Sunday Morning

By [Wallace Stevens](https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems-and-poets/poets/detail/wallace-stevens)

Complacencies of the peignoir, and late

Coffee and oranges in a sunny chair,

And the green freedom of a cockatoo

Upon a rug mingle to dissipate

The holy hush of ancient sacrifice.

She dreams a little, and she feels the dark

Encroachment of that old catastrophe,

As a calm darkens among water-lights.

The pungent oranges and bright, green wings

Seem things in some procession of the dead,

Winding across wide water, without sound.

The day is like wide water, without sound,

Stilled for the passing of her dreaming feet

Over the seas, to silent Palestine,

Dominion of the blood and sepulchre.

       **II**

Why should she give her bounty to the dead?

What is divinity if it can come

Only in silent shadows and in dreams?

Shall she not find in comforts of the sun,

In pungent fruit and bright, green wings, or else

In any balm or beauty of the earth,

Things to be cherished like the thought of heaven?

Divinity must live within herself:

Passions of rain, or moods in falling snow;

Grievings in loneliness, or unsubdued

Elations when the forest blooms; gusty

Emotions on wet roads on autumn nights;

All pleasures and all pains, remembering

The bough of summer and the winter branch.

These are the measures destined for her soul.

       **III**

Jove in the clouds had his inhuman birth.

No mother suckled him, no sweet land gave

Large-mannered motions to his mythy mind.

He moved among us, as a muttering king,

Magnificent, would move among his hinds,

Until our blood, commingling, virginal,

With heaven, brought such requital to desire

The very hinds discerned it, in a star.

Shall our blood fail? Or shall it come to be

The blood of paradise? And shall the earth

Seem all of paradise that we shall know?

The sky will be much friendlier then than now,

A part of labor and a part of pain,

And next in glory to enduring love,

Not this dividing and indifferent blue.

       **IV**

She says, “I am content when wakened birds,

Before they fly, test the reality

Of misty fields, by their sweet questionings;

But when the birds are gone, and their warm fields

Return no more, where, then, is paradise?”

There is not any haunt of prophecy,

Nor any old chimera of the grave,

Neither the golden underground, nor isle

Melodious, where spirits gat them home,

Nor visionary south, nor cloudy palm

Remote on heaven’s hill, that has endured

As April’s green endures; or will endure

Like her remembrance of awakened birds,

Or her desire for June and evening, tipped

By the consummation of the swallow’s wings.

       **V**

She says, “But in contentment I still feel

The need of some imperishable bliss.”

Death is the mother of beauty; hence from her,

Alone, shall come fulfilment to our dreams

And our desires. Although she strews the leaves

Of sure obliteration on our paths,

The path sick sorrow took, the many paths

Where triumph rang its brassy phrase, or love

Whispered a little out of tenderness,

She makes the willow shiver in the sun

For maidens who were wont to sit and gaze

Upon the grass, relinquished to their feet.

She causes boys to pile new plums and pears

On disregarded plate. The maidens taste

And stray impassioned in the littering leaves.

       **VI**

Is there no change of death in paradise?

Does ripe fruit never fall? Or do the boughs

Hang always heavy in that perfect sky,

Unchanging, yet so like our perishing earth,

With rivers like our own that seek for seas

They never find, the same receding shores

That never touch with inarticulate pang?

Why set the pear upon those river-banks

Or spice the shores with odors of the plum?

Alas, that they should wear our colors there,

The silken weavings of our afternoons,

And pick the strings of our insipid lutes!

Death is the mother of beauty, mystical,

Within whose burning bosom we devise

Our earthly mothers waiting, sleeplessly.

       **VII**

Supple and turbulent, a ring of men

Shall chant in orgy on a summer morn

Their boisterous devotion to the sun,

Not as a god, but as a god might be,

Naked among them, like a savage source.

Their chant shall be a chant of paradise,

Out of their blood, returning to the sky;

And in their chant shall enter, voice by voice,

The windy lake wherein their lord delights,

The trees, like serafin, and echoing hills,

That choir among themselves long afterward.

They shall know well the heavenly fellowship

Of men that perish and of summer morn.

And whence they came and whither they shall go

The dew upon their feet shall manifest.

       **VIII**

She hears, upon that water without sound,

A voice that cries, “The tomb in Palestine

Is not the porch of spirits lingering.

It is the grave of Jesus, where he lay.”

We live in an old chaos of the sun,

Or old dependency of day and night,

Or island solitude, unsponsored, free,

Of that wide water, inescapable.

Deer walk upon our mountains, and the quail

Whistle about us their spontaneous cries;

Sweet berries ripen in the wilderness;

And, in the isolation of the sky,

At evening, casual flocks of pigeons make

Ambiguous undulations as they sink,

Downward to darkness, on extended wings.