

ELLEN ADAMS

I Lose My Grandfather in a Class on Scent

I thought it was hair oil in the box, but she said it was opium. I thought it was my grandfather in that sniffing box, the way I thought it was him in the brass chain-link bracelet I found at a Santa Barbara trunk show for four dollars. The bent oval links like a diabetic bracelet that for him, untagged, was decorative gesture, not a medical articulation. I lost that bracelet somewhere between the trunk show and the taco shop and my rich friend's parallel parked sedan; I lost the brass of it in two retraced and re-retraced blocks. I thought I found that bracelet in the sniffing box that smelled like him, a smell I understood as his greased-back gray hair, rough stubbled face, still looking like he worked in a Detroit garage even into his mechanic retirement. But no, opium. Opium—the blue bled arm ink of his own name tattooed while stationed overseas in the war? No, not opium, not that tattoo. Not my grandfather, not his bracelet, not him anywhere. The scent of him made from a factory, not a plant. The scent of him home from the factory, the bright silver of his bracelet links, the sweetness when held against his white undershirt, his thin arms, thin wrists, misidentified, then lost.