

Elmer L Rice

The Adding Machine

Lt. Charles explains to Mr.Zero that he is about to be reincarnated.

CHARLES

You have to go back, I tell you. There's no way out of it. You've got to start all over again. You'll be a baby - a bald, red-faced little animal, and then you'll go through it all again. There'll be millions of others like you - all with their mouths open, squalling for food. And then when you get a little older you'll begin to learn things - and you'll learn all the wrong things and learn them all in the wrong way. You'll eat the wrong food and wear the wrong clothes and you'll live in swarming dens where there's no light and no air! You'll learn to be a liar and a bully and a braggart and a coward and a sneak. You'll learn to fear the sunlight and to hate beauty. By that time you'll be ready to go to school.

There they'll teach you the truth about a great many things that you don't give a damn about and they'll tell you lies about all the things you ought to know - and about all the things you want to know they'll tell you nothing at all. When you get through you'll be equipped for your life-work. You'll be ready to take a job.

You're a failure, Zero, a failure. A waste product. A slave to a contraption of steel and iron. The animal's instincts, but not his strength and skill. The animal's appetite, but not his unashamed indulgence of them. Sure, you move and eat and digest and excrete and reproduce. But any microscopic organism can do as much. Well - time's up! Back you go - back to your sunless groove - the raw materials of slums and wars - the ready prey of the first demagogue or political adventurer who takes the trouble to play upon your ignorance and credulity and provincialism. You poor, spineless, brainless boob - I feel sorry for you. Come on, time's up!