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How much of what we call trouble is only unwelcome change? It's a lot of work to set one's heart on a future we think we can see from here, and it's foolish to believe you can know tomorrow's shape.

The very idea that we can shape events to our liking gets us into trouble. Beyond the need for food and shelter, I don't see any other animals foolish enough to attempt it. Seasons change, and the rest of creation, from the scurrying millepede under its rock to the towering redwoods to the migratory geese and windblown monarch butterflies, all know what to do. They know it as if by heart. Each species seems to have its own work to do.

But just as people work to shape space to their needs, building bridges, roads, stairs, ramps, hallways, cutting forests for farms, clearing land for towns, so do they try to take control of the ways that the present ripens itself toward the future. With heart and soul they commit themselves to the betterment of a person they hardly know, someone they will doubtless never fully understand. It's asking for trouble to expect yourself to change, just because you are foolish enough to want to.

I mean—what could be more foolish than to work for a time that may never come to pass? If change means anything, it certainly means that we cannot rely on the present shape of things. In a year or so I may be fatter or thinner, say, after an illness, or I may be dead. What purpose—and whose—does it serve for me to trouble myself about it? I ought to stay here where my heart is beating, right now, and be glad.

At the heart of our foolish yearning for more is a paradox: as soon as we try to imagine a future that will not be too different from what we know, we have left the very present we hope will persist. The trouble seems to lie in the fact that one is present, truly present, truly living one's life, only when one's mind is where one's body happens to be. And when. This is one rea-

son why a certain kind of work, the kind that requires both attention and physical exertion, feels so good. That kind of work—or play: a recent essay I read on skateboarding and another on singing come to mind—shapes us more truly than all our anxious attempts to change ourselves or the future we're inevitably entering at every moment.

Change requires first an acceptance of the state of things as they are now, not strenuous, heartless, and painful reshaping of one's identity. To treat oneself as a lump of clay or ball of dough is not only foolish but disrespectful. It is the wrong kind of work and nothing but trouble.

The shape of things to come is only for prophets to know, and only the foolish among them think the rest of us want to hear it. We hang, poison, burn, crucify, and otherwise martyr prophets—I guess they didn't foresee that particular change when they looked into their hearts and saw what they thought and insisted was the future.