

Olive Senior



RIDDLE NO. 1

Riddle me dis, riddle me dat, guess me dis riddle and p'raps not:

Torn from the vine in a place of moist heat and shade
where I was growing, skin once plump and reddish, glowing.
Suddenly, a job lot. Indiscriminately thrown in,
we are jumbled, shaken up, rolled together,

little knowing our fate or destination, till black and shrivelled
by the sun, looking all alike now, we are tumbled into hold of
a ship for forty days and forty nights (we guess — for black
is the fenestration).

Disgorged, spilled out, shell-shocked I come parched and
dried, my head emptied, till shock-still I come to rest,
shelled-out, buck-naked. In the mad ensuing scramble,
who will come

who will come sample me, view me, choose me,
sort me out for grade and quality, drive me home to crush me,
use me? Know that alone I'm of little value, like a peppercorn
rental. All together, we can pepper your arse with shot.

Over time, despite our treatment, you'll see, survivors stay
pungent and hot. You can beat me senseless, grind me
down, crush me to bits, to powder. You can never lose my bite
on your tongue, my hold on your senses

forever I'll linger and cling. In your mad scramble
to possess, devour me, remember, if you'd only allow me
to do a strip-tease, slow, peel off my black skin, you'd
be pleased — or shocked — to discover: I'm white below.

