

The Eulogy You Can Give

**Gather Real Memories, Shape Two
Stories, and Prepare a Page to Read
Aloud**

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Start with the work you need to finish

A personal speech draft fitted to the time available, a readable printed copy and a plan if the speaker cannot finish.

This book is for an adult who has been asked to speak at a funeral or memorial and does not know how to turn memories into a manageable speech.

Bring: The allotted time, verified names, real memories and a person who can take over if needed.

The working method: Ask for the time, gather memories, choose a structure, shape two scenes, rehearse aloud and prepare the page plus a spare.

Start with the four working sheets immediately after this introduction. They are part of the book, not an external download you must obtain. You can write on paper or copy the field labels into a document. The fictional worked example shows what a completed piece can look like; the reference sections explain choices and difficult cases. You do not have to finish the reference before making your first notes.

A useful first result is a filled brief: the real task, the available facts and the missing information. A blank field tells you what to find out. It is not permission to invent a detail. Completion takes your own checking and revision; this book does not promise a fixed time or control over someone else's response.

A practical writing guide with fictional examples. It does not promise emotional readiness, comfort or

relief from grief, and does not plan the funeral.

The named people and dialogue in the examples are fictional illustrations, not customer results. Their circumstances are not instructions to copy into your own situation. Treat strong rules of thumb as drafting defaults; the actual brief, recipient, privacy needs and applicable requirements take precedence.

Find the part you need

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- 7 — Time, page, mouth
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Working sheet 1 — The speaking brief

1. Name as the family wants it spoken, with pronunciation

Your notes: _____

2. Time allowed, where I speak and who else is speaking

Your notes: _____

3. Microphone and reading arrangements to confirm

Your notes: _____

4. Any requested or excluded content

Your notes: _____

5. Person I can ask about uncertain facts

Your notes: _____

Decision before moving on: Which fact remains unverified, and what is the next action needed?

Working sheet 2 — Memories before sentences

1. Three people to ask for a specific memory

Your notes: _____

2. One ordinary object, place or habit connected to the person

Your notes: _____

3. Story one: what happened, what they did, what I know first-hand

Your notes: _____

4. Story two: a different moment and its source

Your notes: _____

5. Names and facts to verify; what I will not invent

Your notes: _____

Decision before moving on: Which fact remains unverified, and what is the next action needed?

Working sheet 3 — The speech page

1. Opening: my relationship and one real place or moment

Your notes: _____

2. First story, in words I can say naturally

Your notes: _____

3. Second story, if the time allows it

Your notes: _____

4. Closing sentence I can reach without giving a lesson

Your notes: _____

5. What to cut if the speaking time is shorter than expected

Your notes: _____

Decision before moving on: Which fact remains unverified, and what is the next action needed?

Working sheet 4 — Rehearsal and the spare

1. Actual aloud running time; where I need to slow down

Your notes: _____

2. Large readable print, numbered pages and breathing marks

Your notes: _____

3. One passage I can omit without breaking the close

Your notes: _____

4. Named person with a copy and an agreed handover signal

Your notes: _____

5. Permissions before sharing the speech outside the service

Your notes: _____

Decision before moving on: Which fact remains unverified, and what is the next action needed?

A small memory can carry an opening

The following is a fictional example, not an account of a real person or funeral.

“My uncle kept a pencil tied to the kitchen calendar. If he promised to pick you up, he wrote the time while you were still talking. I am his niece. I want to tell you about two rides he wrote down.”

The opening gives a relationship, an ordinary object and a direction for the speech. It does not announce every virtue the speaker hopes to prove. The two stories would have to be the real speaker’s own memories; the pencil is not a detail to borrow merely because it sounds warm.

Suppose your real memory is a different habit: checking the weather before a journey, saving a seat, labelling leftovers, staying after a shift. Write the scene in plain language. Who was there? What did the person actually do? What can you say without borrowing someone else’s interpretation?

Read the opening aloud. A phrase you would never say to the family may be a phrase you do not need. Read it again after writing the close. The opening should lead to the speech you can actually give within the allotted time.

The sixteen longer fictional speeches later in the book are annotated examples of structure and choices. They are not a bank of memories to pass off as your own. The working sheets are where your people, facts and

decisions belong.

1 — The slot

The officiant has a number. You do not have one yet.

Call before you open a blank page. Priest, minister, celebrant, the friend who was asked to lead — the person who will nod when it is time to stand. You need four facts: how many minutes, when you stand, whether there is a microphone, who else speaks. Then you write shorter than the slot.

If you write first and ask later, you will fall in love with a length the room does not have. Falling in love with a length is how you speed up and drop a name.

This is a speech. It is not a biography. It is not a liturgy you invent because a website sounded solemn. It is not a treatment. Sitting down is the job. Feeling is yours. The page does not take it.

Minutes, not mood

Funeral-home trade custom — the kind you meet in funeral.com's journal and in officiant practice notes — puts a typical eulogy at three to five minutes. If you are the only speaker, the same custom often stretches the slot to five or ten, and only past that if the order of service can carry it. Those are not study results. They are how rooms get run.

Grief slows a voice. A page that looked like five minutes at the table can become seven at the lectern.

Write the day at the top of a cheap pad, under the name. Write a provisional number: 3, 5, or 10. Circle it in pencil. Pencil means you have not asked yet.

If they say “keep it brief,” ask for a number. Brief is not a number. If they say “take the time you need,” ask for a number anyway. Time you need is how a speech becomes a life story.

Catholic Mass, in practice reports, not in canon law, often has a tight window: something like five to seven minutes for the eulogies together. Treat that as a reason to ask the priest, not as a rule you cite. If three people are speaking inside that window, you are not each taking five.

A hall can feel loose and still need you short because two cousins are also standing. A graveside can be wind and no lectern and a length that should have been two minutes. A military funeral keeps the eulogy separate from honors. You coordinate with the funeral director and the detail so you are not standing in the honors. That is one fact, not a handbook. Ask. Do not download a ceremony and invent your place in it.

If two people give you two clocks — the funeral director says five, the officiant says three — take the smaller number. Do not average. Do not write five and “see how it feels.”

If the officiant does not call back, write as if you have three minutes and no microphone, and keep calling. Three minutes and no mic is a survivable draft. Ten minutes invented in your head is not.

Write shorter than the slot

The slot is the maximum. The speech is less.

If you have five minutes, write for four. If you have three, write for two and a half. If you have ten as the

only speaker, write for eight and keep a fold that can drop.

Shorter is not a lack of love. Shorter is how the next person still stands. Shorter is how you can slow down on a name.

If the speaker before you runs over, drop the second story. Do not go faster so you can keep everything. Faster is how names die.

Write the number you are given in ink. Cross out the pencil. If Jane texts later and changes the minutes, you cut. You do not argue that you already printed.

Speech, not biography

A biography wants completeness. A speech wants a room to stay with you.

Completeness looks like this on a first draft: born in, raised in, school, first job, second job, the years at the plant, the marriage, the children by name and age, the grandchildren as a list, the clubs, the illness in one vague clause, a poem, thank you for coming.

The room cannot hold that list. The room can hold one person standing, a few minutes, and two things that sound like the name on the pad.

You are not the archive. The archive is the folder on someone else's desk, the notice already written, the photo boards in the hall. Your job is spoken English that fits a slot. If you try to be the archive, you will speed up. Speeding up is how names get dropped.

Try this test. Read your first paragraph aloud, sitting down. If a stranger could use the same paragraph for a

different dead person by changing the name, you have written a form. Forms die in the room. If the paragraph needs a kitchen, a shift, a joke they actually told, or a habit with an object, you have started a speech.

(Composite — labelled. Not a real obituary.) You are writing for Frank. The first draft says he was a devoted father and a hard worker who loved his family. That sentence fits a thousand Franks. The second draft says he left the porch light on until every car was in, even after the kids were grown, and he called it “the last look.” The second draft is a speech. The first draft is a blank with manners.

Keep the porch light. Cut the devoted-hard-worker line, or use it once, late, and only after the light has done the work.

A biography can mention every workplace. A speech can mention one workplace if the story needs the floor, the clock, or the person who stood next to him. The rest of the jobs can stay in the program, if there is a program. You are not the program.

A kind person will say, “Just tell them about his life.” That person is not standing. Answer at the table, not as a fight: you are telling two things from his life. You are not telling his life.

You will hear, from yourself, “If I skip the early years I am erasing him.” You are not a record office. A four-minute speech is not a family fight. Skipping the early years is how you leave time for a voice that still has to say a name.

What you do not invent

You do not invent a reading. You do not invent a blessing at the end unless the officiant asked for that sentence and gave you the words. You do not invent a Hebrew line, an Arabic line, a Latin line, a hymn fragment, because it sounded serious. You do not invent “we now commit” if you are not the person who commits. You do not invent a moment of silence and then keep talking through it.

If you want a verse, ask whether that verse is welcome in that room. Welcome is the officiant’s word, not a website’s.

If the family wants “something spiritual” and the officiant has a form, you use the form or you stay secular and short. You do not blend a half-remembered line from two traditions. Blend is how a room flinches.

If you are the officiant and the eulogist, split the jobs on the page. The eulogy is the name and the two stories. The liturgy is the liturgy.

“I wrote a prayer” is inventing liturgy. “I’ll feel it” is how you stand at the wrong time. “I can do the committal” is a job you were not given.

Who else speaks

Get the list. Names. Order. Minutes each.

If a sibling is before you, do not open with the same story they are likely to use. Call them. Split. If you cannot reach them, write a story that is obviously yours — your chair, your object — so overlap is unlikely.

If someone is “maybe speaking,” treat them as speaking. Write as if your slot is smaller. It is easier to add a sentence at the table the night before than to cut a page at the lectern.

If they will introduce you — *Helen, Frank’s sister* — your first line is not *I am Helen, Frank’s sister*. They already spent that breath. Your first line is the limit and the thing. *I have a few minutes, not his whole life. He left the porch light on.*

If they will not introduce you, your first line is who you are, in one clause, then the thing.

A first page that is not a life

Date. Name. Your relation in one line. Minutes in pencil, then ink.

Then six lines, not six pages.

1. The name you will say, with the pronunciation you will check.
2. Who you are in one clause.
3. One object or habit you can point to without a speech about what it “symbolized.”
4. One story that has a time of day or a place with a floor.
5. One story that is different from the first — different year, different room, or different person in it.
6. The last look: one sentence that is not a lesson. Then you stop.

If you cannot fill line 4 yet, do not invent. Write the names of three living people you will ask. A gathering

list is still not a biography.

If you can fill all six and the page is already a wall of ink, you have overfilled. Circle two stories. Put a line through the third. The third is how speeches run long.

Do not read it to the group chat. Do not post a draft. The speech is for a room that has not happened.

(Composite — labelled. Helen speaking for Frank. Hall. She thinks she has five minutes. She has not asked yet.)

Draft A, the search draft:

We are gathered to honor Frank, a man who touched so many lives. Born in a small town, he worked hard all his life and never complained. He loved his family more than anything. He will be deeply missed. I take comfort in knowing he is in a better place. Frank taught us to cherish every moment.

Count the things that are his. There are none.

Draft B, the speech draft:

I am Helen. Frank was my brother. I have a few minutes, not his whole life. He left the porch light on until every car was in. Even after we were grown. He called it the last look. On Thursdays he called our mother at seven, not seven-ten. I am not going to list his jobs. I will sit down after this: the light, and the Thursday call.

Draft B is still too long if the officiant gives her two minutes. She can cut the Thursday call and keep the light. She cannot keep Draft A at any length. Draft A does not get shorter. It only gets faster.

Take your own first draft and mark every sentence that would survive a name change. Those sentences are Draft A. They feel finished because they are smooth. Smooth is the problem.

Card

Say this	Do not say this
I am Helen. Frank was my brother. I have a few minutes.	We are gathered here today to celebrate an extraordinary life.
He left the porch light on until every car was in.	He was the kindest, most devoted man who ever lived.
How many minutes do I have, just me?	I'll just say a few words, I'm sure it will be fine.
I will write shorter than the number you give me.	I have ten pages but I can skip around.
I will not add a prayer.	I thought I'd start with a blessing I wrote.

The right column fills the air and leaves no one in it. The left has a name, a limit, and a thing. You can stand a limit. You cannot stand a fog.

When it goes wrong

You did not call. You wrote eight minutes because the search said a sole speaker can take ten. You added a blessing you remembered from a film. At the door the officiant says you have three, the mic is handheld, and they will do the blessing. You are holding two pages. You start the blessing anyway because it is on the page. The officiant steps in. The room is now in two rites.

Leave the blessing. Say the one line that is his. *He left the porch light on until every car was in.* Then: *That is what I came to say. I will sit.* Sit with paper still in your hand. Unused paper is not a failure. A second liturgy is.

2 — What you gather

Three living people. One object. The names you will say. The CV you leave on the chair.

Gathering is not writing the speech. Gathering is what stops the speech from being a guess.

You are hunting a story with a floor and a time of day, a sentence they actually said, a name you might miss, a date you might get wrong, and one thing they would hate to have said about them. The last item is a fence. If three people say do not mention the first marriage, you do not mention the first marriage.

Three living people

Not thirty. Three.

Pick for range, not for rank. One from the house if you can. One from a different room — work, a club, a neighbor. One who will tell you a fact you do not like, or a fact you forgot. The third is the brake on your own myth.

Call. Text only if they will not pick up, and the text is: *I have to speak on Tuesday. I need one story with a time of day. Can I ring you? Not tell me everything you remember.* Everything is a CV by committee.

If someone will not talk, write *declined* and pick another name. If someone talks for an hour, you owe them a thank-you and two lines on the pad, not the hour at the microphone.

You are not here to treat anyone. You are here for verbs.

Do not start with how they feel. Do not start with “this must be so hard.” Those sentences may be kind in a hallway. On this call they turn the clock into a session the other person did not book, and they give you moods, not Thursdays.

Ask, slowly, one at a time:

What did they do on a weekday morning?

What did they say when a day went wrong?

What did they refuse to do?

What would they correct if a stranger described them?

What should I not stand up and say?

Write the last answer in the bin. Do not argue.

Do not ask “what was their essence.” Do not ask “how should I make people feel.” Do not ask “what is your favorite memory.” Favorite is a contest. People freeze, then they give you a holiday with no floor.

If they cry, let them. Do not narrate the crying. Wait. Then ask the next concrete question, or stop and offer to come back. Coming back is allowed. Digging is not.

If they tell a long loop — the illness, the last month — do not take the loop as the speech. *I will not put the last month on the microphone. I need a Thursday from before, if you have one.* Twenty minutes is enough. Read back the verbs. Close the pad.

