

# Burial Service

*Jim Walker*

The place they put him seemed extravagant —  
Sprawling flowers, hovering crowd, artificial grass  
To cover up plain dirt.  
The coffin shone, wood lustrous as the new organ  
At the church. He must be proud, I thought.  
The words of the sermon flowed mellifluous  
But the prayer seemed short and the west wind  
Blew the women's fine-combed hair askew  
And chilled despite late autumn sun.  
After the Amens people melted into their cars  
Except Grandma and her six grown sons.  
Eyes reddened, she refused to go.  
"It's not right," she said. "We can't just leave him."  
Then the brothers threw back the artificial grass  
And one by one dug deep into the mound of earth  
To fling their loads atop the shining wood.  
Sweat brimmed their foreheads,  
Crept into the creases of their dark suits,  
But they labored as if to save a life  
Until the hole lay filled.  
Still she would have stayed, but they whispered  
In her ear, took her by the arm, and all but carried her,  
Looking backward desperately, to the waiting limousine.  
I visit over spans of years  
And find the place quiet, lonely, small.  
Now that she has joined him, I wonder at memory's miracle,  
The moment, frozen in my mind, the look in her eyes,  
The sons' quiet fury as they tore into their resenting task  
That day so distant in the files of time.

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