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Lines in Substitution for a Eulogy for a Dead Elder

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LINES IN SUBSTITUTION FOR A EULOGY
FOR A DEAD ELDER

Living, you were doubtful of your soul.
Even the many cups of fatty tissue that composed you,
you said, would readily melt. And can what's
so unstable be really real, you asked.

A kind of flirtation. But your children
hadn't any answer, then or now.

Only ideas are finally real, you said. Ice-
locked and blazing with cold, inhabiting
an absent world.

* * *

You were quick, gentle, razorish, kind, some-
times mean, yes, but witty. Wit is an obligation
to our friends, a common courtesy—keeps
them at a distance. And in the end your face
was stitched with wit as with fine silver
wires, cloisonné work so precise it hurts
to look. Colors baked into the enamel, not
born with it.

I loved you. But this, you explained, was only
my idea of you. And in time others competed
with their ideas, elbowed me aside. I think
I didn't mind. Though you'd told us all, Truth
weakly spoken becomes a lie.

And, still, you died. And how freely
your children breathe, now. How small the terms
of our reconciliation.