

Anisette

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*by*

Ezra Mark

E·RATIO

Anisette

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*for Joe*

“Oh word, thou word that I lack!” With that despairing cry, Schoenberg’s only opera, *Moses und Aron*, breaks off at the end of the second act. The music for the third was never finished.

— Gabriel Josipovici, *Writing and the Body*

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So marked. A smudge, gradually eroding, fading through the day. People on the streets. The stream multiplies, then dissipates. I was up just before sunrise. A string of lights was in the East.

*A*—The letter, the lost word. . .

In the cafe, a group of people sit around a table. They regard each other in turn. For long stretches of time, no one says anything at all. Waiting for a miracle. That of forgetfulness. Only silence. That lost rose

. . . marks the page with series of Xs. Counting, repeating. When he leaves he checks his pocket for his keys. He grasps them, slips his finger into the ring. Rotates them, slips them round: one, two, three times. And again.

In the dream he left the keys in the door. There were other things. An unfinished letter. Guilt at that. A chill; lingering damp from last night's rain. Did that appear in the dream as well? Little crosses flowering everywhere.

Even if it is raining, a dream of rain has nothing to do with external reality. This he knows. Yet the image of the keys in the lock, room emptied, hangs under the surface of the day. Weight in hand.

It brightens for a minute, sun wafting vapor off the roof. And then, a scattering of rain as it starts anew. The clock grinds slow in the next room. A crow perches on the rooftop, impervious. Down the street, crocuses.

He closes his eyes. In the stripped room, shards of a broken cup, some scraps of paper. Old letters. He recognizes the hand, but nothing of the words. Scent of rose oil. Sound at the threshold. Ghosts in the hallway.

Down the street, crocuses. Black mud, kicked up by rain onto the purewhite. Christmas lights burn on the house next door; it creates a kind of confusion. Neither one nor the other, not in between, but two things at once.

Repetition of rain, repetition of days, repetition of years, repetition of ideas. Repetition of boredom. Flattening of affect. And then: a three-quarter moon appears above a pollarded tree. “The word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart.”

The breeze carries the scent of sea-water. The rattling of the shingle, and silence as the waves withdraw. The name for it, a moment suspended, held as if a stone in your mouth. Emma in her dress of watered silk.

She said: “I was walking in the park, and I smelled flowers for no reason. There were none that I could see, there was still some snow on the ground.” Another thought at the threshold, a hitch in his step.

He stumbles. A missed heartbeat, a pause followed by a quick-step of double or triple beats. Stand still for a minute. Breathe. There's a barely lingering perfume: someone had recently passed this way. Emma's dress: was it blue or grey?

Yes, it was a warm grey; purplish. It was a string of blue glass beads he'd been thinking of. Fabric of doubt. The mind's eye, distorted. You reread an old journal and think: no, it wasn't that way at all.

A memory is most fragile at the moment it's touched. Every time you recall something—literally *re-collect* it—you risk breaking it. You rub a little away. It slowly takes on the contours of your hand, your body.

He rolls a pen between his fingers. A flash of red appears at the edge of his field of vision. A red ball rising into the air and descending into a cloud. Voices. Children at play. This precipitates—*what*, exactly?

Finally warm enough to sit in the park; warm in the sun. He sits on the bench, rolling the pen between his fingers, not thinking of writing. He rolls a cigarette and ink is transferred from his fingers to paper.

The pen weeps ink, mirror of the subconscious. He isn't sure how much time has passed. The children have gone, and it is more or less quiet. A bird chirrup overhead. The robin's breast catches the last of the sun.

A chill to the air, he moves, walking without apparent aim. This happens more frequently now—either this, motion out of habit, or he finds himself standing in his room with his coat on, not knowing where to go.

How he always returns to the church, the side chapel there. The statue of the Blessed Virgin, the candle-lit walls of deep blue, studded with stars above, sconces below. The Virgin holds the Child and the Child holds an apple.

He lights a candle, mouths a prayer, and steps into the nave. The congregation has gone. Keys jangle from a custodian's belt as he polishes the lectern. The sound rings out into emptiness. The smell of beeswax and incense lingers.

What brings him here? Not belief, nor faith brings him here. Habit? Doubt. Doubt and faith: a photo and its negative. As above, so below. He makes a note, turns the page. The ink soaked through from the other side.

What he wrote: “The Virgin treads on the snake and the Child offers an apple. Is it the same apple; does it pose the same danger? Incense seems to hang, suspended in the air. In the gloom, the sanctuary light.”

He steps outside into a fog. Amorphous lights and a few isolated figures. His steps echo into nothing: sharp against the pavement, immediately dampened by the cloud which erases details, leaving only outlines of trees and buildings, smears of light.

He runs the gauntlet of shadow and light cast by an iron fence. His breath mingles with the fog; uncertain border between what he breathes in, what he breathes out. Slow drift. A red light flashes at a four-way stop.

