

Revisiting Old Friends

by Marta Dziuros

Everyone who is in love with perfume probably has a story like that: the one that got away, that was discontinued and never came back. I was given my one and only red-and-gold spherical bottle of Le Feu d'Issey (by Jacques Cavallier for Issey Miyake, 1998) when I was a teenager. My first reaction was a wrinkled nose: I smelled Nivea cream and carrots. It took me a while, but I got there – I got to love its strangeness, its kooky seductiveness. Now that I think about it, I might have been a bit too young then to be wearing it, but maybe not – maybe it was a perfect companion for my protean, precocious youth. Let's not go there.

I used up that one bottle and, excited to try new things, forgot all about Le Feu. A good twelve-fifteen years later, when the perfume mania was already in full swing, I remembered it and tried to search for it, only to find out it was gone. No bottle I could find cost less than a hundred quid, many were much more than that. I'd check a few places now and then, to no avail.

Recently I've been into scents I remember from my youth; I got Kenzo Jungle L'Elephant (still an absolute banger) and am in the market for Aqua Allegoria Pamplelune, and perhaps Kenzo's Le Monde Est Beau. They're high school and early uni for me, discovery and newness, summery, bold scents. I didn't really examine this urge to revisit those old favourites until a conversation on Instagram made me look out again for Le Feu. There it was, a used sample on eBay – a perfect amount to see whether we'd still recognize each other, whether that particular acquaintance and I still had chemistry. It was my first ever auction, and the excitement of winning it was almost too much – absolutely the best 1.5 quid I've ever spent.

Smelling it again was dizzying – not only because the scent itself is bizarre, but also because (as someone very close to me said) ancient connections between synapses started firing. There it was, that solar, strange, lovely thing. It's still sweet, spicy and carrotty – I'm surprised nobody on *Fragrantica* mentioned them, to me the infamous "baby vomit" note is clearly carrots. Or is it the coriander? Initially Le Feu was spicier and more intense than I remembered, almost nutty. I got a distinct whiff of the thin brown membranes covering walnuts. Then a weird, peppery rose came through. There is a consistent, slightly sour note there, so I can imagine it being very much a love/hate scent. The drydown is gentler and sweeter, down to a slight pina colada note. It's sensational, rich, kaleidoscopic.

I have the sample on my desk at all times, and give the nozzle a sniff every now and then, just to remind myself that I've found it again, that what I thought was gone forever is back, however fleetingly. It feels like reconnecting with a piece of myself, like continuing a conversation interrupted ages ago. Le Feu was on the market for a relatively short time, so I don't think it would have been reformulated (happy to be corrected here), but my memories of it weren't, as it turned out, as clear as I'd thought and the sample might have been oxidising in someone's drawer for years. Still, the spark of recognition is there, like seeing your old friend's gait in the crowd and knowing instantly it's them.

I emigrated from Poland to the UK seven years ago. Being here now is, for a few reasons, difficult, and it's occurred to me that in missing my youthful fragrance loves, as brash as some of them were, I wanted reassurance. I cherish the friends I've made here, but there's something special about the friendships that date back from Poland, from ten, fifteen, twenty years ago. It feels like the people who knew me before I left, and who know me still, have the true measure of me. I love meeting them to see how they're doing, what they're up to, what

they love and struggle with – but also, secretly, to confirm to myself I’m still the same person, whatever that means. Encountering Le Feu again was a little like that; I could re-settle into myself through my reaction to something well-known and beautiful.