The hearse was the mobile flower-bed of his dreams; gladioli, sunflowers, lilies and orchids bloomed on polished black, an impossible riot of spring.

They showed us up, shadows in our dark suits as through North London's traffic we progressed past the chorus line of incredulous angels at the bus stop, the shining parade of shop windows, and the syncopated lights until we turned down into Jordan Road.

I was a lamentable accompanist ruining *Nina from Argentina*, unable to keep time or find the notes; he'd smile and offer: that was nearly perfect ...

I resigned before we made it to the stage.

But as he crossed into the glamour of the lights in some unlikely basement he was transfigured, our first angel in sequins and a feather boa serenading Heaven's glitter-ball.

When the mauve chapel curtains discreetly closed after the service, for once he did not return to a standing ovation and an encore –

no *I'll Be Seeing You*, no *Funny Valentine*, no coloratura aria to his finished body, achieving that heart-shattering high C:

perhaps we could only hear, or bear to hear the pitches and keys of the tuned silence in which we stood still, waiting,

 our flowers set on the ground that should have been bouquets tossed to the stage from the footlights as he took his curtain calls.