

TOM'S FUNERAL

[vicar on stage. THREE mourners

grams: gentle organ music playing]

VICAR: Dearly beloved. We are gathered here today to say farewell to Tom Cole. I didn't know Tom very well. In fact I didn't know him at all. I never met him. So why, you may ask, am I leading this funeral service for a complete stranger? Well, because I get paid for it. Not much I'll have you know, probably less than you might think. In fact it's barely enough to pay for a weekend break for two.

This year we are wondering about Paris, which can be quite cheap in the winter months - if a little chilly - or Budapest, which I have heard is quite beautiful. So, anyway, Let us begin.

Congregant: How about Florence?

V: Yes, I have heard that is quite breathtaking, but not cheap. And my boyfriend has this thing about Italian men which, quite frankly, I don't wish to encourage. But thank-you anyway.

Now, there comes a moment in every man's life when he has to die, and at this moment life becomes death. What happens when we die? This is one of man's biggest questions. It's right up there with "why are we here", "how did we get here" and "how do you stop leather shorts from chafing?"

If you are looking for answers to this question you've come to the wrong place. I've got absolutely no idea. I presume there is some sort of afterlife, but as to what it looks like, who knows? Heaven could be a spring day frolicking in a flowery meadow by the River Cam. Or it could be Harvey Nics... the shop. Not Dr Harvey Nix my urologist. By the same token hell could be a rainy day on an urban estate, cold, wet and naked, high on a cocktail of drugs and alcohol, and weighed down by the crushing disappointment of missing out on some cheap tickets to La Traviata. Or it could be Lidl's. Who knows? Not me.

Whatever it may look like Tom has gone to one or the other. Now, this being a funeral service, filled with grieving friends and relatives - of whom I may say he seems to have had remarkably few - it is incumbent upon me to say he has gone to heaven. But has he? What was he really contributing to society? A professional babysitter at the age of 42, God help us. He wasn't especially good-looking and he lived in Leatherhead. So he may actually have gone to hell. But despite this and the fact that he died young, we must still try to find something positive from Tom's death. This is a crowded country.

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Parking in Dorking is a nightmare. We do need the room. Perhaps then at this moment of sombre reflection we can still find it in our hearts to say Tom Cole. Thank-you. For dying. And on that note please stand and sing hymn number 337. "All God's children are precious". I think it's this one [presses wrong button and plays totally inappropriate music]