

VENDING MACHINE

Poetry for Change



volume five

VENDING MACHINE: POETRY FOR CHANGE

"You must be the change you wish to see in the world."

--Mahatama Gandhi

"Change is inevitable, except from a vending machine."

--Robert C. Gallagher

this book is produced for the

Poetic Provisions Food-Drive

Donations collected during the Poetic Provisions Food-Drive go to the **Canton Sunday Picnic** and the **Akron-Canton Regional Foodbank**.

The **Canton Sunday Picnic** is a grassroots meal that feeds the homeless and those in need every Sunday at Market Square Park in Canton, Ohio. Volunteers cook donated food, often supplementing from their own kitchens, for 80 to 100 people each week. In addition to non-perishable food donations, the Canton Sunday Picnic also needs items such as cooking oils, herbs and spices, aluminum foil, paper plates, napkins, and plastic eating utensils.

The **Akron-Canton Regional Foodbank** provides food and other essential items to member agencies in Carroll, Holmes, Medina, Portage, Stark, Summit, Tuscarawas, and Wayne counties. Foodbank lists their most needed food items as: breakfast cereal, peanut butter, canned tuna, canned vegetables, and canned soups.

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"We must do a better job of loving each other."

--Ron Davis, father of Jordan

The baby you held
17 years ago,
dead,
shot by a man who said,

"Turn off your thug music."
He felt threatened.
Blacks. More than one. Young.
Must be a gang.
Load.
Reload.
10 shots.

I'm protected.
It's self-defense.
They're black. That means
they'll kill me.
I'm doing
people a favor.

Afterwards he made a drink,
walked the dog, ordered a pizza.



The baby
you held.

The picture
in the frame
and on the news.

The grief
that travels through
the liver, the aorta,
only you live.

You get up.
You start the heavy climb
toward justice.

Gaza is a garden full of roses.
Stone roses.
Rock roses.
No petals to crush and bruise
to release their fragrance.
Only dust.
Dust and the stench
of death.
No green space left.
No sweet tranquility,
peace, or quiet.
No escape.
No garden of Eden here.
No gateway to paradise.
Rubble and rock roses.

So I shall plant a rose for Gaza
in my green space,
in my tranquil garden.
I won't bruise it,
just gently sniff it's fragrance
and hope that one day
fragrant roses will bloom again
in the garden of Gaza.

What else can I do?

Before the flood our land grew darker
each sunrise. Shamans with bone rattles
arrived too late to catch
the falling patter. On the plains
lethargy ancient as buzzards hazarded
surrender, mountains quaked
with internal cold and weakness sucked
on bones of frost below scrapers
uncovering dances of victory
since liberty meant action.

Out here, black phantoms struggle under
sinks with dishes in prisons –
rarely white rice in single plastic bowls –
they take fried chicken snacks from backpacks
now, as Jupiter's light might express
its giant sun. Where is the eternity
that atheists ignore? Virgins drink slowly
but quickly take maximum cake
from attractive boxes; cake's shameful laziness
channeled from moon to sugar
won't help phantoms on scrapers
to smooth new deviations.



They quick-march away from a seated start.
Dawn in rubber boots, donating food;
must we take it from them? (you victim -)
and why do we need to take it?
For the chick with splinters in her slippers
or for the extinct eagles, beaks and talons
never fooled, even when we eat it,
the grand oviparous of the oblivious?
Before us the hello-hate of aborted generations
has met the never-ending banal

and if it's all banal eternally?
All sluggish ignorance, all icy separation
at the boundaries of possibility, unless we agree
to just ignore everything: listen
to the zips – how many teeth? How
many guns? Listen from the middle of your ear:
dust circles, ready for rebirth. You rejected
perfection but ancient laws sway all.
The perfect mind of life grows stronger here.

What if you die
and ascend above the clouds
and find, waiting for you by the heavenly gates
a dark woman with a long red tongue
and a necklace of skulls?

What if you die, and find, perhaps
a cat
a very large cat
looking at you
with speculative eyes,
and as she crouches to pounce
you realize
that those ancient worshipers of goddess Bast
had been right all along?

Yes, when I die,
just in case,
bury me with a cat toy
or at least a ball of yarn.

