



The Reincarnate, Ray Bradbury

The Reincarnate

After a while you will get over the inferiority complex. Maybe. There's nothing you can do about it. Just be careful to walk around at night. The hot sun is certainly difficult on you. And summer nights aren't particularly helpful. So the best thing for you to do is wait for chilly weather.

The first six months are your prime. The seventh month the water will seep through and the maggots will begin. By the end of the eighth month your usefulness will dwindle. By the tenth month you'll lie exhausted and weeping the sorrow without tears, and you will know then that you will never move again.

But before that happens there is so much to be thought about, and finished. Many thoughts to be renewed, many old likes and dislikes to be turned in your mind before the sides of your skull fall away.

It is new to you. You are born again. And your womb is silk-lined and fine-smelling of tuberose and linens, and there is no sound before your birth except the beating of the Earth's billion insect hearts. Your womb is wood and metal and satin, offering no sustenance, but only an implacable slot of close air, a pocket within the mother soil. And there is only one way you can live, now.

There must be an emotional hand to slap you on the back to make you move. A desire, a want, an emotion. Then the first thing you know you quiver and rise and strike your brow against silk-skinned wood. That emotion surges through you, calling you.

If it is not strong enough, you will settle down wearily, and will not wake again. But if you grow with it, somehow, if you claw upward, if you work tediously, slowly, many days, you find ways of displacing earth an inch at a time, and one night you crumble the darkness, the exit is completed, and you wriggle forth to see the stars.

Now you stand, letting the emotion lead you as a slender antenna shivers, led by radio waves. You bring your shoulders to a line, you make a step, like a new born babe, stagger, clutch for support—and find a marble slab to lean against. Beneath your trembling fingers the carved brief story of your life is all too tersely told: Born—Died.

You are a stick of wood. Learning to unbend, to walk naturally again, is not easy. But you don't worry about it. The pull of this emotion is too strong in you, and you go on, outward from the land of monuments, into twilight streets, alone on the pale sidewalks, past brick walls, down stony paths.

You feel there is something left undone. Some flower yet unseen somewhere where you would like to see, some pool waiting for you to dive into, some fish uncaught, some lip un-kissed, some star unnoticed. You are going back, somewhere, to finish whatever there is undone.

All the streets have grown strange. You walk in a town you have never seen, a sort of dream town on the rim of a lake. You become more certain of your walking now, and can go quite swiftly. Memory returns.

You know every cobble of this street, you know every place where asphalt bubbled from mouths of cement in the hot oven summer. You

know where the horses were tethered sweating in the green spring at these iron posts so long ago it is a feeble maggot in your brain.

This cross street, where a light hangs high like a bright spider spinning a light web across this one solitudinous spot. You soon escape its web, going on to sycamore gloom. A picket fence dances woodenly beneath probing fingers. Here, as a child, you rushed by with a stick in hand manufacturing a machine-gun racket, laughing.

These houses, with the people and memories of people in them. The lemon odor of old Mrs. Hanlon who lived there, remember? A withered lady with withered hands and gums withered when her teeth gleamed upon the cupboard shelf smiling all to their porcelain selves.

She gave you a withered lecture every day about cutting across her petunias. Now she is completely withered like a page of ancient paper burned. Remember how a book looks burning? That's how she is in her grave now, curling, layer upon layer, twisting into black rotted and mute agony.

The street is quiet except for the walking of a man's feet on it. The man turns a corner and you unexpectedly collide with one another.

You both stand back. For a moment, examining one another, you understand something about one another.

The stranger's eyes are deep-seated fires in worn receptacles. He is a tall, slender man in a very neat dark suit, blond and with a fiery whiteness to his protruding cheekbones. After a moment, he bows slightly, smiling. "You're a new one," he says. "Never saw you before."

And you know then what he is. He is dead, too. He is walking, too. He is “different” just like yourself.

You sense his differentness.

“Where are you going in such a hurry?” he asks, politely.

“I have no time to talk,” you say, your throat dry and shrunken. “I am going somewhere, that is all. Please, step aside.”