Do not ask a child for a story for the microphone. Adult questions stay with adults.

Their verbs: *left, wound, checked, called, turned down, refused, waited, locked*. Your verbs: *cherished, touched lives, inspired, taught us, filled our hearts*. Theirs can be said in a room. Yours die, or they turn the dead into a poster.

When they say “he was always there for us,” ask *what did he do that makes you say that*. They say *he waited in the car park until I found the keys*. Write *waited in the car park*. Do not write *always there*.

When they speak in adjectives — kind, stubborn, proud — open the drawer. *Stubborn how. Show me a door they would not go through*.

Write in their wording. If they said *he made a right fuss about the bins*, do not clean it to *he took civic pride in the neighborhood*. If their wording is a private cruelty or a roast, ask *is that a line for the hall or for this table*. If they hesitate, it stays at the table.

(Composite — labelled. Helen at Marjorie’s table. Frank. Not a real interview.) Helen does not ask how Marjorie is. She says the clock. She asks the morning. Marjorie: *He made the coffee before he made the argument. The radio was on from five. He turned it down if I came in. Not off. Down*. Helen writes *turned it down, not off*. What would he correct? *Don’t call him devoted. He paid the bills and he left the light on*. What should I not say? *The first marriage. The ward*. Both go in the bin. Helen reads back. Marjorie corrects *seven to seven, not seven-ten*. Helen closes the pad. She has verbs. She does not have a session.

One object

A watch. Glasses. A tin. A key. A recipe card. A work badge. You pick one. Not a shrine.

The object keeps you from writing abstractions. If the watch is there, you can write the time they left the house. If the badge is there, you can write the door they used, not “a dedicated employee.”

You do not say the watch “stands for the time we had.” That line dies. You say they wound it, or they never wound it, or they put it in the dish by the phone.

If the object is contested — two people, one watch — do not make the speech a claim ticket. Use a habit with no property attached: the porch light, the bins before six.

If there is no object, use a time of day. Time of day is an object the room can see.

(Composite — labelled.) Helen puts Frank’s watch on the table. She almost writes *this watch represents his love of punctuality*. She crosses it out. She writes *he set it ten minutes fast and still left late*.

Leave hospital bands off the table. The last week is often a wound. Certificates are a CV in card stock.

Names you will say

A eulogy that misses a name is remembered for the miss. The stories can be good. The room will still go home with the sister who was not said.

Most people leave two names. The one on the paper. The one the body answered to on a Tuesday. Vonny. Ray. Bee.

Say the paper name once, early, so the room and the record agree. Say the lived name when you enter the stories. Do not manufacture a pet name. A nickname you were not given is a trespass.

Write the sound the way a tired person can read it at a glance. Stress marked. Hyphens if they help.

(Composite — labelled.) A woman I will call Siobhán Byrne signed cards S. Byrne and answered the deli as Vonny. The notice used Siobhán Mary Byrne. The speaker who loved her from the shop wrote “Shivonne” because it looked kind. Kindness that invents letters is a misspelling. Siobhán — shiv-AWN. She answered to Vonny at the shop.

Say every name out loud the night before. If a name catches, call. Ask again. A name you cannot say is a name you ask someone else to say. You pause. They say it. You go on. A mangle in public is still a mangle.

You do not anglicize for the back row. If the family has already chosen an everyday English form, use that form and say so. He was Tomasz. Most of us said Tom. Both are true.

Ask three living people to say the names they expect to hear. The notice is a first draft written under time. Notices miss the living sibling, the child from the first marriage, the spelling the family actually uses.

Ask, with your full face: Who else. Who will be angry if I miss them.

If a living sibling was left off the notice and they will be in the room, you say them. If the first row has asked you to omit a name and that person will not be in the

room, you omit them. You do not sneak a name in as a brave aside. Someone living has to choose.

The ex is a name with a chair attached. You do not decide the chair from your feelings about the marriage. If you name the ex, you name the fact, not the plot. They married. They had two sons. They did not stay married. She is here. That is enough.

Partners who were not married get the same card as spouses when the first row says they do. You do not demote a twenty-year kitchen to “friend” because the notice was timid. Ask. Write. Read it back to the person who will sit where the word will land.

A list should be short enough to say without a breath that turns into panic. Groups can be a sentence: her sisters from the shop are here. Names inside a group are how you leave one sister out. If you are asked to read a long family list, ask whether it belongs in the eulogy or in the program. The program can hold twenty names. Your mouth can hold fewer before the room starts counting.

Read the list to the first row the night before. Then stop collecting. A eulogy that is still adding names at breakfast is a eulogy that will miss one at noon.

Leave the CV

Leave the full job list, the full club list, the grandchild roll if it will become a rush, medical detail the row does not need, money, wills, who got the house, and the search-bar adjectives: devoted, beloved, the kindest man who ever lived. Leave famous deaths and famous quotes. Those people are not on your table.

Leaving out is a craft move, not a moral grade. You are not erasing a life. You are fitting a slot.

A CV dump looks like this: *Born. School. Firm A, Firm B. Married. Children: list. Retired. Liked golf. Fought illness bravely. Will be missed.* Every line can be true. Together they are a personnel file. A personnel file has no Thursday.

The fix is not to make the CV “warmer.” Pick one line that has a room. Cut the rest. If the family wants the CV in the building, it belongs on a printed page someone else can read at their own speed.

(*Composite — labelled.*) Pat brings Helen a printout of Frank’s roles at the plant. Nineteen years, then safety awards. Helen writes *night shift, lock twice, nineteen years* and returns the printout. The awards can sit in the hall. They do not have to go through her mouth.

Dates you write only if you will check them. Check against a living person, a printed notice the family already approved, a badge. If two sources disagree, take the family chair’s number, or drop the date and keep the story. *In the house on Slater Street* can live without *in 1998*. A wrong 1998 will be the only thing an uncle remembers.

If you cannot verify, you may say *I will not guess the year*. “I think it was around the early nineties” cannot.

A social post is not a source. An AI summary of a life is not a source. If you pasted the name into a box and got a paragraph, throw the paragraph away.

If three people contradict — he loved the plant, he hated the plant, he never talked about it — do not

average. Mention a verb: *he went, he came home, he checked the lock*. Love and hate can stay with the others in the hall.

Card

Say this

Do not say this

I need one Thursday story, and the year of the shop if you are sure.

Tell me everything from the beginning so I can do him justice. How are you feeling, really?

He set the watch ten minutes fast and still left late.

This watch symbolizes the time we shared.

Siobhán — shiv-AWN. Vonny at the shop. Who else.

Shee-oh-ban, which I hope I have right. And all those who loved her, you know who you are.

I am leaving the CV off the pad. I will not guess the year.

I'll just list the jobs and the clubs so nobody feels left out. I'll say 1998 and hope.

“Do him justice” is how you get a stack. “How are you feeling” is a session. Justice, in this job, is a name said correctly and a story that could not fit a stranger.

When it goes wrong

You called twelve people. You wrote every job. You added golf because an uncle mentioned golf. You guessed 1998 because it felt right. The pad is a CV with feeling.

At the lectern you hear yourself say *and also* for the fourth time. A sister shakes her head. The year is now the speech.

Leave the list. Leave the year. Say the thing you did not guess. *He set his watch ten minutes fast and still left late. That is what I came to say.* Sit. The uncle can talk golf in the parking lot.

3 — Three structures

A life is not a page. A life is rooms, years, a shop, a second marriage, a brother who died first. If you try to be creative with that pile, you will write a tour. Tours lose the back row.

Three shapes hold. Chronology. Three stories. One value with proof. You pick one. You stay inside it.

You do not invent a fourth shape tonight. You do not braid all three. Braids come apart in the mouth.

People will tell you to speak from the heart. The heart is why you are at the table. The heart does not put a beginning on a page. A shape does. When your voice thins, you look down. You see the next heading you gave yourself. You go.

How you choose

You choose from the pile, not from your taste in literature.

If the verbs are mostly years — moved, married, left, sat — try chronology.

If the verbs are mostly scenes — drove, washed, waited — try three stories.

If the verbs keep returning to one habit — showed up, checked, refused to guess — try one value with proof.

If the pile is thin, choose the narrowest shape that is still honest. Thin plus chronology is fiction. Thin plus three stories is two stories and a padded third. Thin plus one value is a slogan. The honest move is a short

two-story or a short value, and a later chapter's permission to be the almost-stranger.

If the pile is fat, choose before breakfast. Write the name of the shape at the top of the page. If a paragraph does not serve the shape, it goes to a file you will not take to the hall.

Ask how many speakers and how many minutes. Three minutes almost always wants one value with proof, or two stories. Ten minutes can hold a chronology with four doors, or three stories with air. Five minutes is the common middle.

Creativity, as a brief, is a request to rummage. Refuse it.

Chronology

Chronology is not a CV read from the top. It is a path with four or five doors. You open a door. You put one object in it. You close it. You walk to the next year that changed the count of the rooms.

(Composite — labelled. Not a real obituary.) Margaret Hale was born in 1947, trained as a nurse, married, left the ward, kept a garden that bullied the neighbors, lost a sister, and spent the last winter in a chair by the window. That sentence is a life. It is also a parade.

The doors might be: the ward. The garden. The sister. The chair. You can mention 1947 in one clause if the family wants the year. You do not owe the room her school, her addresses, the name of the hospital group, the years of each job.

Order is the gift. The room can rest because it knows you are moving forward. If you need to jump, you are writing three stories. Switch before you stand up, not after the second minute.

Open on one image from early enough that the room believes you have a right to the years, or late enough that the room is already in the death. Do not open on born, educated, employed. That is a notice. You already have a notice.

Close on the last door, looked at once more, then sit. Do not add a moral about time. Time already did the work.

What chronology cannot hold: a life you do not know. If you are the colleague, you do not reconstruct a childhood from a photograph on the fridge. Invention in order is still invention. Use stories from the years you witnessed, or one value you can prove from work.

What it can hold: a public life with a clear sequence the room already shares. A teacher the town had for thirty years. A man who ran the same shop on the same corner. You still select. You do not inventory.

A year without a turn is a caption. Captions belong on photographs. If you cannot find a turn in a decade, cut the decade. You can use the chair twice on purpose — open and close. That is a return, not a leak.

Three stories

Three stories is the structure people think they are writing when they are writing a montage. A montage is: work, family, hobbies. That is a filing cabinet. Filing cabinets are dull in a mouth.

Three stories means three scenes. Each scene has a place, a time of day if you have it, a person besides the dead, and a turn. The turn is the reason the scene is not a compliment.

(Composite — labelled.) Tomás kept a hardware shop. Story one: the morning he sent a boy home with the wrong size of bit and then drove the right bit to the house in the rain. Story two: the sister's kitchen after Cal died, Tomás washing cups because speech had left. Story three: the last summer, the shop sold, him sitting on the step with a paper bag of screws he would not need.

Those three are one person. You do not need his school. You need the rain, the cups, the screws.

A common order that holds: one ordinary competence, one private loyalty, one late fact that is still specific. Ordinary. Loyal. Late.

Open in the first story's room, not with a preface about how hard it was to choose. Close on one object from one of the three. The screws. The cup. Do not summarize the three as "that was who he was." The stories already were.

What three stories cannot hold: a speaker who has only adjectives. She was generous. She was funny. She was strong. If that is all you have, you are in the third structure, and you still need proof. If you cannot find proof, write short and borrow a scene, attributed. Mara told me this. I was not there. Then sit sooner.

What they can hold that chronology holds less well: a life with a break in the middle. Estrangement. A second start. Years the family does not want in order. Three

rooms let you tell two decades without walking the hallway between them.

You will want a fourth story. The fourth is how this structure fails. Officiant custom that follows funeral.com's numbers gives you roughly six hundred and fifty to seven hundred and fifty words for five minutes if you speak at a walk. Grief will take some of those words back. Four stories in that space become captions.

If you have ten minutes, you still do not take five stories. You take three, and you let each one breathe. In five minutes, the slot may take two. Write three. Rehearse. Cut the weakest. The hall does not need to know you planned three.

One value with proof

The narrowest structure. The one that keeps a difficult life from turning into a verdict.

You make one claim. You prove it twice. You sit down.

The claim must be small enough to be true. Not "she was love." Love is a fog. "She kept her word when it cost her a Saturday" is a claim. You can put a Saturday under it.

(Composite — labelled.) Helen did not like the word kind. The family kept using it. The proof was narrower: she showed up when she had already said she would. Story one: a hospital car park, a thermos, a shift she was not on. Story two: a grandson's concert, the bad seats, her coat on the chair beside him because she had promised the chair.

Two proofs. If you have a third, you are close to three stories. You can convert. You cannot keep announcing the value between scenes. The value is the title of the shape, not a chorus.

Open with the claim in a sentence a stranger could repeat. Then the first Saturday. Close with the claim again, smaller. She kept the chair. You do not lift it into a commandment for the living.

What this structure cannot hold: a family that has not agreed on the word. If half the row hears “generous” and the other half hears “controlling,” a single value will split the hall. Pick a word both rows can sit under, or switch to three stories that do not require a verdict. “She stayed in the room” is often safer than “she was selfless.” Staying is visible. Selfless is a fight.

What it can hold: a short slot. A colleague’s three minutes. A graveside where the wind is already talking. One claim, two proofs, you are done. Chronology in three minutes becomes a list. Three stories in three minutes become captions.

Trade custom: four hundred to four hundred and fifty words is a common walk for three minutes. That is not a study of grief. That is how long a mouth takes. One value with proof fits that walk if you cut the preface.

Mixing is a leak

You will be tempted to open with a value, walk a chronology, and drop three stories in as “examples.” That sentence already has three jobs. A mouth can do one job at a time.

If you want a chronology that contains stories, you are still in chronology. The stories are doors. They stay in order.

If you want three stories that happen to fall in order, say so in one line. Then tell them as stories, not as a biography.

If you want a value, do not take a scenic route through 1947 to prove you did the reading.

Leaks sound like this: “But first, a little background.” Background is a second shape trying to enter. “Which brings me to another quality.” Another quality is a second value. “I would also like to say a word about her career.” If the work matters, it is a door or a story or a proof. It is not a section header you announce.

Cover the page and say out loud what kind of speech this is. If you need two terms, you have a leak. Fix it at the table.

On your page you may write the shape in small letters. Chronology. Three. Value. You do not read the headings. “My first story is” is a lecturer’s tic. The room can feel a new story if you pause and change the room in the first clause. Rain. Cups. Step.

If you need a hinge, use a time word you have verified. Then. The year Cal died. Last winter. Do not use “but more importantly.” Objects hinge better than adverbs. The thermos. The coat.

