

## *The* Impenetrable Smell Of Death When You Need To Smell The Roses

My obsessive hunt for scents with deep exotic base notes, tinged with aromas such as vetiver, simulated musk and opium is sustained and unrelenting. A friend – who possesses a particularly developed sense of the olfactory - likens my perfumed inclinations ‘to the smell of a heavily fragrant, open lidded, gentleman’s coffin atop a funereal pyre’; I find this observation is uncannily astute. My aromatic preferences are pre-determined by childhood reminiscences of the heavily incensed Catholic requiem masses, attendance being an obligatory requirement of the primary school I attended.

Every Thursday morning myself and other bewildered eight year olds, begrudgingly snaked to the redolent adjacent church, where we were required to sing for the coffin dwelling soul residing in front of the overly decorous altar. While the deceased’s family rightly wept and mourned, our requiem hymns soared, and the attendant priest dutifully wafted burning chrism oil around the casket - an intoxicating distinctive and compelling scent, the purpose of which to instill visions into the congregation, of the sweetness of Gods divine mercy. As the perfumed smoke filled the church and rose, we were respectfully reminded of the souls accession into Heaven. The aromatic emissions of this ritual are haunting; they embed themselves deep inside the nose for decades - indelible evocations. It is the aroma belonging to the fecund bouquet of mortality.

Long ago I dreamed I was applying scented body oils, but the perfume was so fragile it seemed to evaporate when in contact with skin. I repeated the procedure, again the delicate scent vaporized. I applied again, using greater quantities. The aroma now gained strength and the emollient provided a healthy lustre to my body. Oiled and potently fragrant I gazed down at the Victorian perfume bottle, sculptured glass with ornate, flower – embellished details, and a name in beautiful gold script, which declared – “embalming fluid”.

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