He holds onto your elbow firmly. “Do you know what I am?” He bends closer. “Do you not realize we are of the same legion? The dead who walk. We are as brothers.”

You fidget impatiently. “I—I have no time.”

“No,” he agrees, “and neither have I, to waste.”

You brush past, but cannot lose him, for he walks with you. “I know where you’re going.”

“Do you?”

“Yes,” he says, casually. “To some childhood haunt. To some river. To some house or some memory. To some woman, perhaps. To some old friend’s cottage. Oh, I know, all right, I know everything about our kind. I know,” he says, nodding in the passing light and dark.

“You know, do you?”

“That is always why the dead walk. I have discovered that. Strange, when you think of all the books ever written about the dead, about vampires and walking cadavers and such, and never once did the authors of those most worthy volumes hit upon the true secret of why the dead walk. Always it is for the same reason—a memory, a friend, a woman, a river, a piece of pie, a house, a drink of wine, everything and

anything connected with life and—LIVING!” He made a fist to hold the words tight. “Living! REAL living!”

Wordless, you increase your stride, but his whisper paces you:

“You must join me later this evening, my friend. We will meet with the others, tonight, tomorrow night and all the nights until we have our victory.”

Hastily. “Who are the others?”

“The other dead.” He speaks grimly. “We are banding together against intolerance.”

“Intolerance?”

“We are a minority. We newly dead and newly embalmed and newly interred, we are a minority in the world, a persecuted minority. We are legislated against. We have no rights!” he declares heatedly.

The concrete slows under your heels. “Minority?”

“Yes.” He takes your arm confidentially, grasping it tighter with each new declaration. “Are we wanted? No! Are we liked? No! We are feared! We are driven like sheep into a marble quarry, screamed at, stoned and persecuted like the Jews of Germany! People hate us from their fear. It’s wrong, I tell you, and it’s unfair!” He groans. He lifts his hands in a fury and strikes down.

You are standing still now, held by his suffering and he flings it at you, bodily, with impact. “Fair, fair, is it fair? No. I ask you. Fair that we, a minority, rot in our graves while the rest of the continent sings, laughs, dances, plays, rotates and whirls and gets drunk! Fair, is it fair, I ask you that they love while our lips shrivel cold, that they caress while our

fingers manifest to stone, that they tickle one another while maggots entertain us!

“No! I shout it! It is ungodly unfair! I say down with them, down with them for torturing our minority! We deserve the same rights!” he cries. “Why should we be dead, why not the others?”

“Perhaps you are right.”

“They throw us down and slam the earth in our white faces and load a carven stone over our bosom to weigh us with, and shove flowers into an old tin can and bury it in a small spaded hole once a year. Once a year? Sometimes not even that! Oh, how I hate them, oh how it rises in me, this full blossoming hatred for the living. The fools. The damn fools! Dancing all night and loving, while we lie recumbent and full of disintegrating and helpless passion! Is that right?”

“I hadn’t thought about it,” you say, vaguely.

“Well,” he snorts, “well, we’ll fix them.”

“What will you do?”

“There are thousands of us gathering tonight in the Elysian Park and I am the leader! We will destroy humanity!” he shouts, throwing back his shoulders, lifting his head in rigid defiance. “They have neglected us too long, and we shall kill them. It’s only right. If we can’t live, then they have no rights to live, either! And you will come, won’t you, my friend?” he says, hopefully. “I have coerced many, I have spoken with scores.

You will come and help. You yourself are bitter with this embalming and this suppression, are you not, else you would not be out tonight.

Join us. The graveyards of the continent will explode like overripened apples, and the dead will pour out to overflow the villages! You will come?"

"I don't know. Yes. Perhaps I will," you say. "But I must go now. I have some place ahead of me to find. I will come."

"Good," he says, as you walk off, leaving him in shadow. "Good, good, good."

Up the hill now, as quick as you can. Thank God there is a coolness upon the Earth tonight. If it was a hot night it would be terrible to be above the ground in your condition.

