

Louis had slept on the bottom bunk in the children's room. He was surrounded by soft-toy monsters and a fire engine dug into his back. Somewhere outside a drill ripped into a pavement; it must be daytime. Louis turned over and curled up, knees under his chin, hands between his thighs, nose squashed under a downy pink dinosaur smelling of dribble and curdled milk.

Why had they rowed the previous evening? ... Oh, yes! It was because Alice wanted to be cremated whilst he wanted to be buried. For Alice, with her straightforward common sense, it was crystal clear. First of all, cremation was less expensive; secondly, it was cleaner; thirdly, it avoided uselessly occupying ground (think what could be built instead of the Thiais cemetery, for example!); and fourthly, her somewhat romantic conclusion was that she would like her ashes to be scattered off the coast of Kalymnos (where they had spent their last holiday) from the bow of a beautiful white boat.

He had interrupted her a bit abruptly. First of all, when you're dead you don't give a flying fuck about

the burial costs; secondly, we already tip enough muck into the sea; thirdly, cemeteries are much more pleasant to wander through than dormitory towns; and fourthly, given the progress of science, it's entirely possible that one day we'll be able to recreate life from skeletons, whereas a handful of ashes thrown in the sea, well ... He'd accompanied the last point with an obscene gesture.

And who was going to pay for his fucking burial? Was it not enough that he sponged off everyone while he was alive, did it have to continue after his death? Such egotism! Would he like chrysanthemums every Hallowe'en as well?

Of course he wanted chrysanthemums! And trees filled with birds, and cats everywhere! Wasn't she the one who went into raptures over the mossy old gravestones in the Père-Lachaise? That one where the stone had split under pressure from a growing laurel tree?

OK, so why didn't he put money aside to pay for his old moss-covered gravestone? Why was that then?

Here we go, money, it's always about money ...

After that all he remembered was a sordid slide into a petty domestic squabble and the harsh realities backed up with numbers that she threw in his face. He didn't have the ammunition to argue with Alice about money, so he had risen from the table, saying, 'If that's the way you feel, I just won't die. That'll be cheaper, won't it?'