He stops and listens to the click of the mechanism: off-on, off-on. . . . How many can he fit within each breath? With each click the air throbs pink. Small black dogs seem to come out of the shadows. A recurring dream.

When he wakes, condensation is thick on the windows. In the mist, a cherry tree, a pink explosion frozen in space. Everything at once so slow and fast. A crow picks at something in the street. How to make sense.

Years, night and day, overlap. The pink fog surrounding the streetlight, the pink of the cherry tree. The slow drip of accumulated dew. Taste. The bitterness of coffee and burnt sugar. Aftertaste. “She was wearing a dress of green silk.”

It’s all slowly becoming *now*: the weight of the brass lighter in his hand, the weight of the water suspended in the air. The water-streaked window, beads hanging there. The world mirrored in every drop, condensed in pinpricks of light.

Not the photo, nor the negative. Something in-between. He opens the drawer and takes out two sheets fastened with a paperclip to a postcard, a stereoscopic image. Not one nor the other. What is said and what escapes the telling.

He runs his fingertips along the curves of a paperclip. The postcard shows ships in a harbor, stranded at low tide. The ink on the page, under the card, remains a deep blue; the rest of the page has faded.

A word penciled in the margin: Newfoundland. There's a poem and a message on the postcard he doesn't need to re-read. The sun breaks out as a breeze comes up, scattering cherry petals, making green buds dance in the light.

And the rain starts, despite the sun.

*Clarity*

*In the sense of transparence,  
I don't mean that much can be explained.*

*Clarity in the sense of silence.*

He takes an index card, he makes lines and then crosses them out.

Jacob says he's dying. An attack followed by pains his doctor cannot explain. The phone rang, ending my reverie, and the fiction of the days fell away. Please come over soon, if you can. I don't want to be alone.

Why did I hesitate? Was it the low rumble of far-off thunder? —And was that real, or imagined? Apprehension at the rain, or some basic human failing. Some sense of trepidation or fear I could not, or would not, name.

There was an old woman in the alley, well-dressed, going through the trash. She turned and looked up. Her gaze went straight through me, without any recognition. I walked away. My feet kicked up pebbles; a stone in my mouth.

It was a long, slow afternoon, filled with silences. Condensation formed on the sides of glasses and evaporated: a slow stream of Pernod. A room cluttered with papers. Aftertaste of licorice. Do you regret, asked Jacob, not having any children?

What is the nature of memory, and that of regret? I left with a bundle of my old letters. “Thou shalt count thy steps. . . .” I slowed and looked around; struck with a sudden fear of seeing the old woman again.

“I wish I had a fireplace,” Jacob had said. “I would burn it all.” On my desk was a box of tickets from movies, operas and ballets that I could no longer recall. Why do we hold on to *things*?

Yet: beach stones. My grandmother's rosary. Fountain pens. Books. Foreign coins. I've kept a string of blue glass beads for thirty-five years. I never knew the girl's name. She merely smiled and pressed them into my hand. The light changes. . . .

It is pleasant, even useful, to let one's eyes drift out of focus. Outlines blur, objects disappear. What gently asserts itself are tones: muted chords versus sharp, punctuated notes. A white line, lit by moonlight, slowly feathered across the sky.

A line is drawn and dissolves into the horizon, the coming day. Some sharp noise woke me from a dream. Everything was covered with a veneer of ice. Branches glittered in a low sun. A bird was frozen in place.

I went back to sleep; my father was there. I could remember little more when I woke again. I lay there for awhile, suspended between echoes, thinking that we are always dreaming: only an accident makes us aware of it.

Trees moving in slow motion, as if underwater. I hear a door close down the hall, and someone sigh. Their footsteps disappear down the stairs, into nothing. It takes a minute for me to realize that the phone is ringing.

Outside, sparrows are singing: the same song I've heard, without variation, since childhood. In Paris and Prague. From Emma's room, by the river. Repetition of steps to Jacob's. Repetition of thoughts. A candle burns down and is replaced by another.

Jacob's sister greets me in a dress of black silk. There are white flowers; aren't they nice, she manages to say. We repeat the obvious things, drink the last of the Pernod. Perfume of licorice and jasmine. Memories, like stones.

Ashes, scattered in the dahlia beds. A smudge on my sleeve. I burnt his letters and mine. There was a group of dancers rehearsing in the park, counting time. "For thou hast numberest my steps." The sky, a robin-egg blue.

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The Angelic Night. The curtain rent in two. Echoes.  
Incense and beeswax. My grandmother, dead now fifty  
years, lights a candle. A gesture, repeated. A proliferation of  
crosses, scattered across the page. The still point. Lilies,  
brilliant in morning light.

10.II.16 – 27.III.16

*Two prisoners whose cells adjoin communicate with each other by knocking on the wall. The wall is the thing which separates them but is also their means of communication. It is the same with us and God. Every separation is a link.*

— Simone Weil

Ezra Mark's books include *Retention*, *Setting*, and *Intention*. *Slow Motion* is forthcoming. He lives in Seattle, Washington.

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*taxis de pasa logos*