You will have leftover paper. Good. Put the fourth story in a file called not this speech. You are not throwing a person away. You are refusing to make the hall hold what the kitchen already held. If the first row asks you

to put the leftover back, ask which sentence of the current shape should leave. Something leaves. The slot does not grow because a cousin had a feeling after dinner.

Write the name of the shape. Write the slot in minutes, the number you were given, not the number you wish. Write the one object you will allow yourself to repeat.

You are not a biographer. You are a speaker with a shape. The dead remain larger than the shape. That is expected. The hall remains smaller than a life. That is the job.

Card

Say this

Do not say this

I am going to walk a few of her years, in order, and leave the rest in the house.

I want to take you through the remarkable journey of her life. A creative celebration of all the colors.

Three rooms. Rain. The cups. The screws. I have a fourth in the kitchen.

She touched so many lives, and I want to give you a flavor of each. And finally, I would be remiss if I did not also mention—

I can stand behind one sentence. She kept her word when it cost her a Saturday.

She taught us all the true meaning of family. So let us go forth and be more like her.

Journey, flavor, extra mile, go forth: those phrases are how a shape pretends to be wisdom. Wisdom is not your job. Your job is to hold a slot.

When it goes wrong

You chose three stories. Two minutes in, you hear yourself start a chronology because you forgot the year of the shop sale and you are buying time with 1984, 1991, the move, the second till.

The room feels the leak. You feel it in your mouth as extra names.

Do not finish the years. Stay in the room you were in. *The rain. The bit.* Then go to the cups. Leave 1984 on the table. The hall will forgive a return. The hall will not forgive a second shape that arrived because you were afraid of silence.

4 — Open, two stories, sit down

Cross out *we are gathered here today*.

The room is already gathered. They know why. Your first twenty seconds are the first room of the dead person's life that you are willing to stand in without a list of jobs.

Then two stories, each with a turn. Then a last look that is not a lesson. Then you sit.

Heaven is not yours to guarantee. A résumé is not an opening. A close that tells them how to live is a talk. Talks invite argument. Argument is a poor last sound.

The first twenty seconds

Twenty seconds is four or five sentences if you speak at a walk. Grief will make them slower. Plan for four. If you have written a paragraph that needs a breath just to finish the greeting, you have not opened. You have cleared your throat in public.

Three jobs. Only three.

You say who you are, in a clause, if the room might not know. I am Ray's niece. I worked the till with him. Then you leave yourself.

You say the name the first row asked for, with the sound you wrote down.

You put the room in a place. A kitchen. A shop step. A car park. A window. One place. One object if you need

a handhold. The teapot. The paper bag. The coat on the chair.

That is the open.

You do not thank everyone for coming. Thanks are a meeting. You do not apologize for speaking. I am no good at this. Those sentences make the first twenty seconds about your nerves. You do not tell the room how you feel. I am heartbroken. Feeling announced is feeling performed. The room has its own.

If you put two images in the first twenty seconds, the room will not know which house they have entered. An image is a place you could point at. Not a quality. Not a metaphor. Kitchen, back of the shop, late, chipped teapot. That is enough geography.

How late in the life: early enough to be a root, or late enough to be the last ordinary place. Middles make weak opens. The middle of a career is a résumé in costume. If the work is the room, open on a single shift, not on the profession.

Weather is allowed if it does work. Rain on the paper bag, if that rain is why he drove. Weather as mood is a greeting card. If you have no image, ask for a Tuesday. Small arguments make good rooms. Big virtues make bad opens.

The résumé tells the hall this will be a file. Files invite checking. *She led a full life as a nurse, a mother, a gardener, and a friend to many* is four titles and a fog. Born-and-died as an opener is a gravestone.

If the first row asked for a poem by title, you read it. You still do not open with it unless they asked. The

poem is a guest. Scripture is the officiant's job unless you were asked. Do not start with a wink. *She is in a better place* is not an open.

(*Composite — labelled. Margaret.*) Last winter she sat in the chair by the window and bullied the garden with her eyes. I am her son. I am going to walk a few of her years and come back to that chair.

(*Composite — labelled. The almost-stranger.*) I sat three seats down from him for a year. I do not have his kitchen. I have a corridor and a habit he had with a pencil. I will stay in the corridor.

Honest smallness is an open. Fake warmth is a résumé of feelings.

If two of you speak, agree who owns the first room. Two kitchen opens in one hour is a duplicate. You do not use the open to settle family rank. I was the closest. Closest is a fight. The seat is a fact.

Two stories, each with a turn

Keep two.

A third story is how a five-minute slot becomes a list. A fourth is how you start speaking faster and the turns fall off. Funeral.com's walk, the one officiants repeat as custom, is about six hundred and fifty to seven hundred and fifty words for five minutes, four hundred to four hundred and fifty for three, twelve hundred to fifteen hundred for ten if you are the only speaker and the order can carry it. Grief slows you. Two stories, each with a place and a turn, will fit.

A story is not a compliment with a year attached. *She was always there for us, especially in 2019* is a value with a date sticker.

A story has a place you could point at. A time of day if you have it. At least one other person. A thing that happened. A turn: the end of the scene is not the same as the start.

The turn can be small. He brought the wrong bit. He came back with the right one, in the rain. The turn can be quiet. She sat down to talk and washed the cups instead. Speech left. Work stayed. The turn can be late. He sold the shop and kept a bag of screws he would not need. The turn is the bag.

Without a turn, you have an illustration. Illustrations support a lecture. You are not giving a lecture.

(*Composite — labelled.*) Helen had promised the boy she would sit with him. The good seats were gone. She put her coat on the empty chair beside him so latecomers would not take the promise. Place: the hall. Thing that happened: the coat. Turn: the promise stayed visible when the seats did not. “She never missed a recital” can introduce the coat. It cannot replace the coat.

If you cannot find a turn, you have a habit, not a story. Ask what was different at the end. Ask what it cost. Cost can be a Saturday, a drive, a wrong size admitted.

Specific is a noun the back row can see. Bit. Rain. Cups. Coat. Thermos. Screws. Specific is a verb a living person used. Drove. Washed. Waited. Refused. Your adjectives are not specific. Beloved. Remarkable. Incredible.

Dialogue is specific if you can stand behind it. Short. Attributed if it is not yours. If you cannot hear the voice, do not invent the line.

If you borrowed a story, say so at the start. Mara told me this. I was not there. Then the scene. If you were there, you may use I. Do not make I the hero. The dead person does the verb that turns.

Turns that fail: a medical reveal the row did not authorize. A moral. A turn that needs a villain. Cases stay in the kitchen. Write the turn as a sentence you could underline.

You will love the third. Love is not a slot. Cover it. If the person is still there, the third is leftover. If the first row asks for it, ask which of the two leaves.

Work can be a story. One shift. Work as a ladder of titles is a file. Hobbies as a list are a montage. If the garden mattered, take one tomato, not the countries.

Write each story as a block. White space between them. Order: competence, then cost. Late fact last. Hinges: then. That winter. Not “but more importantly.” If you chose one value with proof, the two stories are the two proofs. The open is not a story. If the teapot opened, glance at it. Do not explain it again.

Close without a lesson

The rooms did the meaning. The close is a last look, a line the hall can carry without being told how to live, and then you sit.

The last look is a return, not a new room. If you opened on the chair, close on the chair. If you opened on the

shop step, close on the screws. One object. Do not close on a new image you saved as a twist.

The last look is visual and small. She is in the chair. The bag is on the step. The coat is still on the chair beside the boy. You do not lift the object into a symbol. The coat is a coat. The hall can do the rest in the car.

If you have no object, close on a name and a place. Siobhán. The kitchen. That is enough.

Do not close on a horizon. Sunsets, stars, roads stretching on: posters. Do not close on the deathbed unless the first row asked and you can do it without machines. Do not close on yourself. I will miss her every day. That may be true. It makes the last sound your interior.

A line they can carry is short enough to repeat in a kitchen later without notes. She kept the chair. He came back with the right size. She would not throw the chip.

A line they cannot carry: Be kind. Live like she did. Hug your children tonight. *She would want us to...* is a lesson with a ventriloquist. If they left an instruction, and the first row wants it said, attribute it. She wrote, on the fridge, this couplet. Then you read it. Then you stop.

If they asked for a religious close, take the officiant's language or the sentence the first row wrote for you. You do not invent a theology. *She held that she would see Cal* is a report. *She is with Cal now* is a guarantee. Reports can close. Guarantees cannot, unless that is the rite you were given by the person who holds the rite.

Sitting down is the close. You say the last look. You say the line. You stop. Silence after a clean last line is the hall taking the line. If you fill it, you take the line back.

You do not thank them for listening. You do not preview the next speaker unless you were asked to hand off, and then you hand off after you have already closed. *I am going to sit. Mara will stand.* Then you sit. You do not wait to be clapped. Clapping is not a grade.

Write SIT under the last sentence. Large. You will be tempted.

A close that needs a full minute is a third story. In a three-minute slot the close might be forty words. In five, sixty to eighty. Extra minutes belong to breath in the stories, not to a sermon at the end.

Write the cheap finish you most want. Do not take it. *She is in a better place. God needed another angel. She lives on in our hearts.* The hall is tired. Give them a chair.

(Composite — labelled. Helen.) She kept her word when it cost her a Saturday. The coat stayed on the chair. That is the line I will keep. I am going to sit down.

Stories first. Close last. Stop rewriting it for grandeur. Grandeur is the lesson in a better coat.

Card

Say this

The kitchen at the back of the shop. Late. The teapot with the chip. I am David.

Wrong size. Rain. The door. Two stories. I had a third about Spain. Spain can wait.

The chair. The window. That is where I will leave her. I am going to sit down.

Do not say this

We are gathered here today to celebrate the life of a truly remarkable woman. Born on, educated at, she went on to enjoy a successful career.

He was the sort of man who would do anything for anyone. And if I may, just one more quick anecdote.

And now she is dancing among the stars. Heaven gained an angel. She would want us to celebrate, not mourn.

The right column is a greeting, a file, a third story, and a heaven you were not asked to hand out. The left is a place, two rooms, a sit.

When it goes wrong

You hear yourself begin *we are gathered*, because the page swam. Or you have said the chair, and the silence lasts a beat longer than you like, and you hear yourself start a lesson. *She would want us to—*

Stop. Do not finish the cliché to be polite to it. Do not finish the want.

Find the place you wrote. *The kitchen at the back of the shop. The teapot with the chip.* Or, if you are already at the end: *That is all I have. I am going to sit down.*

Then sit. The hall will follow a teapot. The hall will not follow a second greeting, or a heaven you invented because the air felt unfinished.

5 — Funny, then quiet

The search wants a roast. The room will not.

A joke in a eulogy is not a set. It is one true thing they already owned, said once, then left alone. You do not chase a second laugh. You land. You go quiet. The quiet is the point.

If you cannot name whose joke it is, it is yours. Yours stays off the page.

Their joke, not yours

Helen burned toast. That is the fact you have. You do not have a routine.

A joke is theirs when they told it, or the room already knows it, or it sits on a habit the family can still see: the toast, the parking, the way she named the dog after a street. A joke is yours when you invent the punchline, when you need the room to meet you halfway, when the laugh would be at a body or a marriage or a last year they did not choose.

Write the morning she stood in the smoke and said, to the toaster, we are not doing this again. That line is hers. You may say it. You may not improve it.

If you improve it, you have started a roast. A roast needs a living target who can stand up after and buy the next round. The target here cannot.

Test the joke by saying it to one living person who loved them, not to a group chat. Say the line once. Wait. If they smile and add the next beat, the joke is

already in the family. If they go still, you have the wrong joke. Cut it. Do not explain why you thought it was kind.

Kind is not a test. Theirs is the test.

If the front row has asked you not to tell the toaster story, you do not tell it. Their no is a fact. Your fondness is not a veto.

If the room is mixed — work people, family, a second family, a partner the parents did not meet — choose the joke that does not require a side to win. The parking story can travel. The story about the first wife cannot. The story about the body cannot.

You are not a translator between factions. You are one speaker with one page.

The landing

Funny, then quiet. That is the whole move.

You say the toaster line. You let the room do what it does. Some rooms laugh. Some rooms make the small sound that is not a laugh and not a sob. You do not add a tag. You do not say but seriously. You do not say we can laugh, it's what she would have wanted. That last sentence is a verdict you are not hired to give.

You say her name. You go to the next true line you already wrote. The next line is not another joke. The next line is the work the toast was standing in for: she stayed in the kitchen until the smoke cleared. She did not leave a mess for someone else if she could help it. One object. One name. Then you stop, or you go to the second story.

Put a blank line on the page after the joke. Write a mark in the margin: wait. Wait is how you keep the joke from eating the rest of the speech.

If the laugh is large, you still wait. A large laugh is not an invitation to do another. You are not a comic who found a room. You are a speaker who found one true thing.

If there is no laugh, you still wait. Then you go on. You do not apologize for the joke. Apology turns the joke into a problem the room now has to solve with you.

The wait is the craft. The apology is the leak.

When you do not

You do not joke when the death is the kind people already lower their voice for. Sudden. Addiction. A death after a long fight that the front row is still inside. A death the family has not agreed how to name. Estrangement that is still in the room as a person, not as a story.

You do not joke when you barely knew them. Borrowed intimacy plus a gag is a kind of theft. If the joke is not already in the family, you do not introduce it on the worst day.

You do not joke when you are the only speaker and the room is a liturgy. A Mass, a temple service, a military honor — the frame is not a club. You can still tell the toaster story if the officiant has given you the minute and the family has heard the line. You cannot do a run. You cannot do the voice.

You do not joke about the body. Not the illness, not the weight, not the way they looked at the end, not the last week in the house. The front row lived that week. They do not need it as a bit.

You do not joke about money, the will, the second marriage, the person who is not here, the bottle, the affair everyone has decided not to say. Those jokes work in kitchens after midnight among people who already have the right to them. They do not work at a lectern. If you need to ask whether you have the right, you do not.

You do not joke when your own voice is the unstable object. If you are the person who uses humor to get out of a sentence, write the sentence first. Put the joke in a second draft. Keep the one that does not need you to be liked.

Outdoor funny is almost always a mistake. Graveside, the laugh has nowhere to go. Write accuracy. Leave the toaster for the hall if there is a hall after.

One object, one name, one turn

A usable funny line has three parts, and only three.

The object. The toaster, the car, the dog, the coat. Not a category. Not her cooking. The toaster.

The name. Helen. Not Mom in a way that could be anyone. Helen, the way the family says it. If they said Nell, you say Nell.