You gasp happily. There, in all its rococo magnificence, is the house where Grandma sheltered her boarders. Where you as a child sat on the porch Fourth of July, watching sky rockets climb in fiery froth, the pinwheels cursing, sputtering sparks, the fire-crackers beating at your ears from the metal cannon of Uncle Bion who loved noise and bought fifty dollars worth of crackers just to explode them with his hand-rolled cigarette.

Now, standing, trembling with this emotion of recapture, you know why the dead walk. To see again things like this. Here, on nights when dew invaded the grass, you crushed the wet petals and grass-blades and leaves as your boy bodies wrestled, and you knew the sweetness of now, now, TONIGHT! who cares for tomorrow, tomorrow is nothing, yesterday is over and done, tonight live, tonight!

Inside that grand old tall house the incredible Saturday nights took place, the Boston-baked beans in hordes saturated with thick juices,

panoplied with platforms of bacon. Oh, yes, all of that. And the huge black piano that cried out at you when you performed musical dentistry upon its teeth ...

And here, here, man, remember? This is Kim's house. That yellow light, around the back, that's her room. Do you realize that she might be in it now, painting her pictures or reading her books? In one moment, glance over that house, the porch, the swing before the door where you sat on August evenings. Think of it. Kim, your wife. In a moment you will see her again!

You bang the gate wide and hurry up the walk. You think to call, but instead slip quietly around the side. Her mother and father would go crazy if they saw you. Bad enough, the shock to Kim.

Here is her room. Glowing and square and soft and empty. Feed upon it. Is it not good to see again?

Your breath forms upon the window a symbol of your anxiety; the cold glass films with fog and blurs the exact and wonderful details of her existence there.

As the fog vanishes the form of her room emerges. The pink spread upon the low soft bed, the cherry-wood flooring, brilliantly waxed; throw-rugs like bright heavily furred dogs slumbering acenter it. The mirror. The small cosmetic table, where her sorcery is enacted in an easy pantomime. You wait.

She comes into the room.

Her hair is a lamp burning, bound behind her ears by her moving, she looks tired, her eyes are half-lidded, but even in this uncertain light, blue. Her dress is short and firm to her figure.

Breathlessly, you listen against the cold shell of glass, and as from deep under a sea you hear a song. She sings so softly it is already an echo before it leaves her mouth. You wonder what she thinks as she sings and combs out her hair at the mirror.

The cold brine of you stirs and beats. Certainly she must hear your heart's cold thunder!

Thoughtless, you tap upon the window.

She goes on stroking her hair gently, thinking that you are only the autumn wind outside the glass.

You tap again, anxiously, a bit afraid.

This time she sets down the comb and brush and rises to investigate, calm and certain.

At first she sees nothing. You are shadowed. Her eyes, as she walks toward the window, are focused on the gleaming squares of glass. Then, she looks through. She sees a dim figure beyond the light. She still does not recognize.

"Kim!" You cannot help yourself. "It is I! I am here!"

Your eager face pushes to the light, as a submerged body must surge upon some black tide, suddenly floating, triumphant, with shimmering dark eyes!

The color drops from her cheeks. Her hands open to release sanity which flies away on strange wings. Her hands clasp again, to recapture some last sane thought. She does not scream. Only her eyes are wide as windows seen on a white house amidst a terrific lightning-shaft in a

sudden summer squall, shadeless, empty and silvered with that terrific bolt of power!

“Kim!” you cry. “It is I!”

She says your name. She forms it with a numb mouth. Neither of you can hear it. She wants to run, but instead, at your insistence, she pulls up the window and, sobbing, you climb upward into the light. You slam the window and stand swaying there, only to find her far across the room, crucified by fear against the wall.

You sob raggedly. Your hands rise clean toward her in a gesture of old hunger and want. “Oh, Kim, it’s been so long—”

TIME IS NON-EXISTENT. For five full minutes you remember nothing. You come out of it. You find yourself upon the soft rim of bed, staring at the floor.

In your ears is her crying.

She sits before the mirror, her shoulders moving like wings trying to fly with some agony as she makes the sounds.

“I know I am dead. I know I am. But what can I try to do to this cold? I want to be near your warmness, like at a fire in a long cold forest, Kim ...”

