

A Postcard from the Volcano

by Wallace Stevens

Children picking up our bones
Will never know that these were once
As quick as foxes on the hill;

And that in autumn, when the grapes
Made sharp air sharper by their smell
These had a being, breathing frost;

And least will guess that with our bones
We left much more, left what still is
The look of things, left what we felt

At what we saw. The spring clouds blow
Above the shuttered mansion-house,
Beyond our gate and the windy sky

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Cries out a literate despair.
We knew for long the mansion's look
And what we said of it became

A part of what it is ... Children,
Still weaving budded aureoles,
Will speak our speech and never know,

Will say of the mansion that it seems
As if he that lived there left behind
A spirit storming in blank walls,

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A dirty house in a gutted world,
A tatter of shadows peaked to white,
Smearred with the gold of the opulent sun.

(1923)

[from *The Collected Poems of Wallace Stevens* (Knopf, 1990)]