The turn. Not a punchline you wrote. The small change in the story: she spoke to the toaster; he returned the library book on the day it was due from a hospital bed,

which is not funny until you know he would have been late for anything else. If you cannot find a turn that is theirs, you have an anecdote, not a joke. Anecdotes can live. Jokes that are not theirs cannot.

You do not write a fourth part called meaning. Meaning is what the room does after you sit down. If you add the meaning, you have started a lesson.

(Composite — labelled. Helen, kitchen, toaster. Not an obituary.)

Helen burned the toast on purpose the second time, because the first time had been an accident and she refused to be a person accidents happened to. She stood in the smoke. She said, to the machine, we are not doing this again. Then she opened the window and made the rest of breakfast as if the window had always been open. That is the Helen I knew. She would rather argue with an object than leave a mess for the next person.

You stop. You do not say and that is a lesson for all of us. You go to the next story or you sit down.

If your funny section is a page, you have a set. Cut it to the object, the name, the turn, the wait.

Humor that is not a joke

Some of what people call funny in a eulogy is only accuracy.

She kept the Christmas lights up until March and called it planning. He wore the same coat until the lining gave up. She texted in full sentences, as if the phone were a letter. These are not jokes. They are

textures. They do not need a wait. They need to be specific enough that a stranger in the third row can see the coat.

Accuracy is safer than a joke. If you are unsure, write accuracy.

Do not announce that you are about to be funny. I want to share a funny story is a drumroll. Drumrolls ask for a result. Do not announce that they had a great sense of humor and then fail to prove it. Sense of humor is a résumé line. The toaster is proof. If you do not have proof, cut the claim.

(Composite — labelled. Mark, coat, lining. Not an obituary.)

Mark wore the gray coat until the lining hung like a second sleeve. We told him. He said the lining was the only honest part left. He said it in the lot, with the keys in his hand, as if he were talking about weather. I do not know what he meant. I know he kept the coat.

That is not a joke. It has a turn. The turn is I do not know what he meant. You are allowed not to know. Knowing would be a lesson. If you force a laugh onto Mark's coat, you get: he was too cheap to buy a new one. Cheap is your verb. His verb was kept.

What you cut

The second joke. Always. The impression. The audience work. The self-roast. The joke that needs a third person as a punchline.

Read the toaster paragraph standing, once. Cut the tag your mouth wants: and that was Helen, or anyway.

Write the joke early. If it sounds like a speaker in the morning, cut it. Last-hour swaps are how roasts get in.

If they want a roast and you cannot give one, say so at the table. I can tell the toaster story. I cannot do ten minutes of bits. Light means ordinary objects and no lesson. Light does not mean a set. Get through this is therapy language wearing a joke. You do not put it on the page.

The quiet after is not a moment of silence you announce. You take it. Then you go on or you sit. The officiant owns the larger silences. You do not invent a ritual inside theirs.

Every funny line gets the card before it gets a paragraph. Left: the sentence you would stand behind if no one laughed. Right: the sentence you would say if you needed them to like you. If you cannot tell which column you are in, you are in the right. Cut it.

Card

Say this

She stood in the smoke and told the toaster we are not doing this again. (*wait*) She stayed until the smoke cleared.

He parked as if the lines were a suggestion. The lot knew him.

I did not know her well enough to joke. I knew her well enough to say this. I can tell one story she already owned.

Do not say this

She couldn't cook to save her life, which, given the week, is an unfortunate phrase. But seriously, she was a wonderful woman. We can laugh. It's what she would have wanted.

He was a terrible driver. We all said it. At least the dog will be less work now.

I know this is heavy, so here's a funny one to start. She would have wanted a roast, so here we go. I'm going to try to make you laugh, because that's how we get through this.

Left column: their object, their verb, their line, then quiet. Right column: your cleverness, a tag, a roast, a therapy sentence wearing a joke. The right column asks the front row to laugh at a wound. They will look at their hands.

When it goes wrong

The laugh comes. You wait for the second laugh. It does not come. Your mouth starts a tag. The room goes still in the wrong way. The front row looks at the program.

Stop the tag in the middle if you have to. Say her name. Say the next true line you already wrote, the one after

the blank space. Do not explain the joke. Do not say
sorry. Sit when the page says sit.

6 — Thin knowledge, hard death

You barely knew them, or the death is the kind people lower their voice for, or both.

Short is honest. Fake intimacy is a second death you do not owe them. Spectacle is a second injury in the aisle.

You will borrow. You will attribute. You will write one safe sentence. You will sit down before the room has to decide whether you were close, and before the front row has to watch the worst hour again.

This is craft. It is not a map of grief. It will not tell you how to feel. It will tell you what you may put on a page.

What you are allowed, when you barely knew them

You are allowed the days you actually had.

The coffee machine on the third floor. The ride home in the rain. The plant they asked you to water. The way they said your name in a meeting. These are yours. You may say them.

You are not allowed the childhood. You are not allowed the marriage. You are not allowed the last night unless you were in the room and the family has asked you to speak to it. You are not allowed *I know how much he loved his kids* if you met the kids once in a parking lot. Love is not a word you can certify from a hallway.

You are allowed *I saw him with them in the lot. He had the bags. He was late and he was not sharp about it.*

That is a Tuesday. Tuesdays are the currency of the almost-stranger.

If the family asked you because no one else will stand, that is a fact, not a promotion. You do not become the best friend in the hour you write. You become a precise witness of a small patch.

Ask the family, not the manager, whether you are wanted. A manager can volunteer you. A family can still say the slot is for blood.

You do not give a performance review. Reliable, dedicated, always there are fog. The coffee machine is better, if it is true. You do not settle a score. You do not speak for the company. David, the third floor, the machine.

If you married in, ask what you are wanted for. Calm is not a life. The neighbor has the plant, the key, the bin. That is a eulogy if you do not upgrade it into family. One conversation is a bead, not a necklace.

If you should have said no: *I can say two minutes about the plant. I cannot do ten about a life I did not live.* Length is a claim. You, barely knowing them, take the bottom of the three-to-five custom. Padding is how fake intimacy gets in.

A short page: who you are in one clause, one story, one attribution if you borrowed, a last look, sit. *That is what I can swear to. I will stop there.* If you catch yourself writing always and never, you have left the Tuesday. Liked you is not a biography.

(Composite — labelled. David, third floor, coffee machine. Not an obituary.)

I am a colleague. I will not pretend I sat the holidays. David ran the machine on the third floor as if it were a small duty that kept the rest of the floor from becoming rude. He filled it when it was empty. On a Tuesday in March he waited while I looked for a mug that was not mine. He said take that one, it doesn't have an owner. I took it. I still have it. That is the David I can swear to.

You stop. You do not say and that is what leadership looks like. You sit.

Borrow, attribute

You will be handed stories. Take them. Put a name on them.

Priya told me he returned the book from the hospital because he would be late for anything else. That sentence has a source. The room can look at Priya. You have not stolen a childhood.

I heard he... is thinner. If you cannot name the whom, you do not have the story. Write the attribution on the page. Grief will drop the name. The page will not.

If two people give you the same story in two versions, pick one and name the one. Blending is how you get a fact no one owns.

If the giver says do not say I told you, drop the story or ask to use it without their name. A post is not an interview. Public is not allowed.

Laundering is saying I remember when you were not there. *Priya told me* is the clean form. *I like to think* is laundering.

Leave out the résumé from the company site, the illness if you were not in the house, the gossip from the break room, and other people's hard deaths. This is not the hour you tell the room about your father.

What hard means on this pad

Hard is a writing problem.

The family does not agree on the story. Or the story has a cause the room already knows and does not want described. Or there was a silence between you and them that is still in the chairs. Or the death was sudden and you have no last Tuesday, only a last ordinary day that did not know it was last.

You do not owe the room a plot. You owe them a sentence they can sit through without being made to watch the worst hour again.

The front row includes the person who found them, and the person who came back. Spectacle is: the method, the room, the body, the last words you cannot verify, the police, the hospital machine, the number of years of the bottle. Spectacle feels like courage at the table. It lands as a second injury in the aisle.

You are not the informant. They know the silence. They know the bottle. They know the call. Your job is not to prove you know. If a sibling says tell them everything, you still ask the person who will sit closest. One yes is not a quorum when the no is in the front row.

If you are the front row, you still do not owe the room the night. You can say I am tired and I will be short. Tired is not a scene.

Estrangement, addiction, sudden

You were not speaking. You may say the fact in one line. You may not try the case.

I had not been in this house for a long time. I am in it today. That is enough. The room can hold a gap. The room cannot hold your closing argument.

You do not use the eulogy to win a fight the dead cannot answer. If you need a sentence for yourself, write it on the back of the page. Do not read the back. If you have no Tuesday: I knew him when I was young. I have the porch. I do not have the later years. If you cannot speak without the case, you say no at the table.

You name addiction only if the family has already named it on the program, or in the talk at the table, or in the one sentence they asked you to say. If they have not named it, you do not break the name open for cousins from the other coast.

If they have named it, you still do not make a tour. *She struggled with alcohol for years. We knew. I will talk about the garden.* That pairing is allowed if the garden is true. The garden is not a cover story. It is the thing you can swear to without describing a night or a hospital.

You do not list relapses. You do not joke. You do not warn the back row. You do not clean the life into a saint. The front row lived the problem. A speech that erases it makes them lonely. A speech that films it makes them flinch. One true naming, if asked, then an object from a day that was still a day.

Sudden is a word that already does the work. You do not need the hour, the road, the call, the kitchen floor.

He died on Thursday. It was sudden. I will tell you Wednesday. Wednesday is the craft. The sandwich. The text about milk. The coat on the chair. You do not say last coat. You say the coat.

If you do not have Wednesday, you have an earlier Tuesday. Sudden does not promote you. You do not invent a last conversation. You do not describe the scene. Public is not permission.

If the family has chosen a word for the program, you use that word or you use died. You do not speculate why. Why is a sermon. You do not say they are at peace as a fact. You may say I hope, if hope is yours, in one clause.

If you cannot write the page without the scene, you are not the speaker. Give the page to the person who can say the garden. If a sentence has a siren or a body in it, cut that. Ordinary sense from an ordinary day is not spectacle. Spectacle is the sense from the worst hour.

The one safe sentence

Every hard eulogy needs one sentence you can return to if the rest of the page fails.

The sentence is not a slogan. It is specific, short, and already true at the table.

I am here. I will say her name. I will sit.

Or: Some of us were not speaking. I am speaking now.

Or: He died suddenly. I will not fill that word.

Or: She struggled. I will talk about the garden.

Write it at the top of the page, after the minutes. If you lose the middle, you say the sentence and you sit.

Test it on one living person who will sit in the front row. If they flinch, you have the wrong sentence. Flinch is data. You do not argue with flinch.

You do not sweeten. You do not harden to sound strong. Sweeten is: at least, better place, no more pain, he would have wanted, everything happens. Harden is: finally, at least it's over, he brought it on. The dry middle is: the day, the name, the object, the one safe sentence.

Anger will want a paragraph. You can have it at the table. You cannot have it as a closer. Write it on a second sheet. Leave it. If you cannot leave the sheet, you are not the speaker.

(Composite — labelled. Tom, garden, one naming, no tour. Not an obituary.)

Tom's death was not a surprise to some of us, and it was a shock anyway. He struggled for a long time. I will not walk you through that struggle. I will tell you he kept a garden behind the house and he watered it in his work shirt. The shirt is on the chair. The garden is still wet from whoever went out this morning. That is the Tom I can stand here and say.

Card

Say this

I worked with David on Tuesdays. I will tell you one Tuesday. Priya told me. I was not in the room. That is what I can swear to.

He died suddenly. I will not fill that word. I will tell you Wednesday. She struggled. I will talk about the garden.

Some of us were not speaking. I am speaking now. I have the porch. I do not have the later years.

Do not say this

David was like a father to me. I remember when he was in the hospital. In many ways I feel like I knew his soul.

I want to talk about how we found him. For those of you who don't know, she was an addict, and at the end... I think you all deserve to know exactly what happened.

We hadn't talked in years, and I still haven't forgiven... I came here to say what no one else will say. I promised I would be honest, no matter who it hurts.

Soul is a claim. The mug is a fact. No matter who it hurts is not honesty. It is a plan to hurt.

When it goes wrong

You hear yourself say we were close, and the front row knows you were not. Or you hear yourself start the scene — the kitchen, the hour, the method — and a sound comes from the front row that is not the sob you expected.

Stop in the middle of the sentence. Say who you actually are, or say the safe sentence on the top of the page. Say the name. Say the garden or the porch or the

mug. Do not finish the scene. Do not explain why you started it. Do not take a second run at being family. Sit, or hand the page to the closer you already named.

7 — Time, page, mouth

You have a number. Now the page has to fit it, and the page has to be readable when your hands shake.

Funeral homes and officiants already keep a custom, not a trial and not a study. Funeral.com's journal, the same habit you will hear from eulogy writers and from tribute guides that officiants pass around, treats three to five minutes as the usual share. A sole speaker is often given five to ten. Longer only if the order of service can carry it. That is trade custom. It is not a promise that a certain length heals anyone. It is a fence for a page.

At a calm pace, the same custom gives you a rough word budget: about four hundred to four hundred fifty words for three minutes, about six hundred fifty to seven hundred fifty for five, about twelve hundred to fifteen hundred for ten. Funeral.com publishes those bands as reading math, not as science. Grief slows you. Write to the bottom of the band. Time the page out loud. Cut.

You will not memorize this speech. Memorizing is a vanity that belongs to people who have slept. You slept badly. The page in your hand is the speech.

The three budgets

If they said four, write for three. If they said you are the only speaker and the hall can hold ten, still write for eight and stop. The upper band is a ceiling, not a target.

Catholic Mass, as practice reports among funeral writers — not canon law — often gives the eulogies a five-to-seven-minute window for the whole share. If three cousins are speaking, you are not each taking five. Ask how the window is split. Write a page that would still work if you lost a minute at the door.

Military honors stay off your clock. The eulogy is a separate object. You write your budget, you sit, you let the detail have their silence.

Three minutes. Write three hundred fifty to four hundred words. Time it standing. It holds: who you are in one clause, one story with an object and a turn, a last look, sit. It does not hold a second story, a poem plus a story, or a résumé. If the death is hard, three minutes is often the kindest budget. A three-minute page that looks sparse on paper is the right length in a room.

Five minutes. Write six hundred. Time it. The default custom for a family speaker who is not the only voice. It holds two stories if both are tight, or one story and a short attribution. The third story is how you steal the next speaker's slot. The job, the hobby, the volunteer year: one sentence if the program does not already have them. Paragraphs are minutes.