“Six months,” she breathes, not believing it. “You’ve been gone that long. I saw the lid close over your face. I saw the earth fall on the lid like a kind of sounding of drums. I cried. I cried until only a vacuum remained. You can’t be here now—”

“I am here!”

“What can we do?” she wonders, holding her body with her hands.

“I don’t know. Now that I’ve seen you, I don’t want to walk back and get into that box. It’s a horrible wooden chrysalis, Kim, I don’t want its kind of metamorphosis—”

“Why, why, why did you come?”

“I was lost in the dark, Kim, and I dreamed a deep earth dream of you. Like a seventeen-year locust I writhed in my dream. I had to find my way back, somehow.”

“But you can’t stay.”

“Until daybreak.”

“Paul, don’t take of my blood. I want to live.”

“You’re wrong, Kim. I’m not that kind. I’m only myself.”

“You’re different.”

“I’m the same. I still love you.”

“You’re jealous of me.”

“No, I’m not, Kim. I’m not jealous.”

“We’re enemies now, Paul. We can’t love any more. I’m the quick, you’re the dead. We’re opposed by our very natures. We’re natural enemies. I’m the thing you most desire, you represent the thing I least desire, death. It’s just the opposite of love.”

“But I love YOU, Kim!”

“You love my life and what life means, don’t you see?”

“I don’t see! What are we like, the two of us sitting here, talking philosophically, scientifically, at a time when we both should be laughing and glad to see one another.”

“Not with jealousy and fear between us like a net. I loved you, Paul. I loved the things we did together. The processes, the dynamics of our relationship. The things you said, the thoughts you thought. Those things, I still love. But, but—”

“I still think those thoughts and think them over and over, Kim!”

“But we are apart.”

“Don’t be merciless, Kim. Have pity!”

Her face softens. She builds a cage around her face with convulsive fingers. Words escape the cage:

“Is pity love? Is it, Paul?”

There is a bitter tiredness in her breathing.

You stand upright. “I’ll go crazy if this goes on!”

Wearily, her voice replies, “Can dead people go insane?”

You go to her, quickly, take her hands, lift her face, laugh at her with all the false gaiety you can summon:

“Kim, listen to me! Listen! Darling, I could come every night! We could talk the old talk, do the old things! It would be like a year ago, playing, having fun! Long walks in the moonlight, the merry-go-round at White City, the hot dogs at Coral Beach, the boats on the river—anything and everything you say, darling, if only—”

She cuts across your rapid, pitiable gaiety:

“It’s no use.”

“Kim! One hour every evening. Just one. Or half an hour. Any time you say. Fifteen minutes. Five minutes. One minute to see you, that’s all. That’s all.”

You bury your head in her limp, dead hands, and you feel the involuntary quiver shoot through her at your rapid contact. After a moment, she dares to move, slightly. She leans back, her eyes tightly closed, and says, simply: “I am afraid.”

“Why?”

“I have been taught to be afraid, that’s all.”

“Damn the people and their customs and their old-wives tales!”

“Talking won’t stop the fear.”

You want to grasp, hold, stop her, shake sense into her, to clasp her trembling and comfort it as you would a wild bird trying to escape your fingers. “Stop it, stop it, Kim!”

Her trembling gradually passes like movements on a disturbed water pool calming and relaxing. She sinks down upon the bed and her voice is old in a young throat. “All right, darling.” A pause. “Anything you say.” Swallowing. “Anything you wish. If—it makes you happy.”

You try to be happy. You try to burst with joy. You try to smile. You look down upon her as she continues talking vaguely:

“Whatever you say. Anything, my darling.”

You venture to say, “You won’t be afraid.”

“Oh, no.” Her breath flutters in. “I won’t be.”

You excuse yourself. “I just had to see you, you understand? I just had to!”

Her eyes are bright and focused now on you. “I know, Paul, how it must feel. I’ll meet you outside the house in a few minutes. I’ll have to make an excuse to mother and dad to get out past them.”

You raise the window and put one leg out and then turn to look back up at her before vanishing. “Kim, I love you.”