Being the change
is leading by example
Being the change
is smiling at those you pass
Being the change
is kindness for no reason at all
Being the change
is putting away hatred
Being the change
is listening to someone's ideas
Being the change
is putting thoughts into practice
Being the change
is getting rid of the word procrastination
Being the change
is giving each person a chance
Being the change
is having faith the world can change
Being the change
is changing ourselves first before forcing change

Luck and wishes
currency of the idle
the indolent
spending stars instead of time
in the pursuit of sun-lit dreams

winter came and went
summer... here then gone
100 winters
1,000 summers

count-down
to the end of the world
we have always known

things will be the same then –

proud, we will pretend to be capable
soft-hearted, will enable each other
will remain unable
to bear the consequences
of our momentum

all things lead us to this

not to self-destruction
no, that's too morbid
a way of putting it

but to the brilliant places
we find on our way back
to where we began

at the edge
of the awakened society
we started building
a long time ago
from inside
our prison cells

In an infinite cosmos
we have discovered stars one-hundred times larger
and more massive than our own star, Sol.

Since then, I have become all the turgid
waves of diminution
which now slowly roil within me.

I stand helplessly
before the giant blackboard that bears the equation:
Newton times Quantum divided by Einstein and the Uncertainty Principle.

Thus I have become nothing more than an animated tear-drop
strewn with the dust of dying suns,
infused with that most elusive content, life.

Life which incessantly bursts
with its own sparks, beacons, bonfires and
aware-nesses,

life which never ceases to exist...

if unadopted African children were
conflict diamonds they'd be flown
first-class to the highly accepted
world available to all never knowing
child soldiers who morph to scorpion
atop field embalming boxes spitting
out hands, arms, eyes, available to all
in every jewelry store in the world
for everlasting enjoyment with family

Smoke escapes
the bottle, a rose curl of hand
reaching down to pull the genie
into the light,

or is the hand
the genie, dropping
the vessel to fish for
wishes arabesque and sage?

This is how it matters:
Lives scribbling out a bible's
worth of pleas for peace,
sutras against the night.

This is how it matters:
We are the incense in the thurible.
We are the scripted meditations.
We are the page.

Straighten up
Shake it loose
Get down
Don't be a fool

Om zone
Phone home
Do whatcha gotta
Atone

Don't put it off
Getcher self in line
Step by step can do it
Pull the rope through time

Be the best you can be
Clear the rubble of your way
For yer not disposable
Carpe diem the day

it was no time
for love outside-
old winds of worship
found hand and mouth
in ruined rain
slanting over cultured fields
into pagan barns
with patched up planks
finding us two misfits.

i felt the pulse
of your undressed fingers
transmit thoughts
to my senses-
aroused by autumn scents
of milky musk
and husky hay
in this barn's faith
we climbed the rungs of civilization
so random in our exile-

and found a bell
housed inside a minaret-
with priest and muezzin
sharing its balcony-
summoning all to prayer
with one voice-
this holy music, was only the wind
blowing through the weathervane,
but we liked its tone to change its time.

Hindu monkey god
Hanuman runs up
Hill on the Indian
Ocean

Apparent son
Of man water
Walking over
Under contract
H'uman

I live in a tattered tent
made from the skin of
the me that I dreamed

Where have all the starfish gone?
The sea divers can't find them.
Where have all the humpbacks gone?
Beached on a distant shore.

Where have all the penguins gone?
Disappearing, every one.
Where has the earth gone to?
Where has the earth gone to?

Where are all the mountain tops?
The town people can't see them.
Where did all the sledge come from?
Flowing in the river beds.

Where are all the mountain tops?
Blown into the river beds.
Where has the earth gone to?
Where has the earth gone to?

Were we not born to keep the earth?
Her lush forests and gardens.
Were we not born to keep the fog?
To see her redwoods thrive.

Were we not born to keep clean water?
Rippling for our children.
Where has the earth gone to?
Where has the earth gone to?

Two children of the same father
Two beautiful boys
Two different women
One God with two sacred names
What fertile land
A thousand years of distrust
Hundreds of villages side by side
A conjoined history
An unaccountable number of graves
A multitude of enemies, real and imagined
One great city
Two separate temples
Good people and bad people
On both sides one wall
And no agreed boundaries
An endless number of rockets
An endless number of bombs
For Isaac
For Ishmael

Their God grieved!

