

**KADDISH**  
**AND OTHER POEMS**  
**1958—1960**

*ALLEN GINSBERG*

*Afterword by Bill Morgan*

‘—Die,  
If thou wouldst be with that which thou dost seek!’



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# KADDISH

*For Naomi Ginsberg, 1894–1956*

## I

Strange now to think of you, gone without corsets & eyes, while  
 I walk on the sunny pavement of Greenwich Village.  
 downtown Manhattan, clear winter noon, and I've been up  
 all night, talking, talking, reading the Kaddish aloud,  
 listening to Ray Charles blues shout blind on the  
 phonograph  
 the rhythm the rhythm—and your memory in my head three  
 years after—And read Adonais' last triumphant stanzas  
 aloud—wept, realizing how we suffer—  
 And how Death is that remedy all singers dream of, sing,  
 remember, prophesy as in the Hebrew Anthem, or the  
 Buddhist Book of Answers—and my own imagination of  
 a withered leaf—at dawn—  
 Dreaming back thru life, Your time—and mine accelerating  
 toward Apocalypse,  
 the final moment—the flower burning in the Day—and what  
 comes after,  
 looking back on the mind itself that saw an American city  
 a flash away, and the great dream of Me or China, or you and  
 a phantom Russia, or a crumpled bed that never  
 existed—  
 like a poem in the dark—escaped back to Oblivion—  
 No more to say, and nothing to weep for but the Beings in the  
 Dream, trapped in its disappearance,  
 sighing, screaming with it, buying and selling pieces of phantom,  
 worshipping each other,

worshipping the God included in it all—longing or inevitability?—while it lasts, a Vision—anything more?

It leaps about me, as I go out and walk the street, look back over my shoulder, Seventh Avenue, the battlements of window office buildings shouldering each other high, under a cloud, tall as the sky an instant—and the sky above—an old blue place.

or down the Avenue to the South, to—as I walk toward the Lower East Side—where you walked 50 years ago, little girl—from Russia, eating the first poisonous tomatoes of America—frightened on the dock

then struggling in the crowds of Orchard Street toward what?  
—toward Newark

toward candy store, first home-made sodas of the century, hand-churned ice cream in backroom on musty brownfloor boards—

Toward education marriage nervous breakdown, operation, teaching school, and learning to be mad, in a dream—what is this life?

Toward the Key in the window—and the great Key lays its head of light on top of Manhattan, and over the floor, and lays down on the sidewalk—in a single vast beam, moving, as I walk down First toward the Yiddish Theater—and the place of poverty

you knew, and I know, but without caring now—Strange to have moved thru Paterson, and the West, and Europe and here again,

with the cries of Spaniards now in the doorstoops doors and dark boys on the street, fire escapes old as you

—Tho you're not old now, that's left here with me—

Myself, anyhow, maybe as old as the universe—and I guess that dies with us—enough to cancel all that comes—

What came is gone forever every time

That's good! That leaves it open for no regret—no fear  
radiators, lacklove, torture even toothache in the end—

Though while it comes it is a lion that eats the soul—and the  
lamb, the soul, in us, alas, offering itself in sacrifice to  
change's fierce hunger—hair and teeth—and the roar  
of bonepain, skull bare, break rib, rot-skin, braintricked  
Implacability.

Ai! ai! we do worse! We are in a fix! And you're out, Death  
let you out, Death had the Mercy, you're done with your  
century, done with God, done with the path thru it—  
Done with yourself at last—Pure—Back to the Babe  
dark before your Father, before us all—before the  
world—

There, rest. No more suffering for you. I know where you've gone,  
it's good.