She says nothing, but stares blankly, and shuts the window when you are outside, and she goes away, dimming lights. Held by the dark, you weep with something not quite sorrow, not quite joy. You walk to the corner to wait out the time.

Across the street, past a lilac shrub, a man walks stiffly. There is something familiar about him. You remember. He is the man who accosted you earlier. He is dead, too, and walking through a world that is alien only because it is alive. He goes on along the street, as if in search of something.

Kim is beside you now.

An ice cream sundae is a most wonderful thing. Resting cool, a small white mountain capped by a frock of chocolate and contained in glass, it is something you stare at with spoon poised.

You put some of the ice cream in your mouth, sucking the cold. You pause. The light in your eyes embers down. You sit back, removed.

“What’s wrong?” The old man behind the ancient fountain looks at you, concerned.

“Nothing.”

“Ice cream taste funny?”

“No. It’s fine.”

“Fly in it?” He bends forward.

“No.”

“You ain’t eating it?” he says.

“I don’t want to.” You push it away from you and your lump of heart lowers itself precariously between the lonely bleak walls of your lungs.

“I am sick. I am not hungry. I can’t eat.”

Kim is at your left, eating slowly. At your sign, she lays aside her spoon, also, and cannot eat.

You sit very straight, staring ahead into nothing. How can you tell them that your throat muscles will no longer contract efficiently enough to allow food. How can you speak of the frustrated hunger flaming in you as you watch Kim’s dainty jaw muscles close and open, finishing the white coolness of the ice within her mouth, tasting and liking it.

How can you explain of the crumpled shape of your stomach lying like a dried apricot against your peritoneum? How describe that desiccated rope of intestine that is yours now? That lies coiled neatly, as if you heaped it by hand at the bottom of a cold pit?

Rising, you have no coin in your hand, and Kim pays, and together you swing wide the door and walk out into the stars.

“Kim—”

“That’s all right. I understand,” she says. Taking your arm, she walks down toward the park. Wordless, you realize that her hand is very faintly against you. It is there, but your feeling of it is lost. Beneath your feet, the sidewalk loses its solid tread. It now moves without shock or bump below you, a dream.

Just to be talking, Kim says, “Isn’t that a marvelous smell on the air tonight? Lilacs in bloom.”

You test the air. You can smell nothing. Panic rises in you. You try again, but it is no use.

Two people pass you in the dark, and as they drift by, nodding to Kim and you, as they gain distance behind, one of them comments, fading, “—Don’t you smell something— funny? I wonder if a dog was killed in the street today ...”

“I don’t see anything—”

“—well—”

“KIM! COME BACK!”

You grasp her fleeing hand. It seems that it is this moment she has waited for in a tensed, apprehensive, and semi-gracious silence. The passing of the people and their few words are a trigger to thrust her away, almost screaming from you.

You catch her arm. Wordless, you struggle against her. She beats at you. She twists, and strikes at your binding fingers. You cannot feel her. You cannot feel her doing this! “Kim! Don’t, darling. Don’t run away. Don’t be afraid!”

Her brooch falls to the cement like a beetle. Her heels scuff the hard stony surface. Her breath pants from her. Her eyes are wide. One hand escapes and stretches out behind her as she leans back, using her weight to pull free. The shadows enclose your struggle. Only your breath sounds. Her face glows taut and not soft any more, breaking apart in the light. There are no words. You pull back, your way. She pulls in her direction. You try to speak softly, soothingly, “Don’t let people frighten you about me. Calm down—”

Her words are bitten out in whispers:

“Let go of me. Let go. Let go.”

“No, I can’t do that.”

Again the wordless, dark movement of bodies and arms. She weakens and hangs limply sobbing against you. At your touch she trembles very deeply. You hold her close, teeth chattering. “I want you, Kim. Don’t leave me. I had such plans. To go to Chicago some night. It only takes an hour on the train. Listen to me. Think of it. To eat the most elegant food across fine linen and silver from one another! To let wine lift us by our bootstraps. To stuff ourselves full. And now—” you declare harshly, eyes gleaming in the leaf-dark, “Now—” You hold your thinned stomach, pressing in that traitor thing lying dry and twisted as a paint tube there. “And now I can’t taste the cool of ice cream, or the ripeness of berries, or apple pie or—or—”

Kim speaks.

