

## **The Strange Funeral in Braddock**

*Gold, Michael, 1894-1967*

Listen to the drums of a strange American funeral.  
Listen to the story of a strange American funeral.

In the town of Braddock, Pennsylvania,  
Where the steel-mills live like foul dragons, burning, devouring man and earth and sky,  
It is spring. Now the spring has wandered in, a frightened child in the land of the steel ogres,  
And Jan Clepak, the great grinning Bohemian, on his way to work at six in the morning,  
Sees buttons of bright grass on the hills above the river, plum-trees hung with wild white  
    blossoms,  
And as he sweats half-naked at his puddling-trough, a fiend by the lake of brimstone,  
The plum-trees soften his heart,  
And the green grass-memories return and soften his heart,  
And he forgets to be hard as steel, and remembers only his wife's breasts, his baby's little  
    laughter,  
And he remembers cows and sheep, and the grinning peasants, and the villages and fields of  
    sunny Bohemia.

Listen to the mournful drums of a strange funeral!  
Listen to the story of a strange American funeral!

Wake up! Wake up! The furnaces are roaring like tigers,  
The flames are flinging themselves at the high roof,  
Wake up! It is ten o'clock, and the next batch of mad, flowing steel is to be poured in your  
    puddling-trough,  
Wake up! Wake up! for a flawed lever is cracking in one of the fiendish cauldrons,  
Wake up! Wake up! For now the lever has cracked, and the steel is raging and running like a  
    madman,  
Wake up! Oh, the dream is ended and the steel has swallowed you forever, Jan Clepak!

Listen to the mournful drums of a strange funeral.  
Listen to the story of a strange American funeral!

Now three tons of hard steel hold at their heart the bones, flesh, nerves, the muscles, brains  
    and heart of Jan Clepak,  
They hold the memories of green grass and sheep, the plum-trees, the baby-laughter, and the  
    sunny Bohemian villages.  
And the directors of the steel-mill present the great coffin of steel and man-memories to the  
    widow of Jan Clepak,  
And on a great truck it is borne now to a great trench in the graveyard,

And Jan Clepak's widow and two friends ride in a carriage behind the block of steel that holds  
Jan Clepak,  
And they weep behind the carriage-blinds, and mourn the soft man who was killed by the hard  
steel.

Listen to the drums of a strange funeral!  
Listen to the story of a strange American funeral!

Now three thinkers are thinking strange thoughts in the graveyard  
"O, I'll get drunk and stay drunk forever, I'll never marry woman, or father laughing children,  
I'll forget everything, I'll be nothing from now on,  
Life is a dirty joke, like Jan's funeral!"  
One of the friends is thinking in the sweet-smelling graveyard,  
As a derrick lowers the three tons of steel that held Jan Clepak.  
(LISTEN TO THE DRUMS OF THE STRANGE AMERICAN FUNERAL!)

"I'll wash clothes, I'll scrub floors, I'll be a fifty-cent whore, but my children will never work in the  
steel-mill!"  
And Jan Clepak's widow is thinking as earth is shovelled over the great steel coffin,  
In the spring sunlight, in the soft April air,  
(LISTEN TO THE DRUMS OF THE STRANGE AMERICAN FUNERAL!)

"I'll make myself hard as steel, harder,  
I'll come some day and make bullets out of Jan's body, and shoot them into a tyrant's heart!"  
The other friend is thinking, the listener,  
He who listened to the mournful drums of the strange funeral.  
Who listened to the story of the strange American funeral.  
And turned as mad as a fiendish cauldron with cracked lever.

LISTEN TO THE MOURNFUL DRUMS OF A STRANGE FUNERAL.  
LISTEN TO THE STORY OF A STRANGE AMERICAN FUNERAL