

Change: An Audio Chapbook

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Words and music by Mark H. W. Hiebert.

Lesson

There is so much
that needs to be said
softly. Gentle now,
listen first to silence.
If you can find it –
here, in a budget
hotel room, outside
City Hall (no matter
what the city name),
along an old highway
named in the even
numbers – it tells true
what you might know
about yourself, no
one else. If then
fortune provides a
share of wisdom
serving comfort, be
resilience voiced slow
enough to stop tides
raised up from battering
days we cannot change;
shift so we have words
like *future*, like *presently*,
like *truth*. I believe
in you, your strength.
I am with you to hear
what turns across night.
Stay long enough,
learn what was heard.

September 10, 2020

Mariners Astray

How many miles between
where we said we would be
(now that we're so far gone)
and the drift that took us?
It started soon as the wind
raised us up from meanings
compasses and barometers
lay against vision and sea.
Hear that sound singing
between waves, rigging,
the aching keel, horizon
ripping into night's colors?
Give me a harbor, clear
water, an anchor rode
holding us tight through
dawn so we might learn
to stop or gain a bearing
true enough to find home.
Were we always so lost
in believing we did not see?

August 2, 2020

The Bill is Due

Oh, we made it:
tomorrow, now,
when we know
we know so little.
Please ask me,
yourself, friends
undiscovered
who proximally
sit or pass with
us: What next?
How? Is it true,
smoldering there
where we aren't
present, or a joke
at our expense,
payment coming
due with our lives?
Unmarked vans
carrying ordered
men are a mask
to make apparent
how very quiet
some would say
we should stay;
those very good
people sleepwalk
like Soviet soldiers
on parade. Go on,
smell the tin air
machinery makes
grinding new gears.
Do you love money
more than justice?

July 23, 2020

In Cypress Creek, Wimberly, Texas

Where water edged to green,
wood, and stone – ran clear
albeit shadowed – one water
snake passed in the current,
a grey wave making no threat
or bother, just ambling
down with the June flow
rising from Jacob's Well.
The fish didn't care, moved
along or not (like always).
All the people watched
intently. They didn't really
know if it was still there,
if it meant something
bad. Fifty yards away,
it was more gone than going,
just being what it is, a flash
and eyes taking the ride
we're all also on, calmly,
past shores others own.

June 22, 2020

Before Before

Already too much too many
times to count, stand up
now. We the people
who witness – who wait
silent, who have allowed
this killing, who speak
without action: Our neutered
words lace bleak boots
of commissioned men
privileged to not admit
how they claim authority
in their administration
of justice. Torn out
to burn, tarnished
blue paper matches
flared a tinderred night;
smoldering injustice
hung into air smoke,
ripe and unsavored
fruit of what we ignited
with our ignorant hands.
The specifics: The man
killed is George (could have
been Eric, Freddy, Michael,
Philando, Sean, another
brother, father, son) Floyd;
this time it is Minneapolis
(could have been almost
anywhere), Minnesota;
the officers made a choice;
we gave them power.
Where is *our*, America?
What new will, *we* being
called to this unfinished
work, may carry forward
us (together, true, and just)?

May 29, 2020

Democracy

Choices, being what we are, the lawn
to be removed or replanted, the paint
where some question of tint rises up
louder than the neighbors would like:
No, these never really get answered
in consensus; just the acquiescence
one gives for the other to give some
quiet (but it's never really peace, time
enough to get done what was to be
done). Somewhere the ballot boxes
gather dust, the paper gets ordered,
and a Pete Seeger song sounds right
for now. "Come all you good
workers, / Good news to you I'll tell"
if you decide to own yourself today,
what might have been the thought
about the time the TV got shut off
for the night. I'm so tired of myself
being tired of this half-made life, going
day to day through not so amicable
requests. Work and conversation mince
mornings and daylight into the bland
supper and what lasts like the garbage
stinking in its hot August-baked can.
Vote for a better world, new shoes,
doorways, what isn't made into a wall.

August 19, 2020

Visitation

At sunset, just after, Virginia
hills and trees mark heavy
scars against the foreclosed
horizon. Light rolled west
across the day slipped
beyond where we had been
coming from. I couldn't see

a damn thing without a flashlight
beyond the cabin porch.
There wasn't much to witness:
campfire long since doused,
children fighting into bed,
crude electric lamps clicked
to the fatiguing darkness.

We would be mostly going
home soon, would leave earlier
if love didn't make hope
such a cold and raw tether.
Those 1,300 miles eat a lot
of joy, leave precious little
else but crumbs and dust.

September 15, 2020

Measures of Success

So said he who wanted to be a king:
I stood up today, did not shoot myself
by accident or intentionally.
Thinking of solutions, I walked in rain
and improvised a sturdy umbrella

that balanced sheets between a tight, budget-
conscious self on the left hand and the right
meandering me into the hotel
lobby where almost everything was now
closed down to prevent excessive sneezing

by average people who want to smell
your breath and mine (apparently). Lucky
how the doors open so quick and weather
eases here to there: I ran out and said,
“Aloha!” Running to the gold-slick street

for a ride that hadn't yet arrived, no
cab drivers tooled traffic as intimate
imitators of the favored bright carp
looking for supper, so I waited some
time, watched the gathering world reeling back

to what I, too, have forgotten so well
I cannot tell you how or why I am
going on with delight or any kind of faith.
These bold steps bring me your honor and love
even if I only get your wallet.