You tilt your head. "What did you say?"

She speaks again.

"Speak louder," you ask of her, holding her close. "I can't hear you."
She speaks and you cry out, bending near. And you hear absolutely nothing at first, and then, behind a thick cotton wall, her voice says,
"Paul, it's no use. You see? You understand now?"

You release her. "I wanted to see the neon lights. I wanted to find the flowers as they were, to touch your hand, your lips. But, oh god, first my taste goes, then I cannot eat at all, and now my skin is like concrete. And now I cannot hear your voice, Kim. It's like an echo in a lost world."

A great wind shakes the universe, but you do not feel it.

"Paul, this is not the way. The things you desire can't be had this way. It takes more than desire to insure these things."

"I want to kiss you."

"Can your lips feel?"

"No."

"Love depends on more than thought, Paul, because thought itself is built upon the senses. If we cannot talk together, hear together, or feel, or smell the night, or taste the food, what is there left for us?"

You know it is no use, but with a broken voice you argue on: "I can still see you. And I remember what it WAS like!"

“Illusion. Memory is an illusion, nothing more. It is a fire that needs constant tending. And we have no way to tend it if you cannot use your senses.”

“It’s so unfair! I want life!”

“You will live, Paul, I promise that. But not THIS way, the impossible way. You’ve been dead over half a year, and I’ll be going to the hospital in another month—”

You stop. You are very cold. Holding to her shoulders, you stare into her soft, moving face. “What?”

“Yes. The hospital. Our child. Our child. You see, you didn’t have to come back. You are always with me, Paul. You are alive.” She turns you around. “Now I’ll ask you. Go back. Everything balances. Believe that. Leave me with a better memory than this of you, Paul. Everything will work for the best, eventually. Go back where you came from.”

You cannot even cry. Your tear-ducts are shriveled. The thought of the baby comes upon you, and sounds almost correct. But the rebellion in you will not be so easily put down. You turn to shout again at Kim, and without a sign, she sinks slowly to the ground. Bending over her, you hear her few weak words:

“The shock. The hospital. Quick. The shock.”

You walk down the street, she lies in your arms. A grey film forms over your left eye. “I can’t see. The air does things to me! Soon, I’ll be blind in both eyes, Kim, it’s so unfair!”

“Faith,” she whispers, close, you barely hear the word.

You begin to run, stumbling. A car passes. You shout at it. The car stops and a moment later you and Kim and the man in the car are roaring soundlessly toward the hospital.

In the middle of the tempest, her talking stands out. "Have faith, Paul. I believe in the future. You believe it too. Nature is not that cruel or unfair. There is compensation for you somewhere."

Your left eye is now completely blind. Your right eye blurs ominously.

Kim is gone!

The hospital attendants run her away from you. You did not even say goodbye to her, nor she to you! You stand outside, helpless, and then turn and walk away from the building. The outlines of the world blur. From the hospital a pulsing issues forth and turns your thoughts a pale red. Like a big red drum it beats in your head, with loud, soft, hard, easy rhythms.

You walk stupidly across streets, cars just miss striking you down. You watch people eat in gleaming glass windows. Watch hot dogs sizzling juices in a Greek restaurant. Watch people lift forks, knives. Everything glides by on noiseless lubricant of silence. You float. Your ears are solidly blocked. Your nose is clogged. The red drum beats louder, with an even tempo. You long and strive and strain to smell lilacs, taste bacon, or remember what a mockingbird sounded like cutting pieces from the sky with the trilling scissors of his beak. All those wonderful memorious things you try to capture.

Sour-sick, an earthquake of thought and confusion shaking you, you find yourself swaying down a ravine path in Elysian Park. The dead, the dead are walking tonight. They gather tonight. Remember the man who talked to you? Remember what he said? Yes, yes, you still have some fragments of memory. The dead are banding tonight, forming a unit to

swarm over the homes of the warm living people, to kill and decimate them!

