

Idiosyncrasy, Love

By Mandy Brzenk

You tell me I'm strange, on your lunch break. As strange as you,
so we match, no matter how mismatched our socks might be
inside those insulated boots, Harvey.

I don't think you're weird, though you rescue a lava lizard
a week, their shed tails your relics. The scruff on your chin
never itches me, and you turn mechanic's hands and dirty talk
into sudden smirks as I pay for V8 and chapstick.

Harvey, you eat bags of chips whole and only leave what crumbs
grease your sweater, before you sweep them to the floor
and I can't help but hook my legs around your hips. They squish
into the carpet, but I like to watch your forearm veins twitch
as you clap the flies in your hands.

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What I See In the Dark

By Mandy Brzenk

Next to me, his shoulders
curve to his strong back, tense
even in his sleep. He can never
fight his fatigue once he's found
comfort on his stomach, an arm hooked
above his head. He's left my mind
whirling again, so I lie high from long
breaths he exhales. His back is a massive
map of scars and knots, but with skin
smooth as the sea glass we ran our fingers
across on Hellshire Beach, so long ago now.
Maybe he's there, lying on a short
beach towel kicking sand at me,
and not earning forehead wrinkles
for all the stress he keeps to himself.

His back keeps a steady rise
and fall and I want to follow him,
see what he sees behind his eyelids.
His days of going, going would fill
our talk on his long drives from
work. Maybe he's on dark roads
singing along to songs, badly.
Maybe I'm there too, and we're up
on the map going further from home,
to a place his shoulders
can slouch and he's only tough
when the rain-swelled door needs
tugging.

I rest my palm on his pillow, twirl
his short light hair with my finger.
He'll be gone again soon, taking
his duffle, leaving his clothes
in its place. He won't need long
sleeves or blue sweats in Pendleton.
Maybe he's there now with a sore
throat from responding to orders,
using his phone calls to dial me
only to whisper what I need
him to proclaim.

Feeling my touch from wherever
he'd been, he turns, tries a sleepy
smile, and draws me into his warm chest.
I want to ask what he'd been dreaming but
I hear more drawn out breaths
and his arm goes limp around me.

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Butterscotch

By Mandy Brzenk

"The butterfly sips from the word 'mariposa.'"

-Philip Dacey

What does the thick and sticky sweet sip from, then?

The shine its wrapped in, the color
of my grandpa's 14 karat chain that snagged
my little sleeve as I caught the saccharine scent
from his wide smile, clear as pipe tobacco?

Or is it granted two sounds, separate,
butter and brown sugar, before they're seared
together then hardened?

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