

ScentEasy

Tucked between the vegan bakery and the outsider art gallery is a space as clean as vapor. The glass is immaculate. From the sidewalk, you can see deep into the shop. Row follows row of milk-glass shelves and repeating bottles, like a kaleidoscope that's lost its color. I think I'm the kind of girl who shops here now.

Dalton's new girlfriend is thin, brunette, and childishly earnest. She's nothing like me at all. Though, this morning I went to Aveda for a cut and color (warm hazelnut, nice, I guess) and a toluene-free mani-pedi. And, I picked up a new pullover. It's plain and painfully expensive. You know that boutique where the sweaters are displayed one-by-one like pastries in a case? Except more serious? So it's nice. Made from bamboo or made locally or something. I don't think bamboo grows here, so it has to be one or the other, not both.

You know, when President Obama said he had a sense of hopefulness about this new green market, and that this investment in clean energy will produce real benefits for the American economy, I think things may have gotten carried away. I know people get excited whenever he uses the word *hope* ... but things just got so much greener overnight. Everybody looked for tax credits and subsidies, not just for wind farms and solar arrays, but for environmentally-friendly polish and post-consumer waste clothing. I am serious about doing well by doing good. I'm a conscientious consumer, and I think Dalton would be proud of me wherever he is.

So, goodsmell is the last stop on my list. No really, *goodsmell*—one word, all lowercase, like whatever that abbreviated language was in 1984 when they kept losing letters. Or e.e. cummings' poem about the "little goat-footed balloon man." Or not.

The funny thing is that goodsmell doesn't smell like anything, at least not to me. The salesgirl, chic in a hemp Calvin Klein shift, eyes my silk jersey wrap dress with concern.

“Hi, welcome to goodsmell. This is your first time visiting our perfumery.” It’s a statement, not a question.

I tap the enamel V pinned to my Diane vonFurstenburg, so she will rest assured it’s vintage. Her face softens as she realizes silkworms were harvested in the 70’s for this dress, but I haven’t personally harmed any. She taps on her own O pin. Yeah, zero-carbon clothing. I’m not surprised.

“I’m Saffron. I’m here to help you find your signature scent.”

She turns my wrist and spritzes it. Except there’s no spit to the spritz, just a puff of air.

“I think it’s empty....”

“Oh, no,” Saffron coos. “That’s just right. We’ve found that alcohol and similar bases are toxic to the environment. So, to stay green, we’ve captured the essence of each scent.”

“It’s air? Ninety-five dollars for air?”

“Not air. Essence. It’s completely different. A completely different thing, a different word.”

She hands me a tiny jar of coffee beans. “Okay, clear your nasal palette.”

I breathe in obligingly. She puffs a series of *essences* on separate spots up my arms. Açai berry, bamboo, chocolate and neroli, black pepper and rosehips, amber-patchouli. I learn that the bottles are made of 100% recycled glass and aluminum. All organic, sustainable, fair trade ingredients and 5% of every purchase would go to something important in Africa. I don’t smell anything. I don’t feel anything.

She reaches for a bottle of green tea essence. I sing under my breath, “There is only air where I used to care.”

“What’s that?”

“Oh, nothing, just humming. Hey, thanks for your time, but I think I’ll keep looking.”

“Was that ‘There is only air’?”

“Yeah....”

“I love that song. I haven’t listened to The Owls in ages.”

“Oh, well, my boyfriend likes them, liked them. My ex-boyfriend likes them.” Why was I telling her this?

“Yeah, mine did, too.” A moment of silence lingers between us for the might-as-well-be-departed.

“Don’t leave yet,” Saffron says. “I think I’ve got something you’ll like. Just hold on a sec.”

She locks the front door and dims the lights, then leads me through the Employees Only door. Okay, she’s either Sapphic or a serial killer or wants to show me the latest Al Gore DVD. But, I’m curious.

“Just to warn you, these cost a lot—I mean *a lot*—of carbon offsets.”

Saffron reveals a bevy of plump bottles in jewel tones. I can smell something familiar; my sense memory is sparking.

“May I?” I hold up a burnt orange bottle, heavy with liquid.

Saffron smiles. I squeeze the atomizer bulb and I’m enveloped in the scent of chicken and dumplings combined with sweet potato pie. It’s just like grandma’s. The next bottle is Valvoline and Dr. Pepper, like gas stations used to smell. The next is the creamy artifice of styrofoam. Another, the musky, pungent odor of my Mediterranean college crush. Another, cinnamon rolls melting with real butter.

“Men just can’t get enough of that one,” she whispers. “So, you’re single, right?”

“Mm-hm.”

“I have just the thing.” She wraps a ruby-tinted bottle in crinkling yellow paper, placing it carefully in a bag. “Just wait to spray it ‘til you’re out of the store. I don’t want the EPA following the trail in.”

I hand her my card and sign without even reading the receipt. “Thanks.”

“Thank me after you’ve tried it.” She flicks on the lights, and unlocks the door. “Have fun.”

I duck under the gallery awning and regloss my lips. I tug my new sweater down to bare my clavicle and the tops of my shoulders. And I spray myself liberally with my signature scent.

Before I’m a foot down the pavement, men are turning their heads. They smell me and remember their most favorite days. A new note wafts with each step: toasted sesame seeds, then the tang and salt of the pickle, the rich cheese, the charcoal, and the perfect char on the hamburger itself.

I have nothing but hope.