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.

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