Ten minutes. Write eleven hundred. Time it twice. Not a promotion. A slot the order can carry when you are the sole speaker. You still do not owe the room fifteen. Ten minutes can hold a three-story structure or a short chronology plus two proofs of a value. It cannot hold a life. Lives do not fit in fifteen hundred words. If you try, you get a list.

Grief will take two minutes you did not budget. A laugh will take a little air. Do not start again from the top if someone coughs. Have a mark on the page: if late, skip story two. Write SKIP in the margin. The close must work without story two. If it cannot, you wrote the wrong close.

You do not pad a seven-minute truth to ten. Unused minute is a kindness.

Timer, out loud

Stand. Set a timer you can see. Read the page at the pace you will use in the room: names slow, sentences finished, wait after the joke if you have one.

You do not read in your head. Head-reading is fast. Rooms are slow.

When you hit a line that thickens, stop, breathe, start the next sentence. Add that breath to the time. That is why the bottom of the band is the budget.

If the first read is 6:40 and the slot is 5:00, do not promise yourself you will talk faster. Faster is how names die. You cut words.

If the first read is 3:10 and the slot is 10:00, do not go hunting for a childhood you do not have. Sometimes a family says take ten because they are afraid of silence. Silence belongs to the officiant. You can give them five true minutes and sit.

What you cut first: claims without objects. Great sense of humor. Always there. Loved his family. Second jokes. The résumé that duplicates the program. We are gathered. The lesson. The other death. Your father

does not get a paragraph inside Helen's five minutes.

You keep the name, the object, the turn, the safe sentence if the death is hard, the attribution if you borrowed.

If you overrun, cut setup, not pauses. If you finish early, do not add the third. Early is a gift.

If you go blank, look at the page. Say the next line. If you cannot, say the safe sentence. If you still cannot, sit or hand the page off. Filling a blank with improvisation is how you blow the clock and the front row at once.

Love is not a budget. If a loved paragraph is ninety seconds and you have three minutes, the paragraph is the speech. If the loved paragraph is the hard scene, cut it anyway.

If the program says remarks, write three minutes. If they say take as long as you need, take five and sit. If a relative waves you on while you are closing, you still sit. The night before, not the hour before. If you are over, remove a block, not one word from every sentence. Do not announce the cut. You just stop.

(Composite — labelled. Mark, coat, five minutes. Not an obituary.)

I am a colleague. I will use five minutes and sit. Mark wore the gray coat until the lining hung like a second sleeve. We told him. He said the lining was the only honest part left. He said it in the lot, keys in his hand, as if he were talking about weather. I do not know what he meant. I know he kept the coat.

Priya told me he returned a library book on the day it was due from a hospital bed, because he would be late

for anything else. That is her story. I am repeating it with her name on it.

The coat is on the chair in the hall tonight. That is the last look I have. I will stop there.

If the timer says 5:40, cut the weather clause, not Priya, or cut Priya if Priya will speak herself. Ask.

The page in your hand

Hold the page at arm's length. If you have to lean in, the type is too small. You will lean in at the lectern. Your voice will drop into the paper.

Print it large. Number every page. The phone is a last resort, not a plan you have not tested.

Until you sit down, the page is a tool. Tools get dropped. Make a spare. Put it in an envelope. Write SPARE on it. Give it to the person who will finish if you cannot. You name them tonight. The next chapter is that call.

Do not fold the working copy into eighths. A hard crease across a name is how you lose the name. A thin folder, one pocket, nothing else in it. Not the program. Not the parking slip.

Sixteen point is a speech you can read while standing. Eighteen if your eyes are tired. Test the type with the glasses you will wear. A book serif. Not a script. Not all caps. Line spacing 1.5 or double. An inch at the margin. Print on one side only.

Number the pages. Large. Top right. Page 1 of 4. You will drop them. The number puts them back. Staple once, top left, loose enough that the pages lie flat.

Box every proper name in pencil. Underline the line you must not rush. At the end of the last page, write SIT. Large. People who have not written SIT add a lesson. If a joke is in the speech, mark the landing, not the joke.

Ask where the water lives in the room. Some halls have none at the stand. Open a bottle before you stand if you must. Do not put the glass on the speech.

If the phone is the last resort, prepare it the night before, and still print. Notifications off, not silent. Auto-lock off. One file. One name. Charge it tonight and again in the morning. Tell the officiant you have paper. If you walk up with only a phone, they cannot help you when the screen dies.

If you can, stand at the actual stand an hour before and read the first page. You are testing type against light, not testing your feelings. Graveside: a clip on the folder. Two clips. A single sheet will leave you.

Read once with the printed pages, standing. Prove the page turns and SIT is on the last sheet. If a page-turn falls in the middle of a name, move the name. If you change one word, change it on both copies. Leave the drafts in the kitchen. Take the clean copy and the spare.

The microphone

Ask which mic is live. Stand, handheld, clip, none. The officiant knows.

If it is a stand, they will have set the height for the person before you. Take a few seconds and bend the neck, or ask someone to. Starting with the mic at your

hairline is how the first sentence vanishes.

If it is a handheld, ask where the switch is before you walk. If it is already live, do not tap it. Tapping a live mic is a bang the room will remember longer than your opening image.

If there is no mic, speak to the nearest faces and accept that the back row will get half. Do not shout the name. Slow down. Slow carries farther than loud in a quiet field.

The microphone is a piece of metal. It is not a stage. It does not want a performance of grief. It wants the back row to hear the page.

Do not begin until the last speaker's page is off the stand. If they hand you the handheld, take it at the base, not at the head.

If the mic dies, do not say is this on. Look at the officiant. If they do not come, step around the stand and finish on your own voice, slower, to the first rows. A squeal: move back. Do not tap. Do not apologize into the mic. Wait. Continue.

Leave the handheld on the stand when you finish. Do not walk down the aisle with a live mic. Take the folder with you.

Speak as you spoke when you timed the draft: a little slower, a little clearer, not a little bigger. Bigger is acting. A cry in the room is not a cue to raise your voice. Say every name slower than the sentence around it. Do not test the mic with a joke. After the last line, say nothing else. Step back.

Card

Say this	Do not say this
I have four minutes. I wrote three. Two stories. Then I sit. 4:00 given. 3:10 written. SIT.	I'll keep it short, and then forty minutes later... Since I have the time, I want to cover everything. I'll speed up so I can fit it all.
I have this written. I am going to read it. Sixteen point. Page 1 of 4.	I didn't prepare anything, so this may ramble. I had this memorized, but I'm a little emotional, so bear with me.
(You adjust the stand. Then you start.) I am going to read this into the microphone.	Is this on? Tap tap. Sorry. Can you hear me in the back? I'm not good at public speaking, so this is hard for me.

The right column makes the clock, the memory, or the metal the subject. The left keeps the job on the page. Memorizing is not a virtue. The page is.

When it goes wrong

The officiant nods. You start. At two minutes you are still in the childhood you were going to skip. A cousin who was promised three minutes is holding a paper. Or the pages slide off the stand, face down. Or the first sentence goes into a dead mic.

Look down. Find SKIP, or find 1 of 4, or find the officiant's nod. Say the name. Say the last look you already wrote, even if you never reached it in order. Do not say I had more. Do not start over with a joke about technology. Say the first sentence again, at the same

speed, if the mic was dead. Then sit when the page says sit.

8 — If you stop

Sitting down is allowed. Write that on the card tonight.

You designate a closer. You print a folded spare and you put it in their hand. You agree on a look, or a word, or the simple fact of a chair. Then, if the throat closes and stays closed, you sit. The speech can end without you.

You will not push through as a virtue. Pushing through is a story people tell after a wedding toast. This is not a toast. No one in the first row needs you to suffer visibly to prove you loved them. They need the next true sentence, from you or from the person you named.

After you sit, the speech is over. You do not post it. You decide who gets the text. You keep the thank-you from becoming a second eulogy. You do not start a grief course because you held a microphone.

Sitting down is allowed

Say it at the table, out loud, once: I am allowed to sit down.

You are not abandoning the name on the page. You are refusing to turn a death into a test of stamina. The room will survive your sitting. The room will not survive a minute of you trying to become a person who can talk when you cannot.

Sitting down can look like this. You finish a sentence. You close the folder. You walk to your chair. You sit. The officiant stands. Or the closer stands.

It can look like this. You stop in the middle. You look at the closer. They come. You sit.

It can look like this. You do not walk up at all. You tell the officiant in the hallway, I cannot do it. The closer already has the spare. You sit from the start. That is still allowed. The speech you wrote can still be said.

Do not ask the room if you should continue. The room cannot vote. Do not stand again to add a line you remembered. It can go in a letter. Do not mouth the words along with the closer.

You may sit having read every page and still feel unfinished. That is the third story asking for a job. You do not hire it in the aisle. If you skipped a living name that is in the room, you go to that person after. You do not reopen the slot.

Someone may whisper push through. You sit anyway. You say, if you can, Marek has it. If you cannot, you sit, and the closer stands.

Designate a closer tonight

A closer is a person with a name, a copy, and a job. Not “someone will jump in.” Someone will freeze, or three people will stand, or the officiant will fill with a psalm you did not choose.

Pick the person tonight. Call them. Do not text a question they can leave unanswered.

You need a person who can stand. Love is not the qualification. Legs are. A clear enough voice is. The ability to read a page they did not write is.

Often the closer is a sibling who is dryer than you, a colleague who already agreed to speak second, an officiant, a friend who is not in the first shock. Sometimes the closer is the funeral director, who will read the page if you ask.

Tell them the job in one sentence: If I sit, or if I look at you, you come up and you read from the spare, starting at the page I am on, or at the start if I have not begun.

Give them the spare tonight. They need to see the type, the numbers, the boxed names, the word SIT. They need to know the speech is yours and they are not to improve it.

Tell the officiant the name of the closer. If you cannot find a closer who will accept, the officiant is the closer. Ask: If I cannot finish, will you read the rest of this page as mine? They would rather read than watch you drown.

Do not designate a child. Do not designate the person whose grief is the reason you are speaking. One closer. One backup if you are careful, named, and informed. A committee at the stand is a new death.

If the closer is a spouse, look again. Prefer legs that slept. If the only person with legs barely knew them, they can still read your page: these are [your] words. They do not add a memory they do not have.

The spare is the same speech. Cuts happen at the table. Write on the envelope: *If I stop, start at the page with my finger, or at 1 of 4*. A spare in your own pocket is not a designated closer.

Agree on a signal. A look. A word: Marek, or I am going to sit. A chair: you walk to it. If you cannot speak and cannot turn, they come after a silence longer than a sentence. Once, in the kitchen, you sit and they take the folder. Once is enough.

They read your page. They may say: I am going to finish what [you] wrote. They start at the next full sentence. They keep your SIT.

If the closer breaks, the officiant closes the slot. Give them one sentence: We are going to hold silence for [name], and then we will go on. You do not ask the room if anyone else wants to speak.

A name is the most likely stop. You may say the name and nothing else. That can be the whole speech. If you are ashamed of the plan, hand over the envelope anyway. In the hallway: confirm the envelope. If the closer is late, give it to the officiant. Sure is a feeling. The envelope is an object.

Do not post

Someone will text before you have taken the chair: can I post this. You answer after you sit, not from the aisle.

The text is the speech you read, or the speech the closer read. If you skipped a story, be consistent about whether the file skips it too.

The spouse, the parent, the sibling who could not stand: they can have it. You can say yes and send it tomorrow, when you have removed the pronunciation notes and the word SIT.

The officiant, if they asked for a file: the spoken text, not the marked-up pages.

A cousin who is building a website: slow down. Publication is a family decision. You say: I will send it to [the person who is deciding].

A colleague who wants it for the company newsletter: the newsletter is content. You do not give a eulogy to a newsletter unless the family asked and the text is the short colleague version.

A reporter: you do not have to give them anything. If the family wants a statement, the family writes a statement.

If two siblings disagree, you hold the file. You say: I need the two of you to agree. You do not send it to the louder one to keep the peace.

You do not post the eulogy as content.

A feed is hungry. A eulogy is not food. If you put the speech on a profile, it picks up a like button, a share, a comment thread, and a stranger. They did not die to open a thread.

This includes a photograph of the pages, a pocket video, a carousel of quotes, a story that vanishes in a day. People screenshot.

You may post, if you post at all, a single factual line the family agreed to. That line is not the eulogy. If someone else posts your words, send a private sentence: Please take the eulogy off your page. Tell the sister. Do not publicly scold. Do not clip a livestream for a personal account.

A family chat is a small feed. You do not paste the speech into twenty cousins. You paste: I will send the file to [sister]. Ask her. Send a file to one person. Say: Please do not forward without asking [sister]. A nephew with a phone: Please do not put that on a page. You do not provide a cleaner file to help their video.

After you sit, and then stop

People will thank you. Keep it short. When they say that was beautiful, you can say thank you, or you can say I wanted the kitchen in the room. Then you stop. You do not retell the story in the receiving line.

When you thank the closer, you thank them for reading what you wrote. You do not apologize for sitting in public. A public apology makes the sit into a flaw. The sit was a plan.

A note the next week can mention one object. It should not contain the full speech. If a wake has an open mic, you do not give the eulogy again. Passing is allowed.

A wrong year is a paper error. You fix it on the file you send the sister. A missed sibling is different. You go to that person and you say the name. You do not put the apology on a feed. If someone was hurt by a true story, you listen. You do not defend craft.

Take the folder. Do not leave the kitchen on a lectern. Put the speech in a drawer, or give it to the sister. You are not now the family chaplain. If someone films you in the receiving line and asks you to repeat a paragraph, you say no.

A manager will ask for a few words for Monday. That is a new slot. Three sentences. Not the hall draft. You can

refuse.

The day after, you may hate a sentence. Hate it privately. Do not issue a new version to the cousins. If you must write more, put it in a drawer. A drawer is not a feed.

You sat. Enough is the correct measure. Healing is not a measure this book will give you. This book ends on the chair, the envelope, and the sentence you do not post. It does not continue as aftercare.

Card

Say this

Do not say this

I am going to sit. Marek has the rest. I need you to finish the eulogy if I cannot. If I look at you, you come up. You read what I wrote. Then you sit.

I promised myself I would get through this. I'm sorry. I'm sorry. She would have wanted me to be strong. Don't worry, I'll be fine. Just wing it if I fail. Say whatever you feel in the moment.

I will send it to Helen's sister. She can share it if she wants. Please don't post the speech.

Of course, I'll put it on my profile tonight. Share widely so her light never dies. I'm going to write something longer tonight for everyone who couldn't be there.

I already said it. I am not posting it. Ask the sister for the words.

I wrote a better ending last night. I'll send it around. I'll start a shared folder so we can all add memories. Let me tell you the part I left out.

