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Antigone in Her Tomb

Zeus,

Your will, finally, is unknowable. I am exhausted, exasperated. Look where my most willful vows have landed me. Father, mother, and a brother already underground, exiled for eternity from our native Thebes . . . I claim no kin in that city. My so-called sister mourns alone, respected by a fool and other frauds, a quorum of spineless idiots posing as law-abiding citizens. The offense reeks—a blind man can see that. No one deserves such a sentence, least of all my deceived, much-wronged brother—left to rot on the desert plain. Generations will know I would not accept that unjust decree. I am not sorry, though I admit I may have misjudged the jury of the gods. Here I will end my otherwise unending agony, groomless, convicted, and unconvinced. From now on, on the surface of this most grotesque earth, my name will echo, a doer of deeds, one who believes, who acts, while Creon—cruel, unjust—will be forever banished from the rolls of the noble.

Always, always, always,
Antigone

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Retirement Poem

*"The process of living and the process of making art are the same."
—Michael Moos*

My colleague, mentor, friend, and twelve-year neighbor,
Michael Moos is retiring. The post-Catholic master
of laissez-faire Buddhism who makes of grading
a walking meditation, whose student acolytes at times
make of him a minor god, and over time have made
of his ceiling a beautiful version of hell: a Michelangelic
tribute to a poem, a man, a method of instruction where
the master refuses all titles and power resides in every
student . . . none abandoned hope who entered there.

Our auburn-bearded bard will roam these halls no more,
but nest with raven and sparrow in St. Paul, Ortonville,
the Black Hills; pen, paper, and fly rod close at hand;
each new day in that unsung paradise called the Midwest
a quiet adventure. He will sing a song of trout and teach
the air its many names. He may even become fluent in
Bison before long. He will seek out the soul of the plains,
and sketch his map in verse. And on our behalf,
he'll scratch down dreams we didn't know we had.

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Why I Am Not Frank O'Hara

Today I'm feeling very Frank O'Hara in my new chartreuse shirt.
Of course, I lack his rakish widow's peak and almost Roman profile.
I lack his Manhattan address and his avant-garde coterie.
I will never pose for Larry Rivers or Alice Neel, never
(much as I'd like to) own a Fairfield Porter or Jane Freilicher.

I will never saunter into a typewriter shop on my lunch break
and tap out a new poem to accompany that evening's cocktails.
I lack a certain *savoir-faire*, a certain *je ne sais quois*.
I'm a straight Midwesterner, a secondary school teacher
with two sons in tow, but my step is jaunty nonetheless.

I've got the summer off, and today we're going on vacation!
I've packed my fly rod and my Du Fu. Nothing
can bring me down, not even standing in shuffling
line after shuffling line for ticketing, baggage check-in,
and security. Don't they get tired? They look tired.

For nearly eight years they've been on orange alert!
In front of these uniformed strangers I take off my belt
and shoes, offer up my cellphone, my house and car keys,
then slip through their metal detectors undetected.
My only identifying traits: a jaunty step and a chartreuse shirt.

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On Pumpkins

They are dumpy orange porpoises diving into a landlocked sea of green.
They are the pigs of the fruit world, rooting in a massive mess
of sprawling vines. Acres of these umbilical threads connect them
to the earth, this small home from which none of us wants to be torn.
They squat, make themselves heavy, practice passive resistance.
These oblate and oblong orbs that resist rising mimic the harvest moon.
Or is it vice versa? Gravity, not time, is on their side. For all that,
they are jovial, avuncular. They seem to have a sense of humor.
What is the point of a pumpkin? They have no points. Ba-dum-bump.
Okay then, what is the purpose of a pumpkin? Like everything else,
they love themselves and want to propagate. They seek posterity
in future generations of pumpkins. And like so much else on earth,
they are sacrificed for our appetites. Their pulp becomes pie.

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Playing Ping-Pong With My Son

Every time! He beats me every time now—so different from just last summer. He revels in destroying me, in holding me to single digits. While serving, he admires the new contours of his shirtless arm. He covers his end of the table with insouciant glee, dancing like Cassius Clay, returning one unreturnable shot after another while nattering on about movies, music, friends, and sports. Cursing his preposterous agility and speed, I plod like Liston and lunge at air, about to go down—again. Last week, the new neighbor swore she'd seen a young man exiting my house. I denied it until I realized she meant him: my teenage son—all sinew, bone, and easy laughter—making his uncharted way by burying me a little every day.

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