September 21, 2020

Rest

Stop. Being what you were
yesterday, given forgiveness,
now can be a kind of change
made up, maybe wholly new;
alternately, additively grown
(slow like the rings in a tree),
pauses shape futures, too,
so you can be yourself still –
no need for transpositions
into what we make a myth
out of or for substantiation
for faith. Off beats, off pages,
outside scores kept presently
confidential in chambers
timing blood and breath,
oh, take a rest here: hear
between aside annotations
calling for no enunciation.
Then go on again, note by note.

September 16, 2020

Change

Everything falling apart
for a very long time
says to the hour of cleaving,
“I have arrived and been
so far removed from what
I have forgotten that I know
this must be true.” It isn’t
wholly false, thinking either
arrival or removal, but no
matter what word may
flash for a moment, all
but the falling proves
incomplete – a point
cut on the line being
makes of us in measures.
We won’t see any *now*
streaming you or I to our
universe unless we quit
looking at the very hard
breaks and transgressions
a life made to be believed
in motion gets to draw out
to be. Stay still, keep falling.
Change makes you a river.

May 19, 2020

Where We Planted the New Garden Bed

Being that the rain came in plentiful
last night and thorough into morning,
I didn't anticipate how difficult turning
soil would be on a Sunday morning.
It was. The stone-hard dirt thwarting
shovels and the full weight of this heavy
man balancing with some assistance
the standard blade against the earth,
seventeen holes difficultly dug yielded
little openings for the given effort,
what serves as a prayer for new days
taking root (blooming as the hearty
will year to year, growing more lively).
We'll give them more water tonight,
new plants in old dirt, and let it be
enough, with the care we can still give.

May 17, 2020

Costal Landscape

We have waves, tide, motion
churning sunlight to darkness,
quivering heat and atmosphere.
Perpetuation, the swamping
griefs we get caught in, rakes
over a stony ocean bottom
our insufficient hearts, takes
beyond what we thought
we had to give. Another ebb,
then flow, the wrack and flotsam
carried to our eventual shore
to bedeck where we walk now,
where repetition removes almost
every trace we thought we left
while water washes under feet
the easy footings gone grain
by grain. Aren't you tired, too?

April 23, 2020

Late Season Plantings

How is it now, like you
expected? What grows
up despite the freezing
seasons and the balance
heat brings up in equal
magnitude for summer?
Maybe I anticipated
different outcomes, too
much made into today.
Maybe it was never
meant to be easy, good
so we might recognize
better if we lived long
enough. Now I plant
seeds for an autumn
harvest. It's growing
time, these late days,
like I never imagined
possible. I hold hope
we all get a second
round of the bountiful
good taken for winter.

September 18, 2020

Soliloquy of the Tree Felled in the Forest

I am trying to figure this out, this matter of being, which is what we're all either doing or ignoring or deluding ourselves into believing we have understood. It's leaving me stumped. Which is to say I feel cut off, cut down, a bit lost for what feels like a loss of whatever it was that I had that reached skyward.

As above, so below, so they say, so I suppose that's to say I have roots, too, but what was lost isn't connected to those roots any longer, and what's missing feels like it was very much me, much more than what's left stumpy here in the stubbled, rubble wreck of my psychological homeland. Where do these roots go? What still connects? Are we united? What's drawing up and will it be enough to bring back some growth and flourishing? What's the probability someone will stumble back in here with lopping shears and cut back what I'm working so hard to grow?

Do you believe in asking questions like, "Do you believe in love?" I do. I think there are so many ideas and concepts that people don't think to think about that we've lost touch with the meaty part of meaning. I think language and words matter, and whatever form the language words form into, languaging through texts, through pictures, through sound is the sole path to meaning something beyond reaction and our carnal drives. It matters what we say, how we answer, and it matters tremendously that we say it. I do my best to not speak anything perfunctorily.

And even if language isn't your thing, how am I to know what you mean until you say it? I don't expect you to read my mind. I don't even expect you to empathize or sympathize with me, but I do expect that we will do no harm to one another so that we might all grow free, full, and stretching into starlight. I'm stretching here but I don't know how to rise up from this ground. I don't even know how to dream right now.

Yes, our actions matter. Also, if our actions are dissociated from the articulation of intentions or considerations of consent and accountability, then they are meaningless, a matter of what might get someone what someone wants but no connection, little more than the satisfaction of an urge until the next urge requires satisfaction. Don't you also want to return to this earth something more than dust, smoke, and rotting loss?

I love you. I will tell you that over and over, and whatever I am made to be – opulent instrument to humble spoon to petrified and transmuted stone – I will continue to tell you in every way I am able.

July 31, 2020