

# Memo to Self: Learning to Receive an Ordinary Tuesday

**The task is not to manufacture a new achievement, but to let ordinary earthly life become sufficient without pretending it is permanent.**

To: Myself From: Myself Subject: How to inhabit retirement without turning it into another project

## Bottom line

The uneasiness of an ordinary Tuesday does not mean retirement has failed or that I need a larger goal. It may mean I am still asking the present to justify itself by pointing toward a future reward. A better question is whether I can receive the life already here—food, weather, the garden, travel, conversation, and mornings with my wife—as valuable without requiring it to become an achievement.

This is not a case for forced gratitude or a slogan about "living in the moment." It is a proposal to examine what gives ordinary experience its meaning. Wallace Stevens's "Sunday Morning" offers a useful argument: earthly pleasure need not be spiritually inferior, and mortality may be part of what makes beauty possible.

## What the poem clarifies

The poem begins with a woman surrounded by small, physical comforts: a peignoir, late coffee, oranges, and a sunny chair. Yet an old catastrophe intrudes. The living morning is shadowed by sacrifice, burial, and the inherited promise of another world. The question is direct: why should a living person give her abundance to the dead? What is divinity if it appears only in silence and dreams?

The poem does not simply replace religion with pleasure. It preserves the hunger for something lasting. Even while content with earthly life, the woman still feels the need for "some imperishable bliss." That tension matters. I do not need to pretend that mortality has eliminated my desire for permanence. Nor do I need to solve that desire before I can enjoy breakfast, a garden, or a conversation.

The poem's alternative is that divinity must live within experience itself: in changing passions, grief, elation, rain, snow, loneliness, flowering forests, and

wet autumn roads. Meaning is not reserved for a remote realm. It can be found in the way the world is felt, remembered, and shared.

## **The implication for retirement**

For forty years, the structure was clear: the next promotion, the larger account, the paid-off house, help for the children, and eventually permission to relax. Now that permission has arrived, but the old structure still governs attention. Leisure is in danger of becoming another assignment, with enjoyment measured as something to optimize.

The poem suggests a different discipline: not maximizing experience, but becoming receptive to it. The waking birds that test misty fields before flight give the woman contentment, yet they also raise the question of where paradise is when the birds and fields disappear. That is precisely the difficulty. The value of a morning is not secured by making it permanent. Its passing is part of its character.

"Death is the mother of beauty" is not a cheerful statement about loss. It is a claim that impermanence gives dreams and desires their possibility of fulfillment. A paradise without change would be suspect: Does ripe fruit never fall? A heaven that merely imitates earthly colors while excluding earthly pain and change might feel less real, not more.

This provides a way to understand the present without denying grief. The morning with my wife matters partly because it cannot be held still. The garden matters because seasons move through it. Conversation matters because people change, remember, and eventually disappear. Mortality is not an interruption added to value; it helps create value.

## **Practical stance**

For the next several weeks, the task is modest:

- Let one ordinary sensory experience remain an experience rather than turning it into evidence of successful retirement.
- Notice weather, food, birds, the garden, or a conversation before judging whether the moment is meaningful.
- Allow pleasure and unease to coexist. The oranges can be vivid, and the thought of death can still enter the room.
- Resist the demand to decide whether earthly life is "enough" in some final sense. The poem itself keeps the longing for imperishable bliss alive.
- Treat attention as receptivity, not performance. There is nothing to win by becoming perfectly present.

## Next step

The immediate decision is not to adopt a new philosophy or construct a new mission. It is to make room for an earthly form of fulfillment while accepting that it will remain incomplete, changing, and mortal. We live in an old solar chaos without guaranteed supernatural sponsorship, but that does not make life empty. It leaves room for freedom, fellowship, and a beauty that does not depend on certainty.

An ordinary Tuesday need not justify the future. It can be received as part of the only paradise I can actually inhabit: a perishing world of people, weather, trees, birds, memory, and love.