The right column keeps you on your feet for a second attempt the room did not ask for, or gives your page a second life you do not control. The left ends the attempt and names a person who can hold the file.

When it goes wrong

A cousin posts a photo of your pages, the type large enough to read, with a caption about angels, and your phone fills with hearts. Or you stayed on your feet with no voice because someone whispered push through, and the closer did not move because you had not given the look.

Sit anyway. Say Marek has it, if you can. Send one private message if the pages are already a post: Please take the speech down. It was not a post. Tell the sister what you sent. Do not write a public comment thread. Do not stand again. The chair was the plan. The envelope was the plan. The feed was never the job.

Appendix — Sixteen annotated drafts

These sixteen speeches are fictional composites. They are not real obituaries. They are not real people. They are not real funerals. The names were built for the page. Use them as furniture. Do not lift a paragraph into a room that has a different dead person in it.

Margin notes sit after each draft. The notes are craft, not praise. Trade custom still holds: a shared service often wants three to five minutes; a single speaker may have more if the officiant said so. Two of these drafts sit under that. If your slot is longer, you add a verified fact, not a lesson.

Four of the drafts keep furniture from an earlier appendix: a kitchen radio, a porch jar, a locker timetable, a library card. The other twelve are new rooms. Leave the names. Leave the sentences. Your object is in a real house.

1. Parent — fictional composite

Label: Fictional composite. Not a real person. Not a real funeral. Speaker: an adult child. Slot: five minutes, hall, stand mic. Closer: a sibling, envelope in the second row.

The last time I stood in my mother's kitchen the radio was on the sports report. She was not watching sports. She liked the sound of scores she did not follow. The dog waited by the refrigerator because the refrigerator

was how you got cheese.

Helen Calder, on paper, is a composite name for this book. In a real room you say the name the room used. I am going to say Helen. I am her daughter. I have this written. I am going to read it.

She taught the dog to wait at the curb on Sycamore before the leash went slack. I was late. I was always late. She did not give a speech about lateness. She pointed at the dog, who was already sitting, and she handed me the leash as if I had been on time. That was her temper: a point, an object, no lecture. The next week I was late again. She did the same point. I do not have a third week. Two is the temper.

When my father died she kept his badge in the bowl by the door for a week, then she put the badge in a drawer and she put stamps in the bowl. She said the bowl had a job. I used to think that was cold. I think now it was the kitchen continuing. She took his mug off the table and hung it on the hook. She did not make a speech about the mug either.

She was born in 1951, which I checked on the copy of the certificate in the file, and she worked thirty-one years at the county office that renewed licenses. If you need the rest of the jobs they are in the program. I am not going to read the program. I will say one thing from that office because I saw it: she brought home the form that had changed and she put it next to the stamps, and then she did not talk about work at supper. The form was for us, not for the table.

I am supposed to mention that she loved her grandchildren. She did. I will mention one thing I saw:

she let the youngest hold the radio dial and ruin the score. She did not put the dial back until the child was in the other room. The older one she taught to fold a letter small enough for the bowl. She watched the fold. She did not praise the fold. She put the letter in.

On Sundays she boiled too many potatoes. She sent people home with them in margarine tubs. If you said you were not hungry she put the tub in your hands anyway. I have a tub in my car that I keep meaning to return. I am not going to make the tub a relic. I am telling you she cooked for a number that was not the number at the table.

She could tell you who was winning from the radio without knowing the rules of the game. I asked her once why she did not change the station. She said the scores were company that did not ask questions. I have thought about that sentence all week. I am not going to turn it into a moral about solitude. It was a radio.

I will not say she is at peace. I will not say she is watching. I will not ask you to be late less often in her honor. I will not read a poem I found last night. If a poem belongs here, the first row already chose it.

If I stop after the curb, my brother has the rest of this page. He is in the second row with the envelope. He reads what I wrote. He does not add.

That is what I have. The radio, the curb, the bowl. I am going to sit.

Margin notes. Open on a room, not a résumé. Radio, dog, cheese. Who you are, once, then the page. Story one: late, no lecture. Story two: badge, then stamps. One verified date, then refuse the CV. Love claimed

with a seen act. Close without a lesson. No heaven.
Lines that were cut: *She was a wonderful mother who touched so many lives. I know she's at peace.* Spare: if she stops after the curb, start at the badge. Words by the daughter. Do not add.

2. Spouse — fictional composite

Label: Fictional composite. Not a real person. Not a real funeral. Speaker: the surviving spouse. Slot: five minutes, hall, stand mic. Closer: an adult child, envelope already given.

The chair at our table is still turned backwards. Alan sat that way, chest to the backrest, as if the kitchen table were a fence he had decided to climb and then changed his mind. I am Pat. I am his wife. I have this written. I am going to read it.

He left the crossword with one clue blank. He would not look the answer up. He said morning would do it. I used to fill the blank to be useful. He hated that. He would erase my letters and write the same blank back. The morning after he died the clue was still empty. I did not fill it. I am not going to tell you which clue. It is a newspaper, not a riddle about marriage.

He packed the car the night before any trip and then unpacked one bag to check the charger. Every time. I mocked it. Last March I packed the night before without him asking. He stood in the doorway and did not say I told you. He said the red bag goes left or you will forget the map. The map was a folded county sheet from 2008. The phone had maps. He still wanted the

sheet.

We married in 1987. I checked the paper in the box on the wardrobe. I am not going to read the jobs. He drove a van for the county parks for twenty-two years. The program has the rest. I will say one thing I saw from that van: he kept a second thermos for the intern who never brought one. He said the intern was not a lesson. The intern was cold.

He set two mugs out even after the children left the house. One mug had a chip he would not throw. I bought a matching set in 2019. He kept the chip. I used to think that was stubborn. I think now it was the mug he could find in the dark. I still set two. I am not asking you to admire that. It is a habit with nowhere to go yet.

On Sundays he drove to the reservoir and sat in the van with the engine off. He took the thermos. He did not take a book. I went with him three times and talked. The fourth time I sat still. He said, that is the point of a reservoir. I have thought about that sentence all week. I am not going to turn a body of water into a moral. It was a Sunday and a van.

I will not tell you he is at peace. I will not tell you what he would have wanted this week to look like. I will not say he was my best friend, even if that sentence is true, because it turns a marriage into a slogan the back row has heard at other deaths. I will not read our vows. The vows had their day.

I will not do the illness. You who sat the last month already have it. You who did not sit it should not learn it from me at a microphone.

If I stop after the crossword, our daughter has this page. She is in the first row. She reads what I wrote. She does not improve the blank.

The chair is still backwards. I am going to sit.

Margin notes. Spouse slot: you may have the kitchen. You may not have the deathbed unless the first row asked for that sentence. Open on the chair, not *my beloved husband*. Story one: the crossword he would not let you finish. Story two: the packed car and the 2008 map. One date from a paper you checked. Refuse the illness as content. Lines that were cut: *He was my soulmate. We should all love like Alan*. Spare: start at the crossword. Do not fill the clue for her.

3. Sibling — fictional composite

Label: Fictional composite. Not a real person. Not a real funeral. Speaker: a brother. Slot: four minutes, hall, lectern clip. Closer: a cousin, named, already holding the spare. Not the estranged draft. Not the sudden draft. A sister who stayed in the week.

The red ladder in my garage is hers. She never took it back. I am Martin. I am Lila's brother. I have four minutes. I wrote them down.

Lila Ward is a composite name for this page. In a real room you say the name on the notice, and then the name the kitchen used if those are different and you asked. I asked. Lila is the name.

On the first warm Saturday she arrived with coffee that was already cold and the ladder. She did my gutters without asking if I wanted help. I wanted to be a

person who did his own gutters. She handed me the lower rungs and took the top. I thought she was showing off. She was finishing the job before the rain. She said, if you argue on the lawn the water wins.

She kept my spare key in a tobacco tin that never held tobacco. When I locked myself out in 2019 I called her before I called a locksmith. She was twenty minutes away and she was annoyed and she came. She said I could have broken a window, it would have been cheaper. Then she gave me the tin and told me to buy a second key. I bought the key. I left the tin on her shelf. The tin came back in a box this week. I am not going to make the tin a shrine. I am telling you she came.

She was born in 1974. I checked the notice. I will not do the school years. I will not do the jobs in order. She worked the late till at the pharmacy on Binder for eleven years. If you need the rest, her wife has the program. I am not her wife. I am the brother with the ladder.

We fought about the ladder. I will not tell the fight. A fight that needs explaining is a story the first row did not come to referee. I will say we were still speaking. That is the weather. It is not the speech.

She left a note on my fridge in 2021 that said your milk is a dare. I threw the milk out. I kept the note until the ink faded. I do not have the note. I have the sentence. That is enough.

I saw her at the late till twice. She counted the drawer twice and did not announce the second count. A boy from the street asked her a question I did not hear. She answered without looking at me for help. I had come in

to be the brother who visits. She did not need a visit.
She needed the drawer to be right. I bought toothpaste
I did not need and left.

I will not say she was the funny one. I will not say I was
the responsible one. Those are roles for a sitcom. I will
not ask you to call your own sister tonight as a tribute.
Your phone is your phone.

If I stop after the gutters, my cousin Len has the rest of
this page. Len, you read what I wrote. Then you sit.
You do not tell the pharmacy story you remember from
Christmas. Leftover minutes belong to the officiant.

The ladder stays. I am going to sit.

Margin notes. Sibling, not parent: you may have the
garage. You do not inherit the childhood montage. One
childhood object is enough if you need it; this draft
refused it and used the ladder instead. Story one:
gutters, rain, the lawn. Story two: the tin, 2019, the
key. Name the wife so the room can sit inside the
household. Do not rank the siblings. Lines that were
cut: *She was my best friend as well as my sister. We
should all be more like Lila.* Spare: if he stops after the
gutters, say the tin sentence and sit.

4. Friend — fictional composite

*Label: Fictional composite. Not a real person. Not a
real funeral. Speaker: a friend, not family. Slot: four
minutes, hall, stand mic. Closer: the officiant,
envelope already given. Furniture stolen from an
earlier porch. Indoor this time. The graveside draft is
a different death.*

June kept a jar of screws on the porch even after the porch project ended. I know that because I stepped on the jar in the dark and she laughed from the kitchen without coming out. She said, if you can find the lid you can come in. I found the lid. That was the friendship: a chore, a joke, a door that opened after you did the small thing.

My name is Ellis. I am not family. June's sister asked me to speak for four minutes. I wrote it down because a hall is still a place where memory fails.

We met in a night class that was supposed to be bookkeeping. She sat in the back and corrected the instructor on a form that had changed the year before. I thought she was rude. She was right about the form. After class she gave me a ride because the bus had stopped running, and she talked about the form the whole way, and I got out knowing I would call her when my own forms went wrong. I did. For twelve years. I checked twelve against a text I still have. I am not going to read the text.

The last Tuesday I saw her we split a pizza that was too cold and she put the leftover in my bag for the next day. She said I looked like a person who forgot lunch. I was. I ate the pizza on Wednesday standing over the sink. I still have the bag. I am not going to make the bag a relic. I am telling you she noticed lunch.

She called on Sundays if I had not called by four. I used to let the phone ring once so I could finish a sentence in my own kitchen. Then I answered. She did not ask what I had been doing. She asked whether the form had come back. Sometimes there was no form. She asked anyway. I will not turn that into a speech about

checking on people. It was a Sunday call.

I will not tell the story about the wedding, because it is long and it belongs to the people who were in the wedding. I will not do an accent. I will not do her laugh for you. You have her laugh if you knew her. If you did not, a performed laugh is a stranger.

June, I am using the name she used at the door. Some of you knew her as Junie. I asked her sister. Junie is for the family. I will sit with June.

I will not say she was my best friend in the whole world. That sentence asks the row to rank a life they did not live with us. I will not say we should all live like June. I will not say I love you, girl, into a microphone. If that last one is true it can stay true without the hall as a witness.

That is four minutes if I go slowly. I am going to stop.

Margin notes. Friend, not child. You are allowed the porch. You are not allowed the deathbed unless you were there and the family wants it said. Attribute the ask. Story one: night class, rude, then useful. Story two: pizza, bag, sink. You refuse the relic. Names: you asked. You do not take Junie. Funny, then quiet: you decline the wedding bit. Lines that were cut: *She was my best friend in the whole world. We should all live like June.* Officiant spare: start at the night class. Do not add a prayer.

5. Colleague — fictional composite

Label: Fictional composite. Not a real person. Not a real funeral. Speaker: a coworker, almost-stranger to the family. Slot: three minutes, chapel, lectern clip. Closer: another colleague in the third row, or the officiant.

I am Marek Voss. I worked with Daniel Ruiz on the second floor for six years. I did not know him at home. I will not pretend I did. His brother asked for three minutes about the work and about one thing Daniel did that was his.

Daniel kept a paper timetable of the late bus taped inside his locker after the company went to badges. The timetable was from 2019. The bus changed. He still looked at the paper before he left, then he checked his phone, then he laughed at himself and took the stairs. I know this because I had the locker beside his and I asked why the paper was still there. He said, the paper is what I had when I started, I don't throw a start away.

He ran the Monday numbers. He sent them before eight. If you sent him a correction he changed the file and he did not send a note about who had been wrong. I checked that with two people on the floor, Lena and Chris, composites for this page, standing in for the living people you actually ask. They said the same sentence: he fixed it and he moved.

He ate lunch at his desk with a banana that was always too green. I offered him a ripe one once from the shop downstairs. He said the green one is how I know it is Monday. I am not going to make the banana a symbol. It was a banana.

He held the lift for the night cleaner when the rest of us had already turned toward the stairs. I know that because I had forgotten a badge and came back. He did not make a story of the lift. He said the cleaner has a longer night than we do. Then he took the stairs anyway, because the paper in the locker had already done its job.

I will say his name again. Daniel Ruiz. If I have the stress wrong, his brother will tell me after, and I will take the correction. I practiced it in a kitchen that is not his.

I do not have a lesson from the second floor. I have a locker door and a bus paper and a file that got corrected without a performance. His family has the rest. They should. If I start to tell you about his weekends I will be guessing. I do not have his weekends. Guessing is how a colleague becomes a liar in a good suit.

I will not say we were like family on that floor. I will not say he was a legend in the industry. I will not say Daniel would have wanted us to stay positive. I do not know what he would have wanted this week. I knew the locker.

Thank you to the family for the slot. I am going to sit.

I will not put these remarks on the company intranet unless his brother says yes. A newsletter is content. The brother gets the file first.