Be the tree, plant change,
take step up, rearrange stage,
season song as sage.

Consider candleflame. Notice how light
flows through this air as if sourced from a spring
or drifts, moved by an unseen wind across
our vision, streaming as the candle's held
still in this moving air, as beams emboss
their patterns all around us in a ring
matching the circled flame, whose glowing flakes

fall weightless through the air. The stream remakes
itself, reforms, through movements of our breath
through undulations of our spirit, known
only through light and shade, that twisting, meld
themselves in spiral colored patterns, blown
by incandescent wind. This is the death
of shadow and of darkness. We're reborn

within the candleflame. Flickers adorn
our passage, jewels turning in their slow
faceted prisms, revolutions lit
by just one centered source. We are compelled
just like those beams, those flakes, to move, emit
something approaching radiance and show
in spiraled visions, how to renew sight.

The shuttle is broken. All but his suit and
Pieces. He shelters away
From the holes he hopes the
Foil around him will
Shield like the moon's backside takes
Pot shots for Earth.
Childhood at the place with the scratchy beds
Where Mom was silent and
Strangers silent.
"Why aren't they happy?" he asked over
Delicious hot salty over rice.
Hoping for seconds.
She said, "No one wants to be here,
In the shelter."
Particles strike in the wonderland of quanta.
Are his feet exposed?
Bus shelter wind like a knife blade on
Sockless ankles.
Strangers warm friends, huddled
Bodies make shelter to share.
Broken tethers stick out like twist-ties,
Braggarts of loss.
Radiation and snowflakes.
He doesn't want to be here but
He remembers;
He had to leave the shelter.

we're killing the bees
and we're killing the trees,
killing the farmland, too.
we're killing the rivers
and killing the seas-
killing is what we do,
killing is what we do.

blame it on progress
or blame it on need-
blame it on me
and I'll blame it on you!
blame it on serving the money machine-
blaming won't cure all the killing we do...

everything growing
and everything green,
beating it black and blue.
killing is what we do.

we better change,
we better change,
and SOON!
killing is what we do.

When things are awful,
strive to be a thumbs up, not
a middle finger.

Ron Carter on bass

Elvin Jones, drums

every line an occasion
train leaving the station

your future walks into the room
all dark eyes, big hair
like nine-eleven
nothing the same since then

for good reason
the word poem traces to the Mesopotamian,
did our Texas cousins
truly believe we would liberate the cradle of civilization,
replace millennia of wisdom
with a cartoon bible and a dollar menu?
now our Illinois brothers

this dream can be confusing
three steps forward, two steps back
if you're lucky, otherwise four

then the leaves turn with autumn
football on television, in person
children suddenly men, women
a curtain rises, all is forgiven

The stillness of the pond
Before the ripple
The fresh layer of snow
Before the footprints
The waving tips of the grass
Before they topple
The full trees
Before the leaves tumble
Like whispers
Everything spreads
Sorrow shapes the soul
Into a different kind of lovely
There are many things
More important than forgiveness
Know your heart
It will lead you to your soul
Away from the world's numb poison
Every person is beautiful
Until they are crushed
What matters is what you make afresh
After the ripples
With the new snow
And the green grass
That never stops reaching for the sun
Sway like the trees under the moon
Let your leaves go, regretless
Always grow

The hunter (our vice principal) stalked his prey (the girl in the short dress) and our gaggle of seniors began to walk more quickly.

She was, needless to say, trapped - that is, sent to the office. Courtney cannot be with us anymore. We sent her away with encouragement, knowing that under her breath, she practiced her speech about rape culture and the deeper implications of forcing girls to measure the hem of their skirts from the bend of their knees. Four inches between victim and attacker, turn around and measure the guilt from the bend of your shamed head.

From the office, Courtney was sent home to find clothing that better suited a learning environment. In my English class, they asked where Courtney had gone. They reacted to her dress code violation as if she had been hiding weapons in her locker. As if she had bullied another student. As if she had wasted class time judging a classmate. Those people were my friends, and in that moment, I hated them.

