

## The Taste of Change

When we moved out of my childhood home, I was sixteen years old and feasting for a mouthful of change. We had a garage sale a week before we left. My dad and I spent the night prior pitching up signs around the neighbourhood. I held them up, he hammered them down. When we finished, he put his hands on his hips and looked outwards at the open Earth. Something he does when he feels proud. Accomplished. Excited.

I, expecting to feel the same, started to taste the odd bitterness of dread on my tongue. It made my stomach heavy and my eyes wet. It made my chest hurt and my neck burn. I spat it out and scraped my tongue raw with my teeth. I suppose I was too young to know that sometimes change can taste like fear.

The next morning, I woke up hoping for rain. Instead, I was folding out tables under a hot July sun and propping my entire *Geronimo Stilton* collection up for sale. Soon enough, the entirety of my childhood was out on display. Memories for sale. A Barbie telephone I had begged for and unwrapped that following Christmas in '05. A pink and purple bicycle with the training wheels still on. A collection of miscellaneous plastic toys that haven't seen me since I was ten. Little piles scattered across asphalt. Little piles of me.

I think about that garage sale often. I think about the stream of people who followed those signs over to my house to see what insides we decided to carve out. What beating parts we agreed to leave behind. I think about that little girl testing out my bicycle. The way she gripped the handlebars, knuckles white, tongue out in concentration. Would she love it like I did? I think about the way everything started to disappear around me. So slowly and quickly all at once. It shook me, how fast my childhood left me. And before the sun even set, what remained of my early youth was a cashbox full of coins and a small heap at the end of the driveway labeled, *free*.

I cried very hard that night. It was quite comical now that I think of it. One of those cries that makes you hiccup and you can't catch your breath. One of those cries that strips you bare and reminds you of your humanness.

"They're just toys."

"Junk! You haven't touched those things in years!"

My parents were not wrong. They *were* just toys, and I *hadn't* touched them in years. But it wasn't that. Please, you have to understand. It was not that. It was that taste on my tongue again. So potent this time. I'm sure you know it. It's that taste I still don't know how to flush out. The taste of being so severely conscious, so acutely aware, that something in my life was changing, and there was nothing I could do to stop it. I didn't know how to explain it. I wish I wasn't cursed with this power of feeling. How should I have said: I'm afraid of having to remember my childhood longer than I've lived it?

I am just shy of a decade older, and I am still afraid. Perhaps even more so now, than I was before. And it feels foolish admitting this because I've since had many encounters with change. Sometimes it greets me with a handshake, or a cordial nod and wave of mutual understanding, or sometimes it knocks me to the ground with a brutal slap in the face. It doesn't feel fair to be ill-equipped for the unknown. To be thrown into the dark, hands moving slow, searching for balance in a world with twisted scales. And my god, is it ever exhausting to know that this is how it will be. This is how it has been written. My life. Your life. An endless cycle full of change, and full of finding.

The feeling of change I've learned, starts as a smell. When you inhale and suddenly realize the notes of your life are no longer familiar to you. And suddenly you're surrounded by it,

and you think, *is anyone feeling this too? How do I tell it no? How do I say: Wait, but I'm not ready yet. Give me five more minutes, please. And maybe then some.* And soon the smell of it is so commanding that you have no choice but to deal with it.

I moved back in with my parents this Summer, after six years of living across the country. Talk about change. It was a major decision for me. I created a life in a world of my own independence. I built community, fell in and out of love, dove deeper into my queerness, and reignited my creative spark. Leaving that felt like a kind of silent betrayal. So why then, did it feel like the right thing to do? To intentionally break my own heart, hoping it would heal in the way I prophesized? The week before I left, I had written in my journal in a frenzy haze of panic:

*July 9<sup>th</sup>, 2024.*

*I am moving back home. Is it normal to not know how to feel? I do not feel equipped for this journey. Is there something big that I should be doing right now? Am I missing it colossally? My childhood tastes so far away. I feel scared. I feel full. Sometimes I don't think I can feel at all and sometimes my chest hurts so bad I think it could shatter. Am I ok? Am I doing this right?*

Dramatic? Oh yes, absolutely. That should not come as a surprise. Do I want to hold my own hand and tell myself gently that I still don't know the answer any of those questions? Also, yes.

In what seems like a hypocritical turn of events, I am trying to be less cynical of change; since it is, as we have discovered, inevitable. I'm tired of feeling scared. Tired to the point that

it's starting to bore me. To the point where I want to be fueled by it. I want to grab onto it, feel the weight of it in my palms. Hold it. Nurture it. Don't you want that too?

I have not found it yet, if you're curious to know, this newfound sense of balance. This *Eureka!* moment that hits me square in the chest and fills me with knowing. Sometimes I fear change the way I did when I was sixteen. Sometimes I dream of my childhood bedroom and wish so desperately that Summer smelled the way it did when I was five.

But I am still young and so are you. And we are after all, on this Earth for the very first time together. All of it should be scary. All of it should be new. And change is the very definition of newness, no?

This is how it has been written. This is what it shall be. Our lives full of change and full of finding. What a beautiful thing.