

The One Who Remembers, Ray Bradbury

The One Who Remembers

For a long while, many days and then weeks, the place was empty above the town. On occasion when the rains came and the lightning struck, the merest plume of smoke would arise from the charred timbers sunk inward on the cellar and its broken vintages and from the attic beams fallen in black skeletons on themselves to cover the buried wines.

When there was no longer smoke there was dust which lifted in veils and clouds, in which visions, remembrances of the House, flickered and faded like sudden starts of dream, and then these, too, ceased.

And with the passage of time a young man came along the road like one emerging from a dream or stepping forth from the quiet tides along a silent sea to find himself in a strange landscape staring at the abandoned House as if he knew but did not know what it had once contained.

The wind shifted in the empty trees, questioning.

He listened carefully and replied:

"Tom," he said. "It's Tom. Do you know me? Do you remember?"

The branches of the tree trembled with remembrance.

"Are you here now?" he said.

Almost, came the whisper of a reply. Yes. No.

The shadows stirred.

The front door of the House squealed and slowly blew open. He moved to the bottom of the steps leading up.

The chimney flue at the center of the House hollowed a breath of temperate weather.

"If I go in and wait, then what?" he said, watching the vast front of the silent House for response.

The front door drifted on its hinges. The few remaining windows shook softly in their frames, reflecting the first twilight stars.

He heard but did not hear the sussurance about his ears.

Go in. Wait.

He put his foot on the bottom step and hesitated.

The timbers of the House leaned away from him as if to draw him near.

He took another step.

"I don't know. What? Who am I looking for?"

Silence. The House waited. The wind waited in the trees.

"Ann? Is that who? But no. She's long gone away. But there was another. I almost know her name. What ... ?"

The House timbers groaned with impatience. He moved up to the third step and then all the way to the top where he stood, imbalanced by the wide open door where the weather drew its breath, as if to waft him in. But he stood very still, eyes shut, trying to see a shadow face behind his eyelids.

I almost know the name, he thought.

In. In.

He stepped in through the door.

Almost instantly the House sank the merest quarter of an inch as if the night had come upon it or a cloud drifted to weight the high attic roof.

In the attic heights there was a dream inside of a slumber inside of a flesh.

"Who's there?" he called quietly. "Where are you?"

The attic dust rose and sank in a stir of shadow.

"Oh, yes, yes," he said at last. "I know it now. Your blessed name."

He moved to the bottom of the stairs leading up through the moonlight to the waiting attic of the House.

He took a breath.

"Cecy," he said, at last.

The House trembled.

Moonlight shone on the stairs. He went up.

"Cecy," he said a final time.

The front door slowly, slowly drifted and then slid and then very quietly shut.

The End