Margin notes. Colleague protocol. Seat first. Borrowed ask, attributed. Short is honest. No fake intimacy. One object: the timetable. One habit of work, verified with two living people. Pronunciation humility

without a comedy bit. You hand the life back. One thank-you, then sit. Do not post without the brother's yes. Lines that were cut: *We were like family on that floor. If you knew him you knew he was one of a kind.* Spare: start at the timetable. If the name stops him, say Daniel Ruiz and sit.

6. Neighbor — fictional composite

Label: Fictional composite. Not a real person. Not a real funeral. Speaker: the person at number 14. Not family. Slot: three minutes, hall. Closer: the officiant.

She left my hedge shears on the step with a note that said these need oil, not a lecture. I am Craig. I live at 14. Inez lived at 12. Her son asked for three minutes from the person who took in the mail. I have this written.

Inez Soto is a composite name for this page. I am going to say Inez the way the son said it on the phone. If I have it wrong he will tell me after.

She left a key under the third pot. I brought her mail in a rubber band and put it through the slot. She knocked twice, left soup, and did not wait for the door. I used to think that was rude. It was the soup still hot and her bus. I ate the soup. I washed the pot. I left the pot on her step. She left a second note that said the pot is yours if you keep forgetting dinner. I did not keep the pot. I kept the sentence.

The night the storm took the fence she was in the yard with a flashlight and a roll of twine before I had found a coat. She said, we can be proud tomorrow, tonight we

keep the dog in. My dog. Not hers. She did not own a dog. She owned twine and a flashlight that worked. Mine did not.

I will not say we were like family. I had her spare key. That is a neighbor. I did not sit in her kitchen except once, in 2022, when the lock froze and she made tea while we waited for the man from the hardware shop. The tea was too strong. She said that was how tea earned the wait. I am not going to improve that line.

She rolled my bin in when I was away in March. I rolled hers when she went to her sister. We did not make a roster. We looked at the street. Once I forgot hers for two weeks. She did not mention it. She left the shears again, oiled. That was the mention.

In winter she salted the patch of pavement that was neither hers nor mine. The council missed it. She used a mug from the kitchen as a scoop. I offered a proper pail. She said the mug already knows the ice. I have that mug sentence. I do not have her childhood.

I do not have her jobs. I do not have her childhood. Her son has those. I have 12 and 14 and the shears and the third pot.

I will not tell you what the street has lost. The street is still there. I will not ask the row to check on their own neighbors as a tribute. If you check, you check because the bin is still out, not because I told you to be good.

If I stop after the soup, the officiant has my page. Start at the shears. Do not add the storm unless I have already said the soup.

Inez. Number 12. I am going to sit.

Margin notes. Neighbor: you may have the step, the bin, the key. You may not have the family plot. Do not say *like family*. Story one: soup, bus, pot. Story two: storm, twine, someone else's dog. One indoor scene is enough if you mark the year. Close on the house numbers. Do not assign homework to the block. Lines that were cut: *This street will never be the same. She was the heart of the block*. Spare: shears, then sit. The storm is extra.

7. In-law — fictional composite

Label: Fictional composite. Not a real person. Not a real funeral. Speaker: a son-in-law. Slot: four minutes, hall. Closer: the spouse of the dead, if she can, otherwise the officiant. Not a mother-in-law joke. Not a ranking.

She set a plate for me before I had said I was coming. I am Neil. I married her daughter. I did not grow up in this kitchen. I have four minutes. I wrote them.

Gwen Hart is a composite name for this page. I am going to say Gwen. Some of you said Gran. I asked her daughter. Gran is for the blood. I will sit with Gwen.

For two years she called me by my surname. Then one Thursday she said Neil as if the name had always been that. She did not make a ceremony of it. I had been waiting for a speech. There was no speech. She put the plate down and told me the salt was on my side. I have thought about that Thursday more than is useful. I am not going to turn it into a story about acceptance. It was a first name and a plate.

She peeled potatoes toward herself and told me I was going to lose a thumb. I peeled them her way for a year and then I went back to my way when she was in the other room. She knew. She put a plaster in the drawer nearest my chair. The plaster was the correction. I used the plaster once, in 2018, which I know because I wrote the year on the box like a fool. She saw the box and said, good, you can count.

I will not rank her as a mother-in-law. I will not do the joke about mothers-in-law. The joke is a roast of a woman who cannot answer. I will not say I gained a mother. I had a mother. Gwen was the person who set the extra plate.

She voted differently than I do. I am not going to tell you which way. A eulogy that settles a vote is a meeting. We had meetings. They are not this slot. She once changed the subject by putting a second helping on my plate and saying the potatoes are not political. I ate the potatoes. I did not win the argument. I am not going to pretend I wanted to.

She was born in 1948. I checked the program. I will not read the jobs. She kept the books for the paint shop on Pell until 2011. The shop can go in the program. I have the plate and the plaster.

I saw her at that shop once. She was not at the till. She was in the back with a ledger and a pencil that had no eraser. She said if you need to change a number you should know you changed it. I had come to collect my wife. I waited in the doorway and did not enter the ledger. That is the whole visit. It is enough.

If I stop after the surname, my wife has this page. She may not want it. If she does not stand, the officiant reads from the plate. No one adds the vote.

The extra plate. I am going to sit.

Margin notes. In-law: name your seat. You did not grow up in the kitchen. Ask which name is yours to say. Gran is theirs if the blood asked you to leave it. Story one: the surname, then Neil, no ceremony. Story two: potatoes, plaster, 2018. Do not rank. Do not do the stock joke. Do not settle a vote. Lines that were cut: *I couldn't have asked for a better mother-in-law. She treated me like one of her own.* Spare: start at the plate. Do not improve Thursday.

8. Coach / teacher (adult student) — fictional composite

Label: Fictional composite. Not a real person. Not a real funeral. The dead person taught adults. The speaker is forty-four. Not a child in a lane. Not a school prize day. Slot: three minutes, municipal hall next to the pool. Closer: another student in the fourth row, or the sister.

The water was always too cold and she would not discuss it. I am Owen. I was in Priya Shah's adult beginners lane on Tuesday at eight. I am forty-four. I learned to swim last year. Her sister asked for three minutes from someone who was not family and was not a child.

Priya wrote our names on the lane roster in pencil so they could be erased. She waited at the wall. She did

not blow the whistle at us. She said, when you are ready, the wall is still here. I thought that was a slogan. It was an instruction. I held the wall longer than the others. She did not move me on until I could let go.

I told her I was too old for this. She said the pool does not check. She moved me to the next lane when I could do a length without stopping. I wanted a certificate. She gave me a nod and the next Tuesday. I am not going to say she changed my life. I will say I can get across the pool. Her sister has the rest of her. If I start to tell you what the water meant I will be writing a pamphlet. The water was cold. She would not discuss it. That is the fact I came with.

She kept a spare pair of goggles on the peg marked spare, which was a joke she did not explain. The goggles were ugly. They worked. I used them once when mine snapped. I bought a new pair. I hung the spare back. She said, good, you can count. Then she waited at the wall.

I do not have her degrees. I do not have her other classes. I saw a card on the staff board that said she also taught the Thursday seniors. I did not go to Thursday. I will not speak for Thursday. If someone from Thursday is here, they have their own three minutes or they have silence. I will not borrow their Tuesdays.

The first Tuesday I came I stood in the shallow end and counted the tiles. She did not fetch me. She stood at the wall and let the counting finish. When I looked up she said the deep end is still there when you want it, and then she said nothing else for the rest of the length. I wanted a pep talk. I got tiles and a wall. I came back

the next Tuesday because the wall had not moved.

I will not do her accent. I will not do a joke about grown people in a beginners lane. The joke is a roast of the living, and the living are in this row trying to sit still in chairs that squeak.

If I stop after the wall, my classmate Ruthie has this page. Ruthie, you read what I wrote. You do not add the night you passed me. That night is yours. It is not the slot.

Priya. The pencil. The wall. I am going to sit.

Margin notes. Adult student: say your age if it keeps the room from picturing a child. The dead person is a teacher of adults. Story one: pencil roster, wait at the wall. Story two: too old, a nod, no certificate. Do not say *changed my life*. Do not speak for the class you did not attend. Lines that were cut: *She believed in all of us. She made me a better person*. Spare: start at the wall. Sit after the pencil if the name fails.

9. Secular hall — fictional composite

Label: Fictional composite. Not a real person. Not a real funeral. Setting: a community hall with stacked chairs, no liturgy. Speaker: a committee member. Slot: four minutes. Closer: the niece, or the officiant if the niece already spoke. No invented prayer.

This hall. He stacked the chairs so the cart would still roll on the broken wheel. I am Nia. I am on the committee. Bert's niece asked me to speak here, in the room he treated as a job. I have four minutes. I asked her if she wanted a prayer in this slot. She said no. I

will not invent one.

Bert Lang is a composite name for this page. I am going to say Bert. Some of you said Albert. I asked the niece. Albert is the notice. Bert is the cart.

On Saturdays he priced the paperbacks at fifty pence and then sold them for twenty if you talked to him. The books were not the point. The talking was, and he would deny that. I watched him do it for six years. I checked six against the sign-in book in the kitchen. The book has his initials, B.L., in a hand that got larger.

He refused a new cart. He said a new cart would make us careless with the chairs. I thought that was stubborn. The wheel still works if you lift the left side. I lifted the left side with him for those six years. Last month I ordered a new cart and then I cancelled the order. I am not proud of the cancel. I am telling you the wheel was his, and I am not going to replace it this week so the hall can look improved.

He kept a tin of screws under the stage for the table that wobbles. The table still wobbles. I used a screw from the tin on Thursday. The table still wobbles. He would have liked that I tried. I am not going to say he would have liked it. I do not know what he would have liked this week. I know the tin.

He unlocked the kitchen at seven on jumble mornings and put the kettle on before anyone had a right to tea. I arrived at seven-ten and found the cups already out. He said the cups are not a welcome, they are how you start a hall. I used to arrive earlier to beat him. I never did. I am not going to make seven a virtue. It was a kettle.

There is no homily in this slot. There is no reading unless the niece already placed one after. I was told the order: my four minutes, then the niece if she wants, then the doors. I will not stretch my four so the doors feel blessed.

I will not say this hall was his church. This hall was a hall. He stacked chairs in it. That is a life you can say without a borrowed sacred word.

If I stop after the paperbacks, the officiant has the page. Start at the cart. Do not add a moment of silence I did not write. Silence is theirs if they take it. It is not a trick I pull to look solemn.

Bert. The cart. I am going to sit.

Margin notes. Secular hall: ask whether a prayer belongs. If the family said no, you do not supply one to sound complete. Open on the room you are standing in. Story one: paperbacks, twenty pence, the sign-in book. Story two: the broken wheel he would not replace. Do not call the hall a church. Do not stretch the slot so the doors feel blessed. Lines that were cut: *This was his sanctuary. He would have wanted us to keep smiling.* Spare: start at the cart. No silence stunt.

10. Church frame (ask, do not preach) — fictional composite

Label: Fictional composite. Not a real person. Not a real funeral. Setting: a church the speaker does not belong to. Speaker: a nephew. Slot: tight, two eulogies sharing a short window; he wrote three minutes and will sit sooner. Closer: the officiant. Ask first. Do not preach. Heaven is not your fact.

I asked the officiant what I may say in this house. I was told: her name, a story, sit. I will not preach. I am Simon. I am her nephew. I am not a member here. I have this written.

Frances Bell is a composite name for this page. I am going to say Frances. Some of you said Fran. I asked her sister. Fran is the kitchen. Frances is the name on the board in the porch. I will sit with Frances in this room.

She kept the hymn book open with a bus ticket from the 14. The ticket was expired. She said the page still needed a weight. I saw the ticket. I did not take it. If it is still in the book, that is the family's business, not a relic I describe for effect.

When I was twenty and angry at a funeral that was not hers, she took me to the hall after, not to the altar. She gave me tea and did not correct my theology. She corrected the way I held the cup, which was too close to the rim. I have that. I do not have a sentence about where she is now. I was not hired for that sentence. The officiant has that work if this house wants it.

I asked again yesterday, by email, whether a line from the book of this house should sit in my mouth. The answer was no. The readings are already placed. My job is Frances and one room I can stand in without borrowing a vestment. I am going to stay in the hall with the tea.

I will not say God needed her. I will not say she is an angel. I will not close the book for you. I will not borrow a line in a language I do not pray in. If the family wanted a line from this house, they would have given it to me, spelled, with the sound. They gave me none to add. I have Frances and the ticket.

She worked the coat rail here on first Sundays. I checked that with her sister, not with a guess from a photograph. I will not turn the coat rail into a sermon about service. She hung coats. People found them. I hung my own coat here twice and could not find it. She pointed at the end peg without a speech. The end peg was where the coats that looked alike went. Mine looked alike. That is the whole theology I am qualified to offer.

I was asked not to run long. There is another speaker, and there is a liturgy that is not mine. I will not use my minutes to explain my own faith. My own faith can wait for the car park.

If I stop after the ticket, do not fill the gap with a psalm I did not choose. The officiant already has the psalm if there is one.

Frances. The ticket. I am going to sit.

Margin notes. Church frame: you ask the officiant before you write. You say you asked. You do not invent

liturgy. You do not perform belonging. Story one: hymn book, expired ticket. Story two: tea in the hall, the cup, not the altar. Heaven is not your fact. No borrowed sacred language. Your own faith waits for the car park. Lines that were cut: *God took her because He needed another angel. I know she is looking down.* Spare: the ticket, then sit. Do not add a prayer.

11. Graveside short — fictional composite

Label: Fictional composite. Not a real person. Not a real funeral. Setting: graveside. Speaker: a cousin. Slot: two or three minutes if the wind allows. Handheld if the wind allows, otherwise voice. Closer: the officiant, envelope in a pocket, not a flipping binder.

I will be short. The wind is already in this. I am Dana. I am her cousin. I have two or three minutes if the weather allows. I wrote them large.

Rosa Klein is a composite name for this page. I am going to say Rosa. I asked her brother. He said Rosa, not Rose.

She planted the same bulbs every October and then complained they came up late. She planted them late on purpose. She wanted the complaint. The garden was a conversation. I am not going to do her voice. You have her voice if you knew her. If you did not, a performed voice is a stranger, and the wind will take it anyway.

She kept a stone by the back step for the door when her hands were full. The stone has a paint splash from a year I cannot verify, so I will not date it. The stone is still there. I checked this morning. I am not going to make the stone a relic. I am telling you her hands were often full.

I will not tell the long story about the train. The train needs a closed room and a chair. We do not have those. I wrote the train anyway, last night, because I thought I might be brave. I am not going to read it. The wind would take the middle and leave you with a station you cannot picture. If I have to choose, I choose the bulbs and I sit.

