

MARVIN BELL

The Book of the Dead Man (Kiss Kiss)

Live as if you were already dead.

—Zen admonition

1. About the Dead Man (Kiss Kiss)

The dead man is of the future, but he will not breathe a word of it.
The dead man will say he is the patchwork offspring of Mother Nature and Father Time.
He frames it thus when folksy, as others say *tsk tsk* to youth or *kiss kiss* for goodbye.
He is common, even so he has tried to pry official fingers from the nuclear button.
He is common, even so he has tried to smoke out the cranks.
The dead man has seen his nation shoot itself in the foot with a blood lust for guns.
He has seen it smoke itself to death.
He has lived among the wistful who can only rub a brass lamp.
He has boarded with the fry cook and the pool tender, the task master and the idler.
He doesn't wear a suit, he is small town, common, he is one-at-a-time.

2. *More About the Dead Man (Kiss Kiss)*

Where now a cyclotron spirals particles at Brookhaven Laboratory, there was Camp Upton.
The dead man saw the soldiers mustering out.

He was a child among the khaki strap undershirts, buffeted by the commotion at the edge of
imminent release.

This was the old way of war, one tour of duty and a discharge.

The dead man's father drove to the Camp to hire a veteran.

And there were prisoners, then, working at roadsides or in fields, happy to have been pulled
from the fighting.

And the veterans of older wars who said nothing afterward.

The dead man is a veteran of an army rent by the *hubris* of empire.

Now dead men and women live among the bereaved of war, live and pass away, live
and pass away.

The dead man dies with the fallen soldier and the aged veteran equally.