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**Instructions for Reading an Epitaph**

The dead occupy the insides, settle,  
nestle in our basal ganglia—the word

*spirit redefined: A singular gravity  
that sustains in us all, its baseline other-less,*

enough to go round. People remain  
movement between ashes and of the earth.

## Aluminum Foil in the Microwave: A Love Song

You abuse drugs and then lecture on  
conservative values. It's always *giggity*  
this and *giggity* that. Go ahead, spread 'em,  
cards on the table, tell me my fortune. Make me  
“a promise, non-verbal, not in writing either.  
Make it with your thighs.”

## Halloween in the Castro

*San Francisco, California*

A naked woman tied with black voile fabric  
mocks her dominator with his horse  
whip, and laugh cries,  
lashing out at me—her flickering  
face painted and dressed with sequins  
dripping in lines from sunken eye hollows.

This is my first time seeing a human being  
walked on a leash, prancing  
wild and bound, smug defiance in her strut;  
she bucks religiosity and manmade norms—  
mastered by the reins,  
she laughs outright at control.

## Instructions for Surviving the Fifth Breakup

When the back burner starts to burn  
you've let it go too long. It anvils  
like any project ignored: the long-  
promised phone call, that appointment  
with the speculum you've not wanted  
to keep, the *pleases & thank yous & I  
love yous* left unsaid. Check the pot  
of boiling lover you've left unwatched  
too many hours. Stir the *you's-a-fool*  
there's no band-aid for. Salt to taste.

## Instructions for Talking to a Man after his Second Stroke

Of course every moment is slippery  
instantaneous truth and love is more right

now than forever. We are perpetual  
starpaths, a complex string of moments.

Time stretches on the treadmill  
of days. See clearly: the inevitable

end always in motion.

## Instructions for Surviving Past Age 50

Try peeling an orange too early. Pick a fresh scab. You'll see how skin loves the underneath.

Clams, mussels, oysters plucked out of the sea, fight prying hands, the inevitable halving.

Do not save your passion, fling yourself at the goosebump. Fill both lungs and float

the waters of hardnoon memory with burnt-out throat. Navigate sea-rock down thru the gut.

Find another open mouth and be sea creature wrestling in the dark, inseparable for now.

Eventually, you'll find yourself silk maker spidering blind, a vestigial conscience.