I walked past the stone this morning before anyone else was here. I did not rehearse. I said Rosa once, to see if the mouth would do it. The mouth did it. That is the whole rehearsal.

Her brother asked me because I am the cousin who can stand in weather. That is not a compliment. It is a job. I have this page in a pocket, not a binder. A binder is a sail.

I will not guess the weather as a metaphor. It is wind. It is unkind to paper. That is all. I will not say the sky is weeping. I will not say we return her to the earth as if I were hired to narrate soil. The officiant has the words for this ground if this family wanted those words.

I will not name the years in order. She was born in 1966. I checked the notice. I will not do the jobs. She kept the desk at the clinic on Mason on Wednesdays. Wednesdays can sit in the program. I have October.

If I start to go on, I will look at the officiant and I will stop. Going on is how a graveside becomes a hall without chairs.

Rosa. The bulbs. I step back. If I stop, the officiant has the envelope. Start at October. Do not add the stone unless I have already said the bulbs. Do not add a prayer unless the family already placed one after this slot.

I am done.

Margin notes. Graveside: write short on purpose. Large type. Pocket, not a binder. One story if the wind has already taken a sentence. Story one: October bulbs, the complaint she wanted. Story two: the stone, unverified paint, refuse the relic. Cut the train even if you wrote it. Do not do the voice. Do not make weather into meaning. Lines that were cut: *The heavens are weeping with us. I wrote something longer but the wind will have to take it.* Spare: October, then step back. No second page.

12. Barely knew them — fictional composite

Label: Fictional composite. Not a real person. Not a real funeral. Speaker: a building manager. Thin knowledge. Borrow and attribute. Slot: three minutes, hall. Closer: the sister, who has the life.

I did not know Arthur well. I am Jo. I manage the building. His sister asked me to say his name and one true thing from the stairs. I wrote it down so I would not invent the rest.

Arthur Hale lived on the third floor for nine years. I am glad his name is being said in this room. That is my safe sentence. If I sit after it, I have still spoken.

His sister Carol told me he liked the window open an inch. I never went inside. I am repeating her sentence and I am marking it as hers. Carol, if I have the inch wrong, you will say so after, and I will take it.

The hallway light sat on a timer that clicked at six. He reset it when it drifted. I know because I asked why the click had moved and he said, the click is how I know I am on time for the bus I no longer take. Then he laughed at himself. I have that. I do not have his kitchen. I do not have his work. I do not have a childhood. I will not assemble those from a notice and a guess.

He signed for a parcel once and left it with me because the neighbor was out. He said, I am not a hero, I am on the third floor. I have that sentence too. It is small. Small is honest when you barely knew them.

Carol also told me he took the stairs, not the lift, even when the lift was empty. I am marking that as hers. I saw him on the stairs. I did not know it was a rule. I thought it was a man who had forgotten the lift button. I will not merge her sentence and my guess into one intimacy.

I have a second safe line if the first fails: I did not know him well, and I will not invent the rest. Then I sit.

I will not say he was like a father to the building. He was a tenant who reset a timer. I will not say we shared so many talks. We shared a stair and a click. The family has the life. They should.

I will not tell a funny story I do not own. Borrowed intimacy plus a gag is a kind of theft. I will not close with a lesson about checking on your neighbors. I checked a timer. That is the job I was paid for, and one extra sentence Carol gave me. If someone here knew him from work, they should speak in their own slot or not at all. I will not stitch their stories onto mine so the three minutes look full.

If I stop after the safe sentence, let me sit. Carol has the rest. Carol, you do not have to use my page. You have your own.

Arthur Hale. I am glad his name is being said in this room. I am going to sit.

Margin notes. Thin knowledge: say the thinness in the first line. Safe sentence on the card. Borrow and attribute. Do not invent the kitchen. One stair fact you saw. One sentence the sister gave you, marked as hers. No fake intimacy. No gag. Lines that were cut: *In the short time I knew him he became family. He was a father figure to everyone in the building.* Spare: say Arthur Hale and the safe sentence. Sit. Do not start the timer story unless Jo has already begun it.

13. Estranged — fictional composite

Label: Fictional composite. Not a real person. Not a real funeral. The last years were estranged. No spectacle. No case history. Speaker: a sibling. Slot: five minutes, hall. Closer: a cousin, named, already holding the spare. Sudden death is a different draft. This one is the gap.

I am going to say my brother's name. Thomas. Some of you have not heard from him in a long time. I am not going to tell the story of the gap. The gap is real. It is not the speech.

I have a safe sentence if the rest fails. Here it is:
Thomas was my brother, and I am glad his name is being said in this room.

The object I have is a library card in a wallet he left at my house in 2018. I checked the year on a paper in the wallet. I did not go through the rest. The library card has his name in a clerk's handwriting. He used to walk to the branch on Mason and sit in the periodical chairs and not take a paper home. I drove past him twice and did not stop. That is true. I am not going to dress it up as fate. I am not going to confess for a third time. Two drives is the sentence.

When we were children he could fix a bicycle chain with a stick when the pin was gone. I saw it in the alley behind the brick building we rented. I do not have a second childhood montage. I have a chain and a stick and a boy who did not want to walk the bike home. I will not say that was the real him, as if the later years were fake. The later years happened. They are not this microphone's file.

I will not explain how he died. You who need to know already know. You who do not need to know should not learn it from a microphone. I will not name a hospital, a night, a substance, a charge. Those details wound the row and do not make me honest. They make me a narrator of harm.

I will not tell you what I should have done in 2019, or 2020, or the year I deleted his number and then wrote it back down. That is a kitchen conversation if it is anything. It is not a hall. I will not ask the first row to nod as if we have all agreed the gap was inevitable.

I will not guess where he is. I will not assign peace. I will not ask the room to forgive anyone on a schedule. I will not turn the stand into a pamphlet about a disease, even if a pamphlet would be true.

If I cannot go on, my cousin Reed has the rest of this page. Reed, you read what I wrote. Then you sit. Sitting down is allowed for me and for you. If I stop after the library card, do not start the bicycle unless I ask with a look. You may say the safe sentence and sit. You do not fill the leftover minutes with stories you remember.

Thomas. I am glad his name is being said in this room. That is what I have.

Margin notes. Estranged: name the weather without opening the file. No timeline of the fight. Safe sentence on the card. Story one: library card, 2018, you drove past. One sentence of your failure, then leave it. Story two: one childhood scene, not a way to erase the adult gap. No mechanism. No sermon. Lines that were cut: *He's in a better place. We all did our best. Addiction is a disease, which is why...* Spare: safe sentence, then sit. Leftover minutes belong to the officiant.

14. Sudden — fictional composite

Label: Fictional composite. Not a real person. Not a real funeral. The death was sudden. The family is not estranged. No spectacle. No last day as a tour.

Speaker: a sister. Slot: five minutes, hall. Closer: her husband, named, already holding the spare.

I am not going to tell you how this week arrived. You who need to know already know. I am Pam. I am Meg's sister. I have this written.

Meg Dunn is a composite name for this page. I am going to say Meg. I asked her partner. Meg is the name.

The grocery list is still on the fridge. Milk and a question mark. I did not add the answer. I am not going to photograph the list. I am not going to read it as a sign. It is a list. She wrote lists. She left a question mark when she could not remember whether we still had milk. We did. I checked. I am telling you that because I checked a fridge, not because the week has a moral.

The car keys are on the hook by the door, the hook she installed crooked and would not redo. She said a crooked hook still holds keys. I used to straighten pictures in her hall. She put them back. I thought that was stubborn. I think now it was her hall.

I will not walk you through the last day. I will not do the news version. I will not name the road, the room, the time. The notice already chose what the death is allowed to say in public. I will not expand it so the back row can feel informed.

I will not assign peace. I will not say at least it was quick, as if speed were a kindness I am hired to sell. I will not say she did not suffer. I was not there for the minute that would let me say that, and even if I had been, this slot is not a medical report.

I have a safe sentence if the rest fails. Meg was my sister, and I am glad her name is being said in this room.

She was born in 1981. I checked the notice. I will not do the jobs. She ran the till at the garden shop on Sycamore on Saturdays. Saturdays are in the program if someone needs them. I have the list and the hook.

I saw her at that till once. A man asked for a plant that would not die. She sold him a fern and said, this one dies if you love it too hard, water the tray not the leaves. I bought nothing. I stood there being a sister. She did not need a sister at the till. She needed the fern to leave.

I will not joke. This is the kind of week people already lower their voice for. A joke I own in a kitchen is still a joke I will not introduce today.

If I cannot go on, my husband Chris has this page. Chris, you read what I wrote. Then you sit. If I stop after the list, do not start the hook unless I look at you. You may say the safe sentence and sit.

The list. The hook. I am going to sit.

Margin notes. Sudden: no mechanism, no last images, no news tour. Open by refusing the week as a plot. Story one: grocery list, question mark, you checked the fridge. Story two: crooked hook, pictures

she put back. Safe sentence on the card. Do not sell speed as mercy. Do not joke. Do not photograph the list. Lines that were cut: *At least it was quick. She's in a better place. She didn't suffer.* Spare: safe sentence, then sit. Do not add the shop.

15. Funny, then quiet — fictional composite

Label: Fictional composite. Not a real person. Not a real funeral. Speaker: a daughter. Slot: five minutes, hall. Closer: a brother in the second row. Their joke. The landing. Not a roast. Wait written on the page.

He talked to parking meters. I am Ivy. I am his daughter. I have this written, including the wait.

Hank Morse is a composite name for this page. I am going to say Hank. Some of you said Henry. I asked my mother. Henry is the notice. Hank is the meter.

He put the coins in and said, you and I both know this is theater. Then he paid. That line is his. I am not going to improve it. I am not going to do the voice. I am not going to add a tag.

I will wait here.

He still paid. He still came back out if the rear tire sat on the line. Mrs. Peña once left a note. He moved the car and left a note back that said you are right, without a joke. The joke was for the meter. The neighbor got the correction.

He named the dog after Pell Street, where he grew up. The dog still answers. I will not do a bit about the dog

outliving him. That bit is a roast of the week. I will not say at least the dog will be less work now. I will not say we can laugh, it is what he would have wanted. I am not hired to verdict his wants.

He parked as if the lines were a suggestion. The lot knew him. That is the second true thing, and it is already close to a second joke, so I will not build it. I will say he came back out. That is the landing I have. I tested the meter line on my mother. She smiled and added the note to Mrs. Peña. That is how I knew the joke was already in the family. If she had gone still I would have cut it. She did not go still.

I will not do a run. I will not do a callback. I will not do the voice of the meter. If the laugh is large I will still wait. If there is no laugh I will still wait. I will not apologize for the line. Apology turns the joke into a problem the room now has to solve with me.

He was born in 1958. I checked the notice. I will not read the jobs. He repaired washers in the shop on Binder until 2019. The shop can sit in the program. I have the meter and the dog's name.

I saw him in that shop once after hours. He was talking to a machine that would not drain. He said, you and I both know this is theater, and then he replaced the pump. Same line as the meter. I am not going to call it a callback. I am telling you the line was his in more than one room. I will not say it a third time.

If I stop after the wait, my brother has this page. He starts at *He still paid*. He does not add a second joke he remembers from Christmas. Christmas is a kitchen. This is a hall.

Hank. The meter. The dog's name. I am going to sit with that.

Margin notes. Funny, then quiet: the whole move. Their line, not yours. Write WAIT on the page. No tag. No *but seriously*. No *what he would have wanted*. Story two is the landing, not another bit. Do not roast the dog, the body, or the week. Test the joke on one living person first; this composite assumes that test already happened. Lines that were cut: *He couldn't park to save his life, which, given the week, is unfortunate. We can laugh. It's what he would have wanted*. Spare: start at *He still paid*. No second joke.

16. Two-minute slot — fictional composite

Label: Fictional composite. Not a real person. Not a real funeral. Speaker: a daughter. Slot: two minutes, church, two eulogies sharing a short window. She asked the officiant. She wrote a page that can lose a paragraph. Closer: the officiant. If she is over, she sits before the biscuit.

I asked the officiant. I have two minutes. I am Kim. I am his daughter. I will not use three. I wrote the limit at the top of the page so my mouth would see it.

Victor Lane is a composite name for this page. I am going to say Victor. I asked my mother. Victor is the name.

He left the porch light on until he heard the gate. I was thirty and he still did it. I told him I could find a key. He said the light is not for the key. I have that. I do not

have the rest of the house. The rest of the house is in the program and in my mother's slot if she wants it.

I timed this in the kitchen last night. At a walk it was two minutes and ten if I kept the biscuit. At a walk with grief it will be longer. That is why the biscuit is marked. I am not proud of a timer. The officiant asked for two. Two is the job.

He worked at the print shop on Binder until 2016. I checked the card in his wallet. I will not read the shop. I will not read the years before the shop. I will not read the names of the machines. I will not tell you about the ink on his hands. Ink is a résumé in costume.

If I am under, and only if I am under, I will say the biscuit. He took his coffee black and then put a biscuit in it until it was not coffee. That is the second story. If the officiant looks at me, I cut it. I am looking at him now. I am cutting it.

I will not thank everyone for coming. I will not thank the officiant in a paragraph. I asked. He gave me two minutes. That is the thanks.

I will not say Dad in a way that turns this into a private call the row has to overhear. I will say Victor, and I will say the porch light, and I will sit.

I will not close with a lesson about coming home before dark. The light was his habit. It is not your homework.

I have a line I cut this morning: he kept a spare bulb in the drawer by the door. It is a good line. It is a third object. Two minutes cannot carry three objects. The drawer can wait for the car park. If my mother wants the bulb, she can have it. I will not steal her window to

finish a house.

If I stop after the gate, do not start the biscuit. The biscuit is the cut. The officiant has the next piece of the order. My mother has her own two minutes if that is the share we were given. I will not steal hers to finish mine.

Victor. The porch light. I am going to sit. I am under two if I skipped the biscuit. I skipped the biscuit.

Margin notes. Two-minute slot: ask, write the cut on the page, watch the officiant. One story is the speech. The biscuit is the spare you are willing to lose. Refuse the CV even harder than in five minutes. No thank-you list. Do not steal the other eulogy's window. At a walk, even this page can run long. Grief slows you. Time it aloud. Lines that were cut: *I know I only have a moment but he was a man who...* and the whole shop. Spare: porch light, then sit. Never start the biscuit if she has already sat.

Take the furniture. Leave the names. Leave the sentences. If a draft here is prettier than what you can write this week, ignore prettier. Pretty is how a composite sneaks into a real mouth. Print large. Number the pages. Hand the spare to a person who has legs. Sit if you must. Do not post the page.

