

The Moon is Still Bright

It is the New Year and Old City Hall proudly stands out—no, it pretends to. Instead it sulks on the outskirts of Nathan Phillips Square. It is a relic of an ancient past; the remnant of a forgotten time. The people have gathered in the plaza for the countdown: 3...2...1...*Happy New Year!* 2008 is done; 2009 has begun. Their cheers float for what seems to be miles to the island where Old City Hall sags and reminisces over the good old days. It sighs. The old is done; the new has begun.

The New Year makes me nervous.

I sneak away from the crowd and slip down to the subway. Every train is full to the brim with blabbering booze hounds who broke the bank at bars all across town. The frat boys yell out Greek letters until they get kicked off the train. The men nap now that the party's over and it's time to go home. The middle-aged secrete the sour smell of depression and vodka—when did the party end? An old man with gnarled hands forgets his bottle is empty and, once he finds it empty, cries. The shouting, the snoring, the sulking, the sobbing: it's all too much. I get off the train one stop early and walk instead.

My walk is quiet and uneventful, eerily so. The shadow of the New Year has fallen over the city. The city is no longer vibrant. It's getting old. It's tired. Its days of eager youth and rapid growth are no more. Now, after 175 years, the city is massive; it stretches for tens of thousands of metres in all directions. Toronto is fat and content and it has no greater desire than to lie down, spread out, and slowly die.

I used to work in a grocery store. I didn't leave in the most diplomatic way and that left a bad taste in everyone's mouth. Long story short: no one tried to contact me until last night. I was invited to a New Year's party at the Paradise Bar. I wasn't sure if I wanted to go but I decided to go anyway, if not for nostalgia then at least for a memento mori. Those days were too good.

The Paradise Bar is a faux-dive sports bar in East York. The flickering neon sign conjures the image of a motel whorehouse. The felt on the billiard table is ripping and the cue ball yellowing. A whale sits in the back with an ocean of beer. I begin to wonder why I came until I see Diana slouching against the wall with a half-empty bottle of wine.

"Heyyyyyy!" she slurs, "whur have you been? I huven't seen you in a loooooooooooooong time!"

She staggers towards me. Her feet trace out a pattern sublime. In the final moment she falls on me, vomits, and passes out. I slide her carcass off me and I pick up the bottle. Although it says 2008, it smells rancid; it probably corked decades ago. As I pick Diana up and slowly drag her out I turn to the bartender and shout:

"This is why you don't put old wine in new bottles you jackass!"

* * *

Diana is home now. I carried her some four and a half blocks to her house. It's only fair; she got me out of trouble at work all the time. She woke up once along the way and mumbled something stupid. I

didn't respond. I used her key to get in her house and then I left her on the couch. I couldn't believe free-wheeling Diana had broken.

What is happening? Everything is so different. The people I knew changed. The city changed. My world changed. I now know how Old City Hall feels. Today, it is a courthouse—a consolation prize, just like the New Year.

I heard a small voice come from the shadows. A drunken dwarf was singing quietly to himself. He must have been singing some song of old, some childhood tune. He sang as though he were cradling a baby. I couldn't catch all the words but I did catch these:

*In the dark of the night
The Moon is still bright
Since the sun still shines*

He drifted off to sleep.

I looked up and I watched the moon all the way home.

* * *

The next day I woke up, just like the day before. I got out of bed, showered, and I dressed in yesterday's pants. I had the same breakfast—cereal—and I tuned the TV to the same channel. The same anchors were on. The weather, the traffic, the score all played in the same order. Finally, the local news came on. There had been a shooting at the Paradise an hour after I left. So Eden sank to grief.

“Weird,” I thought.

I turned off the TV and brushed my teeth. I put on my shoes, threw on my jacket, and walked outside. Sure enough, the sun was still shining.