

# Phenidone Perfume

By Bridgette Brados

She said it would be soon. “Soon”, what an arbitrary word.

I turn the dial on my electronic timer to eight seconds, and wonder what numerical value represents “soon”. I press the rectangular gray button on the bottom of the dial. A white light shines through my 35mm negative and onto the blank sheet of photo paper. Eight seconds. Carefully grabbing my paper by the edges, making sure not to leave fingerprints on the latent image, I walk past the shelf of rubber gloves, refusing to grab a pair. Continuing my short walk from my enlarger to the development tank, I pass two of my classmates. Except for a few amber lights, the room is dark, darker than how it is portrayed in movies, actually. I cannot see where one of their bodies ends, and the other one begins. They took this class, Darkroom Photography, because it’s the only dark place to make-out in on campus. It is just the three of us in the room today, so the only thing to listen to is the running water of the wash bin, and the occasional intake of breath by high school lovers. I drop my photo paper in the bin of developer, without gloves, making sure to briefly dip my thumb and pointer fingers in there too. After spending three years, equating to about 1,125 hours, in the darkroom itself, I have become accustomed to the smell of developer. Quite honestly, I might have an addiction to it. Developer is comprised of: metol, phenidone, dimezone, and hydroquinone. Each chemical, separately, is used for things just as great as developing my amateur photographs. Metol is used to treat high blood pressure by affecting the response of nerve impulses to the heart. Phenidone is used as a modulator in most chemotherapies. Dimezone polishes the foggy aspect of silver particles. Hydroquinone is used as a defense mechanism for the bombardier beetle. Some may plug their nose while near the chemical mixture, but I prefer to indulge myself in the nerve pulsating, cancer curing, particle polishing, beetle defending potion. I look at the developer dripping down the base of my finger. I rub my hands together, forcing the developer into every miniscule wrinkle on my hands. I want the smell to linger for hours, and days. I want the smell to linger for longer than “soon”.

My teacher and I talk frequently of chemical experimentation when developing, however, we rarely discuss the actual logistics of the darkroom. Today, I asked if I could mix up some new developer for my print. The corners of her eyes turned down as soon as the question left my body

and hit hers.

“Unfortunately, you have to use what’s already there, even if the chemicals are a bit exhausted. We are running out of developer, and there won’t be a new supply anytime soon,” she admitted.

My teacher usually gets a new supply of chemicals every month, it didn’t make sense as to why this time is different.

“Did you forget to purchase it?” I further implored.

“No, honey, I did not forget. There is no money for it. They school board took our program off the tax credit form.”

We both stood there blankly, no words to be shared, our instinctual facial idiosyncrasies spoke for us.

This is not the first time the school board dubbed the darkroom as undeserving of monetary support. The darkroom was originally funded alongside other classes like mathematics and English, but since the rise of the digital age, the law makers who grew up using film decided to deduce the program to just an extra-curricular activity, in which the only funding can come from a tax credit donation basis. Typically meaning that the only people supporting the darkroom are the parents whose children are specifically involved with the program. However now, the school district decided to remove the “Darkroom Photography” option from the tax credit form. Originally, reducing the program to strictly a donation basis was heartbreaking, now they are taking away the public’s right to formally donate. I wondered whether that decision was made just for the sake removing text on the form to save printer ink.

The image on my photo paper is appearing rapidly and I get ready to move it to the next stage of development. I recall the conversation between my teacher and I this morning as I decide to dip my entire hand in the developer while moving my print. I rub the liquid in between my fingers up to my wrists. I check for the couple I’m sharing the darkroom with, they are still oblivious, but their enjoyment of the darkroom is probably equal to mine. With the knowledge of practically being invisible at this moment, I take a large scoop of the clear chemical concoction. Like a child in a mud pile, I rub developer all over my arms. I want my skin to absorb the darkroom. I want my chemical makeup to, at least for a moment, mirror that of the room I’m in. I make sure to flick some of it on my jeans for its bleaching properties. I want the developer to stain my pants so

I'll always have an ounce of the darkroom with me. I lightly press my thumbprint onto my neck, wearing the developer as if it's a high-end perfume. The similarities between the two are uncanny. Both priced upwards of \$100. Both coveted. Both are toxic with an increase in application. Politicians will buy high-end perfume in a heartbeat, but they will cower behind their 4<sup>th</sup> floor office desk when asked to fund a school program. I put extra around my neck for them. The pigmentation of my jeans is starting to fade, and my hands are beginning to burn. Soon the heart of the darkroom and I will coincide. I realize now that "soon" does not have a numerical value, only a developed compulsion to become what you love.