No more flowers in the summer fields of New York, no joy now,  
no more fear of Louis,  
and no more of his sweetness and glasses, his high school decades,  
debts, loves, frightened telephone calls, conception beds,  
relatives, hands—

No more of sister Elanor,—she gone before you—we kept it  
secret—you killed her—or she killed herself to bear  
with you—an arthritic heart—But Death's killed you  
both—No matter—

Nor your memory of your mother, 1915 tears in silent movies  
weeks and weeks forgetting, agrieve watching Marie  
Dressler address humanity, Chaplin dance in youth,  
or Boris Godounov, Chaliapin's at the Met, hailing his voice of  
a weeping Czar—by standing room with Elanor & Max  
—watching also the Capitalists take seats in Orchestra,  
white furs, diamonds,

with the YPSL's hitch-hiking thru Pennsylvania, in black baggy  
gym skirts pants, photograph of 4 girls holding each other  
round the waist, and laughing eye, too coy, virginal  
solitude of 1920

all girls grown old, or dead, now, and that long hair in the  
grave—lucky to have husbands later

You made it—I came too—Eugene my brother before (still  
grieving now and will gream on to his last stiff hand, as  
he goes thru his cancer—or kill—later perhaps—soon  
he will think—)

And it's the last moment I remember, which I see them all,  
thru myself, now—tho not you

I didn't foresee what you felt—what more hideous gape of  
bad mouth came first—to you—and were you prepared?

To go where? In that Dark—that—in that God? a radiance?  
A Lord in the Void? Like an eye in the black cloud in a  
dream? Adonoi at last, with you?

Beyond my remembrance! Incapable to guess! Not merely the  
yellow skull in the grave, or a box of worm dust, and  
a stained ribbon—Deathshead with Halo? can you  
believe it?

Is it only the sun that shines once for the mind, only the flash  
of existence, than none ever was?

Nothing beyond what we have—what you had—that so pitiful  
—yet Triumph,

to have been here, and changed, like a tree, broken, or flower—  
fed to the ground—but mad, with its petals, colored,  
thinking Great Universe, shaken, cut in the head, leaf  
stript, hid in an egg crate hospital, cloth wrapped, sore  
—freaked in the moon brain, Naughtless.

No flower like that flower, which knew itself in the garden, and  
fought the knife—lost

Cut down by an idiot Snowman's icy—even in the Spring—  
strange ghost thought—some Death—Sharp icicle in  
his hand crowned with old roses—a dog for his eyes  
—cock of a sweatshop—heart of electric irons.

All the accumulations of life, that wear us out—clocks, bodies,  
consciousness, shoes, breasts—begotten sons—your Com-  
munist—'Paranoia' into hospitals.

You once kicked Elanor in the leg, she died of heart failure  
later. You of stroke. Asleep? within a year, the two of  
you, sisters in death. Is Elanor happy?

Max grieves alive in an office on Lower Broadway, lone large  
mustache over midnight Accountings, not sure. His life  
passes—as he sees—and what does he doubt now?  
Still dream of making money, or that might have made  
money, hired nurse, had children, found even your  
Immortality, Naomi?

I'll see him soon. Now I've got to cut through—to talk to you  
—as I didn't when you had a mouth.

Forever. And we're bound for that, Forever—like Emily  
Dickinson's horses—headed to the End.

They know the way—These Steeds—run faster than we think  
—it's our own life they cross—and take with them.

Magnificent, mourned no more, marred of heart, mind  
behind, married dreamed, mortal changed—Ass and face done  
with murder.

In the world, given, flower maddened, made no Utopia,  
shut under pine, aimed in Earth, balmed in Lone, Jehovah,  
accept.

Nameless, One Faced, Forever beyond me, beginningless,  
endless, Father in death. Tho I am not there for this Prophecy,  
I am unmarried, I'm hymnless, I'm Heavenless, headless in



blisshood I would still adore

    Thee, Heaven, after Death, only One blessed in Nothingness, not light or darkness, Dayless Eternity—

    Take this, this Psalm, from me, burst from my hand in a day, some of my Time, now given to Nothing—to praise Thee—But Death

    This is the end, the redemption from Wilderness, way for the Wonderer, House sought for All, black handkerchief washed clean by weeping—page beyond Psalm—Last change of mine and Naomi—to God's perfect Darkness—Death, stay thy phantoms!

