

Chapter 1 Excerpt from
Scent of Triumph: A Novel of
Perfume and Passion by Jan Moran

St. Martin's Press

A rose, the symbol of love, the queen of the perfumer's palette. How then, does the perfume of war intoxicate even the most reasonable of men?

—DB (From the perfume journal of Danielle Bretancourt)

3 September, 1939
Atlantic Ocean

Danielle Bretancourt von Hoffman braced herself against the mahogany-paneled stateroom wall, striving for balance as she flung open a brass porthole, seeking a moment of respite she knew would never be. A damp, kelp-scented wind—a harbinger of the storm ahead—whistled through the cabin, assaulting her nose with its raw intensity, but the sting of salty spray did little to assuage the fear she had for her little boy.

Nicky was only six years old. Why, oh why did I agree to leave him behind? She had wanted to bring him, but her husband had disagreed, saying he was far too young for such an arduous journey. As a trained scientist, his arguments were always so logical, so sensible. Against her instinct, she had given in to Max. It was settled; in their absence her mother-in-law, Sofia, would care for Nicky on their old family estate in Poland.

Danielle kept her eyes focused on the horizon as the Newell-Grey Explorer slanted upward, slicing through the peak of a cresting wave. The ocean liner creaked and pitched as it heaved through the turbulent gray waters of the Atlantic on its voyage from New York to England. Silently, Danielle urged it onward, anxious to return home.

Her usually sturdy stomach churned in rhythm with the sea. Was it morning sickness, anxiety, or the ravaging motion of the sea? Probably all three, she decided. Just last week she'd been so wretchedly ill that she'd seen a doctor, who confirmed her pregnancy. The timing couldn't be worse.

She blinked against the stiff breeze, her mind reeling. When they'd heard reports of the new agreement between Germany and Russia, they'd cut their business short to hurry home. Had it been just two days since they'd learned the devastating news that Nazi forces had invaded Poland?

Someone knocked sharply on the door. Gingerly crossing the room, Danielle opened the door to Jonathan Newell-Grey, heir apparent to the British shipping line that bore his family name. His tie hung from his

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collar and his sleeves were rolled up, exposing muscular forearms taut from years of sailing. A rumpled wool jacket hung over one shoulder. Danielle and Max had met Jon on their outbound voyage to New York several weeks ago. They had become good friends, dining together regularly on the ship, and later in the city. Well-traveled and physically fit, Jon loved to explore and dine on fine food, and insisted on taking them to the best restaurants in New York, as well as little-known nooks that served authentic French and German fare, assuring Max and Danielle of a salve for their homesickness after their relocation. During their time in New York, Max worked tirelessly, tending to details for their pending cross-Atlantic move, so they both appreciated having a knowledgeable friend to call on for help.

With his gregarious yet gracious manner, Jon had helped them find a good neighborhood for their family, introduced them to his banker, and even explained some of the odd American colloquialisms they couldn't understand, as they all laughed together over well-aged bottles of his favorite Bordeaux. They had all climbed the Empire State Building together, and one night they saw a play on Broadway, and even danced to

Benny Goodman's big band into the late evening hours. Jon also went to the World's Fair with them, where their crystal perfume bottles were featured in a potential business partner's display. Danielle and Max were both glad they'd met Jon, a man who embraced life with spirit and joie de vivre, and they looked forward to their new life in America far from the threat of Hitler's forces.

But now, with news of the invasion, Max and Danielle's guarded optimism for their future had turned to distress over their family's safety.

"Bonjour," she said, glad to see Jon. "Any news yet?"

"None." He pushed a hand through his unruly chestnut hair, droplets of water spray glistening on his tanned face. "The captain has called a meeting at fifteen hundred hours for all passengers traveling on Polish and German passports."

"But I still hold a French passport."

"You'll need to attend, Danielle." His hoarse voice held the wind of the sea.

"Of course, but—" As another sharp pitch jerked through the ship, Jon caught her by the shoulders and kept her from falling. He moved intuitively with the ship's motion, a testament to his years at sea.

"Steady now, lass," Jon said, a small smile playing on his lips. He stared past

her out the porthole, his dark eyes riveted on the ocean's whitecapped expanse. Blackened, heavily laden clouds crossed the sun, casting angled shadows across his face.

Embarrassed, Danielle touched the wall for support. She recalled the strange sense of foreboding she'd had upon waking. She was blessed—or cursed—with an unusually keen prescience. Frowning, she asked, "Can the ship withstand this storm?"

"Sure, she's a fine, seaworthy vessel, one of the finest in the world. This weather's no match for her." He turned back to her, his jaw set. His usual jovial nature had turned solemn. "Might even be rougher seas ahead, but we'll make England by morning."

Danielle nodded, but still, she knew. Anxiety coursed through her; something seemed terribly wrong. Her intuition came in quiet flashes of pure knowledge. She couldn't force it, couldn't direct it, and knew better than to discuss it with anyone, especially her husband. She was only twenty-six; Max was older, wiser, and told her that her insights were rubbish. Max wasn't really insulting her; he had studied science at the university in Germany, and he simply didn't believe anything that couldn't be scientifically proven.

Jon touched her arm in a small,

Triumph me

sympathetic movement. "Anything I can do to help?"

"Not unless you perform miracles." Jon's rough fingers were warm against her skin, and an ill-timed memory from a few days ago shot through her mind. Danielle loved to dance, and with Max's encouragement, she and Jon had shared a dance while Max spoke to the captain at length after dinner. Danielle remembered Jon's soft breath, his musky skin, his hair curling just above his collar. He'd been interested in all she had to say, from her little boy to her work at Parfums Bretancourt, her family's perfumery in the south of France. But when she'd rested her head against his chest, it was his skin, his natural scent, which was utterly unique and intriguingly virile, that mesmerized her.

A third-generation perfumer, Danielle had an acute sense of smell. Her olfactory skills were paramount in the laboratory, but at times this acuity proved socially awkward. Jon's scent still tingled in her nose, taunting her dreams, its musky animal appeal relentless in the recesses of her mind. His memory crept into her mind more than she knew it should. After all, she told herself firmly, I am a happily married woman.

Danielle forced the scene from her mind, took a step back out of modesty. She caught sight of herself in the mirror, her thick auburn hair in disarray, her lip rouge smeared. She smoothed her celadon green silk day dress—one of her own designs her dressmaker had made—and drew her fingers across her pale skin. "I've been apprehensive about this trip from the beginning."

"Have you heard anything else from your mother-in-law?"

"Not since we spoke in New York. And my mother's last cable said they haven't arrived." When she and Max had heard the news, they called Max's mother, Sofia, and told her to leave

immediately with Nicky for Paris, where Danielle's parents had a spacious apartment in the sixteenth arrondissement, a fine neighborhood in the heart of Paris. Sofia's voice had sounded dreadful; they hadn't realized she was so sick. What if she isn't well enough to travel? Wincing with remorse, Danielle fought the panic that rose in her throat, fearful for her mother-in-law.

"They have to get out of Poland." Jon touched her cheek. Reflexively, she turned into the comfort of his hand, inhaling, her heart aching, his scent—at once both calming and unsettling—edged with the smell of the sea and a spiced wood blend she normally could have recognized in an instant. But now, Nicky was ever present in her mind. Danielle pressed her eyes closed and stifled a sob.

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