

I pass the place at Clam Cove where the shrimp man repeatedly parks, pickup packed with pink prey. A spectacular spot. The best ocean view on this stretch of Route 1.

I scan the cove and the bay's reach. Full tide. Stunning blue. Sea a-dazzle in dawn's early light.

The bejeweled bay, bedecked in her best.

I take a sip from my travel mug. J's mug, actually. Her coffee, too. Colombian, she said. Not the country's most profitable export, but it is legal. And damn good.

Not that I'm any expert. J's the coffee freak, not me. And, as early riser of the family, she's the one who needs it. Gets her going, she says. The way it's helping me at this ungodly hour.

A normal day, I'm fast asleep. My mate's morning noises – shower, bean grinding – don't bother me. Sandwiching my head between pillows helps. Mr. Pillowhead, she calls me.

Yup, sleeping in's my thing. Which I can do because I'm my own boss. Not one of your famous writers, but I do well enough. Splendidly, I'd say, for someone who's raised himself by his own bootstraps.

I sleep in because that's what my body wants. And I like to give the fella what he wants. Treat him well, and he returns the favor. Do unto others.

In Rockport now, buzzing by the entrance to the hospital where A had his surgery. Should be at his place in twenty minutes or so. Twenty minutes of rattling along. Got to do something about that tailpipe. Put it on my list for when we get back.

Getting up. The hardest task I face every day. An inertia thing. The taxing transition from limp horizontal lump to vertical action figure.

Semi-vertical action figure. I spend most of my day at my desk. I'm the homebody husband, and J's the go-get-'em wage earner. She enjoys her paralegal work. More power to her, I say. A job like that would drive me batty. Different strokes for different folks.

I catch a green light at Route 90. Then, cresting the rise before Maine Sport, I get a good look at Mount Megunticook. And the sky above. A lovely blue.

How to describe it. Early-morning blue? Nascent blue?

I'd like to say nascent, nacreous blue. But nacreous it's not. The sky's luminous, but it lacks nacre's essence – iridescence.

Too bad. I like *nascent nacreous*. But then, as you've figured out by now, I have a fondness for alliteration. You might say I'm addicted. My lady's hooked on coffee, and I'm hooked on alliteration. Different dependencies for different folks.

I picture myself in an auditorium, addressing the annual assembly of Alliterationists Anonymous.

My name is N. I'm an addict.

Hi, N!

Alliteration, my once secret but now sanctioned habit. Readers, you see, tell me how much they enjoy my wild and woolly wordplay.

I relish it too, of course – big-time. Tons of fun finding those tantalizing, tongue-tiptoeing terms.

Like the tongue twisters of old. Peter Piper, perpetually picking his pecks of pickled peppers. And the unnamed she – call her Shelly – who ceaselessly sells her seashells down by the seashore.

Seashell selling Shelly and pepper picking Peter. Match made in tongue twister heaven!

Downtown Camden now, splitting the space between the town's stalwart landmarks, French & Brawn and Camden National Bank, with a brief glimpse of the harbor. And past the library, a turn at the blinking light onto Mountain Street – aka Route 52.

Some years ago, I looked into the literary history of my habit. To my surprise, I discovered a true treasure trove of alliteration – the great Anglo-Saxon poem *Beowulf*. Penned a millennium ago, the epic teems with *more than three thousand lines* of alliterative Old English verse. Three thousand one hundred and eighty-two, to be exact.

Which tells me that the anonymous author was, without a doubt, an addict. Our *archetypal* alliteration addict.

Into the home stretch, now. Pretty much a straight shot to my pal's picture-filled pad.

He's quite the painter, though just a couple of decades ago he had a dead end job in an art store. When he got fired – fortuitously fired – he pursued his childhood dream to be a full-time artist. He went all in, as we poker players say.

I clatter by the house of one of our poker posse. A's the ringleader of our little group. It's a lot of fun, but no way to make money. For the simple reason that my card-savvy compadre wins almost every time.

When I first started toying with wordplay, I was a tad reluctant. Perhaps because it can come off as showy and shallow. In time, though, I came to see that, when done right, playful language is more than gamesmanship – it's akin to poetry. Or music, the words flowing rhythmically along like notes in a song. Or ballet, each word a member of a troupe, under the writer's direction, leaping and gliding across the stagey page.

I begin my climb to the Route 52 roadcut, unofficial gateway to Lake Megunticook. As I drive through the picturesque aperture, I take in its view of Maiden Cliff – named after a poor tyke who fell to her death on a family picnic.

Dropping down the hill's other side, I begin my rumble alongside the lovely lake, with its tree-filled islands and mountainy backdrop.

Wordplay's captivating pleasure. Pleasure, after all, does not preclude seriousness. Play is often in earnest – a fact well understood by poets and writers from time immemorial.

Wordsmiths like Joyce and Shakespeare, for example, who found their fun with puns – that funky form of verbal gaming. A form deplored by stuffed shirts like Samuel Johnson,

who panned the playwright's persistent play. His objection being that such foolery blunts the force of the writing.

Wiser readers, though, understand a deeper truth: wordplay is a direct expression of the writer's nature. The sporting, fun-filled soul of the artist shining through.

Leaving my watery view, I ascend a long hill, then veer onto the road that leads to the artist's abode. In short order, I pass the homemade sign planted in his lawn –

SAY NO To BIGOTS

– a remnant of the 2016 election, left standing after the shocking result.

I pull up beside my buddy's blue sports car, kill the engine, and hop onto the gravel. As I tramp toward the cedar-sided Cape, I catch calls of unseen songbirds. Songs supplemented by the sound of my steady steps.

Crunch. Crunch. Crunch.

I play the doorbell's two-tone tune.

"Morning."

"Come in. Just packing my cooler."

I follow my friend into the foyer.

"Looks like we'll have a fine start for our trip."

"Yup. She's a lovely Maine day."

While I wait, I'm drawn to a pair of faded magazine ads hanging on the wall. In one, a twinkle-eyed Kirk Douglas plays a country club swell, golf clubs by his side. In the other, Marlene Dietrich poses as a swank society dame, lounging louchely on a love seat. Each with cigarette poised provocatively in parted mouth.

I look closely at the copy. Above his signature, Kirk purportedly says, "Chesterfields are so Mild they leave a clean, fresh taste in my mouth." In like manner, Ms. Dietrich declares, "I smoke a smooth cigarette – Lucky Strike!" To which the ad people add: "Let your own taste and throat be the judge! THERE'S NEVER A ROUGH PUFF IN A LUCKY!"

And if that ain't enough to sway you: "So round, so firm, so fully packed – so free and easy on the draw."

So round. So firm. So fully packed. Soooooo *sexy!*