That means Kim, too. Kim and the baby.

Kim will die and have to grope and stumble and gabble like this, stinking and falling away from the bone and have dull ears and blind eyes and dry, eroded nostrils. Just like you.

“No!”

The ravine rushes on both sides and under you. You fall, pick yourself up, fall again.

The Leader stands alone as you grope your way to him by the silent creek. Sucking hoarse breaths you stand before him, doubling your fists, wondering where the horde of the undead are, you do not see them. And now the Leader talks to you, explaining, shrugging angrily:

“They did not come. Not one of those cold dead people showed up. You are the only recruit.” He leans wearily against the tree, as if drunk. “The cowards, the persecuted swine.”

“Good.” Your breath, or the illusion of breath, slows. His words are like cold rain on you, bringing confidence and quiet. “I’m glad they didn’t listen to you. There must be some reason why they didn’t obey you. Perhaps—” you grope for the logic of it ... “perhaps something happened to them that we can’t understand, yet.”

The Leader makes a bitter move of his lips, shaking his head back. “I had wild plans. But I am alone. And I see the futility of it now. Even if all the dead should rise, they are not strong enough. One blow and they fall in upon their members like a fire-gutted log. We grow tired so soon. Above the earth our discrepancies are hastened. The lift of an eyebrow is slow, painful toil. I am tired—”

You leave him behind you. His muttering passes away. The red pounding beats in your head again like horses' hooves on soft turf. You walk from the ravine, down the street, and into the graveyard, with mute purpose.

Your name is on the grave-stone still. The cavity awaits you. You slide down the small tunnel into the waiting wooden cavity, no longer afraid, jealous or excited. The complete withdrawal of your various senses has left you little but memory, and that seems to dissolve as the boxed satin erodes and the hard square wood softens. The wood becomes malleable. You lie suspended in warm round darkness. You can actually shift your feet. You relax.

You are overwhelmed by a luxury of warm sustenance, of deep pink thoughts and easy idleness. You are like a great old yeast contracting, the outer perimeter of your old fetidness crumbling, being laved away by a whispering tide, a pulsation and a gentleness of moves.

The coffin is now a round dim shell, no longer square. You breathe sufficiently, not hungry, not worried, and are loved. You are deeply loved. You are secure. The place where you are dreaming shifts, contracts, moves.

Drowsy. Your huge body is washed down in movements until it is small, tiny, compact, certain. Drowsy, drowsy on a slumberous singing tide. Slow. Quiet. Quiet.

Who are you trying to remember? A name plays at the rim of a sea. You run to get it, the waves pluck it away. Somebody beautiful you try to

think of. Someone. A time, a place. Oh, so sleepy. Close round darkness, warmth, tiredness. Soundless shell. Dim tide pulsing. Quiet contraction.

A river of dark bears your feeble body on a series of loops and curves, faster, faster and yet faster.

You break into an openness and are suspended upside down in brilliant yellow light!

The world is immense as a new white mountain. The sun blazes and a huge red hand binds your two feet close as another hand strikes your naked spine to force a cry out of you.

A woman lies below, tired; sweet perspiration beads her face, and there is a wide singing and refreshed and sharpened wonder to this room and this world. You cry out into it with a newly formed voice. One moment upside-down, you are swung right side up, cuddled and nursed against a spiced-sweet breast.

Amid your fine hunger, you forget how to talk, to worry, to think of all things. Her voice, above you, gently tired, whispers over and over:

“My little new born baby. I will name you Paul, for him. For him ...”

These words you do not comprehend. Once you feared something terrifying and black, but what it was you do not know now. It is forgotten in this flesh warmth and cackling content. For but a moment a name forms in your thimble-mouth, you try to say it, not knowing what it means, unable to pronounce it, only able to choke it happily with a fresh glowing that arises from unknown sources. The word vanishes swiftly, leaving a quickly fading, joyous soon-erased after-image of triumph and high laughter in the tiny busy roundness of your head: “Kim! Kim! Oh, Kim!”

The End