When Courtney returned, they all looked at her - but none of them saw her. This happens every day. I don't pretend to know the solution. There must be limits, and boundaries must be drawn. But when teenagers begin to isolate each other because of the way they dress, are the rules really working?

A boy said to me, "If you dress like a slut, you're going to get treated like a slut." He was my friend, and in that moment, I hated him. I hate hating my friends. I hate wondering whether all the male teachers' eyes follow my short skirts, trying to measure it in their minds. I won't judge you for your short skirts, your low-cut shirts, or your bare shoulders. I dress myself for myself. I have to be the change I wish to see. Because if I don't, who will?

Few of us see it this way
But when lightning occurs –
I won't say "strikes" –
It does not appear in the clouds
And then shoot down,
The way our minds tell us it does.
Something does strike, called the leader,
But we do not see it
And it does not light up.
But then, from the ground,
A visible bolt shoots up into the sky.
This is known as the return stroke,
It is the earth talking back, it is
Returning the sudden energy
To the storm.
The weather supplies the electricity -
But we supply the light.

Indeed, indeed, indeed,
Beauty is a creature in bordered wild
Exoticism is diffused in colored
Here Brown, there White, there Black,
There is even Ivory

Indeed, indeed, indeed,
Every country changes its shape and shade
Complimenting bounded sight
Like that of the proud Eagle in the Occident
Like that of the earthy Ox in the Orient

Come, come, to realize
Beauty is a creature in the wild
Varying, still you must know and see
Depending on what the individual portrays
Depending on how one self-declares

Stagnantly I sit
Stationary patiently
Waiting
Waiting for wants;
Those inedible carrots
Carrying more
Moving more
Swaying to the beat
Of my life
Passionately pursuing...
THAT...
In stillness
In lukewarm
Unwarmed
Unsoothing
Sweat that cocoons
And may birth
What may be
Someday.

You need to listen to me.
You need to turn up the television.
You need to forward this email.
You need to read this article.
You need to watch this video.
(No really, you need to watch this video,
and you won't believe what happens!)
You need to buy different cereal.
You need to buy different milk.
You need to order this organic, fair-trade brand of over-priced coffee.
You need to stop going to that other coffee place.
You need to listen to me.
You need to shop at this grocery store.
You need to drive your kid to school.
You need to drive your kid to practice.
You need to drive your kid to tutoring.
You need to drive your kid until he won't stop screaming in a public place.
You need to shut your kid up.



You need to listen to me.
You need to stop eating meat.
You need to stop eating wheat.
You need to stop eating sugar.
You need to stop eating carbs.
You need to stop eating GMOs.
You need to read this article about GMOs.
You need to buy a hybrid.
You need to buy an electric car.
You need to buy an SUV.
You need to stop driving so much and take public transportation.
You need to move to a city with adequate public transportation.
You need to listen to me.
You need to

silence
the
noise.

*"Whether you speak
Or
Do not speak
Thirty blows
Of my stick
Just the same"
--Tokusan*

You asked me
How I felt yesterday
When the train
Of my unfulfilled dreams
Passed by
splattering rain
I reckon I felt just like
An estranged recluse
With the supreme dignity
Of a drifting boat



You asked me
How I felt yesterday
When the king wondered
"Where did the wealth go?!!"
I reckon I felt more like
The fool in my village
Kicking a rusty lamppost
Trying to turn it on

You asked me
What does it take
To change the state of affairs
I reckon it takes
50% stop watching soccer on plasma TVs,
20% stop blustering about ancestral allegiance,
20% stop blaming it on God and his representatives
10% stop changing the subject

Sucked up from the mud, I pulled
the shells—split apart, left behind—
of mollusks (moved on).
They had been buried, burrowed open,
and grown barren into the grains.
They hushed and smoothed into
velvet layers of mud, silt, and sand,
sinking down through the filtered sunbeams,
floating through Lake Huron along the shore.

They were pearly in places where
soft skins had been bare, lived, and left—
opposite the other sides where they arced
and folded like a baby's belly button
tucking in each soft spot with a need of security.
Those raised, ridged sides were still covered in skins,
rough and brown, coarse and dark,
peeling like old paint in abandoned rooms
of vacated vacation homes, not marketed, unsold.

