretold a doom that although perhaps deserving, is entirely anticipated.

Now, how simple it is to imagine the reactions of the evening clerk coming on for the night shift, made inquisitive by the alluring odor. Intrepid, she follows, not by the mechanics of an elevator, but, keys in hand, by the stairs. More powerful by each stride grows the bouquet, incongruous and anachronistic, curious and wrought with prediction, a footpath through the wilderness made as clear as a paved road.

I cannot distinguish her footsteps from my own beating heart. I hear her now, just outside the ingress, palpably anticipating. She knocks, thumps, bangs, beats on the door. Or is it merely the thud of an overwrought pulse?

I cannot bear the pressure. I will surely be captured, subjected to long inquisition, and eventually confined. No longer can I bear the constriction. I must breathe, and that I cannot do while alive yet restrained. I will choose the time and manner of my own unmaking.

The pounding on the door returns anew, and she cannot addle me with her false solicitations. I will end this, as I have begun it. I have the mechanism. The lock in the door turns, and I form a wry smile, ready to complete the undertaking begun this morn. I will not depart shackled and humiliated. I will decide.

*City Post, Monday – Police have discovered no motive for the apparent assault on a hotel maid yesterday evening at the Plaza Inne. George Baker, most recently of Hadleyville, apparently swung a lamp at her multiple times, before slipping on a wet floor and knocking himself out. "I was just coming in for nightly turndown service," says the maid, who refused to be identified. "Something seemed off when I first walked in. The place reeked. Then he came at me, spun a couple of times, and fell and banged his head on the tub." Police report no signs of a reason for the attack, but in addition to confirming that the floor was littered with broken shards of glass from a smashed bottle of cologne, noted that the room's bedding and pillows were discovered floating in the bathtub. Mr. Baker is now indefinitely confined at the Sweeney Mental Health Center for further observation.*

