

# Anisette and amateurs

written by Jessica Sequeira | July 15, 2016



Late at night, I was walking around the front driveway, half out of insomnia (nothing better than a 2am ramble when you can't sleep), half because I heard the dogs barking. No one was awake except for me. Black sky, stars above; I called in the animals. Then, all of a sudden, a man jumped out of the bushes, wearing a ghillie suit. He had on dark glasses and was carrying a gun. Who *are* you? I asked, startled, jumping backward. I'm Mark, he said. Long silence. Didn't you pay me to shoot coyotes here? he asked. No, I said. Another silence.

We got to talking, and he explained everything. It turns out he had the wrong house. This was not his day job, but simply a passion, and he'd made an amateur mistake. He apologized profusely and said he'd come back a different day, to the correct house. He left just after, but I kept thinking. What is an amateur, exactly? We can all imagine the genius: the wild eye, the uncombed mop of hair, the hands running over piano keys in the effortless composition of a concierto. The professional: confidence, a tie neatly knotted, hair expertly combed, trouser hems falling just-so over leather dress shoes, hand occupied with briefcase or beaker. The idler: a can of beer before him, television all afternoon. And the artist: Midnight inspiration made material, with government funding.

But the amateur, who is he? What does he look like? Enthusiasm and passion mark him. His mind works laterally, striking on connections that escape the plodding logic of the professional. He is anti-abstract, pro-abstraction. Yes, the amateur is the essence of abstraction. His mind constantly connects pieces of information, constantly synthesizes. He is never bored. There is too much to see and do. Loyal to his whims, he is capable of achieving that rare thing, joy, that slips so easily from those bound by scheming strategy and institutional loyalty.

Let's say that after this episode, terrifying, but also, I admit, a little comic, we'd laughed it off and I'd invited him in for a drink. A palomita, my new favorite. The proportions are precise: one-fourth anisette, three-fourths water. The liquor falls into the clear liquid and turns it milky white, a touch of cloud and sugar that plumes in the most beautiful way. It would have been an appropriate choice, for the success of the amateur breaks down in

about the same way: three-fourths of his ideas are rubbish, an absolute bungling-up, but the other one-fourth are unexpected discoveries, brilliant precisely for their way of connecting ideas that may not have occurred to a so-called professional.

There's no getting around it; the attempt by the ghillie suit man fell in the three-fourths category. But let's say that he had been successful. He might have got the right house, he might have shot the coyote, or better yet, he might have come up with a solution that didn't involve violence to animals at all. There's still time even now. Why not? It's only a sleepless 3am, there are ghosts out here and anything is possible.