I dried them on the dock in the summer sun
so the skins could peel off and reveal refuge
like bone glinting soft rainbows that had been
caught from the wispy sun splayed through lake,
held against the belly of half a mollusk shell;
made beauty of necessity, made a precious thing
of emptiness.

CHANGE is a wild horse, *equus ferus*.
Are we the horse wrangler
herding it towards our focus?
CHANGE is a tired toddler
with no attention span whatsoever.
Are we guiding it like an attentive mother?
CHANGE is a process to a goal,
toward building a positive outcome.
Do we know our roles?
CHANGE is an automobile
trekking uneven twisting roads.
Are we passengers or driving the vehicle?
CHANGE is loose; an ascension,
free, fluid, inevitable, constant.
Are we paying attention?
CHANGE is a thief in the night;
patient, stealthy, selfish.
Are we keeping it in our sight?
CHANGE is a cause to rejoice;
a message, a premonition, vision, hope.
Together we are the voices with choices.
CHANGE is the future,
a chance for improvement
and action is a suture.
Because...
We all deserve an about-face,
a healthy safe environment,
and a break from the rat-race.

Where does change come from?
Is it the light without
Or the light within?
Is it the hand of government
Or a grassroots movement of the people?
Is it through control
Or is it gained through influence?

Think about those who have changed you.
It's the loving hand of your mother
Picking you up after falling off your bike.
It's the strong embrace of father
With those gentle words, "I love you."
It's a free cupcake from a friend who cares.
It's the look in a brother's eyes
When he declared more boldly than you
That you can do it.

Change comes through love
And love comes from that light within.
Change begins with one person, one act,
One moment of humility at a time.
One act becomes a hundred,
A hundred becomes a thousand,
A thousand snowballs into a million,
And soon, society begins to change.
A myriad of small acts all of a sudden
Become the light without,
For only when change shines
From the inside and the outside
Can change ever fulfill its destiny:
Creating a better world for all humanity.

She was standing outside Del Taco,
asking for money, assuming I had
plenty, one look at my car producing
the understandable assumption that
I might have resources to share.

I glanced sideways at my purse,
flung across the passenger seat.
She was close enough to see the look,
and thus started thanking me before
I'd even said a single word in response.

I wanted to help, but had nothing substantial to give,
having recently lost my spouse, as well as my job.
I smiled and told her I'd fallen on hard times too,
then opened my change purse and dumped
all the coin I had into her outstretched hand.

She smiled a near-toothless grin
and called me honey, before thanking
me repeatedly for the handful of change
that amounted to no more than a mere
two dollars and seventeen cents.

We finished the conversation
with a round of God bless you,
before she departed with her grocery cart
and I drove on home, no longer needing to pull into
the drive-thru, having adequately given all that I had.

So much talk about change
But you don't get up to grab it
If you don't wanna work for it
You don't deserve to have it
Change is not a light switch
It's a ringing of a phone
If you don't get up to grab it
Your chance it will be gone
Hey! You! Hey! You!

You want a revolution
But you are stuck in place
You cannot move a muscle
With a dumb look on your face
Rotating one and eighty
But then not taking steps
But you are stuck in place here
Your chance has up and left
Hey! You! Hey! You!

Change and revolution
Linger at your fingertips
Uneducated masses
One percenters at their lips
We must resist the opiation
And teach the others how
With the power in your fingers
Your chance to change is now
Hey! You! Hey! You!

Mirror
Reflection

My
Reflection

Can I do anything?
And will it make a difference?
Not sure if my tiny drops are adding up at all

Your drops and my drops
Our drops combined
Underestimating the power of more than one

Too much at our fingertips
Every waking moment
Loosens the grip of empathy around our souls
Loosens the trait of compassion from our gene pool

Maybe another day, another generation
Each one passing off responsibility to the next

Hope - a different type of four letter word
One relies on
When change is slow to come



Tomorrow
Or never

Crayons - 52 colors
Here lies the rainbow of human connection
A palette of diversity
Never working together
Going at it alone
Each for himself

Tell our leaders with
Heavy hearts
Evolution may mean revolution

Which means we need to rally for the right causes
Or put the right leaders in place
Round the world
Leaders not out for power but for the betterment of mankind
Didn't you get the memo?

We start today.

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