

## Village Funeral

Peering around in part - familiar space ,  
 Last - gasp arrivals seek  
 Expected , inconspicuous niche ,  
 Bewildered at a church already packed  
 With knowing ones more skilled than they  
 In customary village funeral lore.

At last squeezed tight , they dust and shine the pews  
 Ignored since last the village joined  
 To celebrate , in passing tribute , one of theirs.  
 Bonded , diverse , they shuffle , chat , and nudge ,  
 Acknowledge one another ' s membership ---  
 Ignore indifferently off - comers  
 Presumptuously here.

Clothed in their varied best , they demonstrate  
 Unequal course through life's dark vale  
 Since shared occasions of a differing sort  
 In village classrooms long ago.

Parading tribal fellowship  
 They mark arrival of those few whose turn  
 Now falls to be at centre stage  
 In silent , standing courtesy ---  
 And sideways , curious glance.

Strangers to prayer and ritual ,  
 Though versed enough in pastures green ,  
 They dare to hope the resurrection and the life  
 Reserves them room in Heaven ' s manse.

Who knows what thoughts each present has ,  
 Of private griefs , or shrouded secrets long concealed ,  
 Now boxed in oak to disappear in earth or fire ?  
 Perhaps relieved , they bellow their Jerusalems ,  
 And cock attentive ear to catch the Vicar's slip  
 For plenary , post - mortal blame.

Exuding care of loved ones left behind ,  
 Respect at last for those they ' ve safely stowed away,  
 They hint at tensions lightly eased ---  
 Just sad enough to feel another 's grief ,  
 Yet consummately glad that they survive.



In solemn - faced retreat , coffin to fore ,  
They march in heavy tread .  
But once released , proprieties done ,  
A sudden mood of levity prevails .  
The stranger , passing by , might pause  
As sombre - seeming celebrants  
Defy their sobre suiting  
In gush of joshing talk .  
Deliverance from death ' s precinct once again  
Gives genuine cause for generous cheer.

Their turn will come , they know ,  
To follow close , and , worse , to lead  
The file to life ' s definitive ,  
A void peculiarly their own .

Yet in this moment , now ,  
The clan , diminished by a single loss ,  
Endures renewed in village rite.