

Questions about the text : Citrus-scented love

KEY

1. Ruth's mother received a bottle of 'Royall Lime' toilet water (= *cologne*) from her husband on her birthday. **R**
2. Her mother was disappointed because she expected a more original present than toilet water. **W**
3. Her mother didn't let her children smell her new perfume. **W**
4. The father insisted that his wife should use the cologne without moderation. **W**
5. Her mother had no 'special occasions' when she could use the perfume. **W**
6. After a couple of years, the bottle was empty. **W**
7. When Ruth's father died, her mother lived alone in the family home. **W**
8. The mother kept the bottle of cologne until she became an old woman. **R**
9. Today, Ruth understands that buying the expensive perfume was an act of love for her father **R**
10. . Today, the bottle is in Ruth's home. It's completely empty and smells of nothing. **W**

Citrus-scented love

The cologne¹ was costly, but for my mother, my father was willing to splurge².

By Ruth Douillette in the “Christian Science Monitor”

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(1) Many years ago, my father gave my mother a special birthday gift. My brother and I watched as she unwrapped it and held up a narrow-necked, green bottle with a crown-shaped stopper.

(2) "Oh, my," she said, flashing my father a smile. "Oh, Bob, this is too much."

"What is it?" I asked.

She held the bottle out to show me.

I read the label: *Royall Lyme Toilet Lotion: A delightful essence scented with native limes³, to be used by gentlewomen as a cologne, and by gentlemen as an aftershave lotion. Made in Bermuda. Ten fluid ounces.*

I glanced at my father, who looked pleased. My mother tugged at the crown to pull out the cork and took a delicate sniff. "Mmmm."

"Let me smell." (3) She held the stopper beneath my nose, and then my brother's.

"Strong." I said, eyes watering. "It smells like lemons."

"Limes," she said. She placed her finger over the opening, tipped the bottle, and dabbed a citrus-scented drop behind each ear.

"Why are you putting it there?" asked my brother.

"Pulse spots," she said. We didn't ask what that meant.

"Can I have some?" I reached for the bottle, and put my small finger over the hole.

My father, perhaps sensing a spill, sprang into action. "Wait a minute," he said, taking the bottle. (4) "That's expensive stuff. It's not to be wasted. You use only a little at a time. It's for special occasions."

He handed it back to my mother. "This is not to be wasted," he repeated.

My mother put a tiny touch behind my ears and a dab on my brother's nose. Then she put the bottle on her bureau where it sat like liquid gold on a crocheted doily.

Even though I'd been disappointed that the gift was merely cologne, I took my father's words to heart: The gift was special, not to be wasted, and was to be saved for special occasions.

I took a proprietary interest in it, checking the bottle frequently to see if the liquid's level was dropping. Not at first, but (5) after a while I could tell that my mother had used some, and I was glad she had special occasions, although I wasn't sure what that entailed.

(6) When I went to college the bottle was more than half full, and when I married, a little less than half remained. Then I forgot about the bottle in the rush of my own life.

Thirty-five years later, (7) after my father's death, my mother moved to an assisted-living apartment. She left behind a lifetime of possessions that would not fit in her single room.

(8) I saw the bottle again when I went to prepare her house for sale. It sat on a shelf in her bathroom between dental floss and Q-tips.

The bottle was dusty. It looked empty. I held it to the light and tilted it. There on the bottom were several drops of amber liquid.

While the house was being readied for sale, I wandered through rooms and took a few simple things – the Royall Lyme bottle among them.

¹ cologne : a type of toilet water

² to splurge : faire une folie

³ limes : citrons verts

Royall Lyme is still sold today. A smaller bottle sells for \$40. I don't know what my father paid for it more than 50 years ago. Growing up during the Depression, he learned to stretch money more than most blue-collar workers⁴ were able to. (9) For him, the Royall Lyme was a splurge in the name of love.

The bottle now sits on a shelf above my desk between a picture of my three children and a Mickey Mouse snow globe. It's dusty again and truly dry inside now. When I grasp the crown, the cork slides out easily and only (10) a whisper of lime lingers, a ghost of a scent that fills me with memories and a new understanding.

I'm sure if he could rewind time, my father would tell my mother to splash some scent on every day, to sprinkle it on her pillow at night, to bathe in it if she felt like it. He'd tell her that every minute she breathes is a special occasion.

The green bottle on my shelf reminds me of this every day.

⁴ A blue collar worker = « un col bleu » (un ouvrier)