

Just Different

The halls I walked down were empty. I don't mean to imply that the halls were barren. The trash bins were full. Overflowing in fact. Heaps of discarded items piled haphazardly around them. Decorations covered half-open dorm room doors. Happy thoughts, half-erased read:

“Have a fun spring break.”

The halls were empty in the sense that there were no people. Rooms with partially torn down posters, couches and coffee tables that just wouldn't fit in the car. Half – eaten meals lay abandoned on desks and tables. It seemed as if everyone had just vanished at the snap of finger, in the middle of their day-to-day activities. I couldn't help but think that the dorm that had become home for me could easily be turned into a perfect horror movie set with a single flickering light. I quickened my pace, down the stairs and out the door. A sunny spring day met my eyes, birds chirping as I lay my last suit in the trunk of my car and slammed it closed. The sound echoed around the surrounding buildings, the only indication of human activity reaching my senses.

The other car had left before me. I slid into the driver's seat of my 2005 Ford Taurus wagon, and smoothly inserted the key into the ignition. I froze. I looked around at the empty parking lot. I gazed up at the empty dorm. This was the first time in almost three years that I would have to move off-campus. It was at this moment that I realized how much things were about to change. I sat, frozen, for what seemed like an eternity.

“Sitting here isn't going to change anything. Nowhere to look but forward.” I thought to myself as I brought the engine to life. Soon enough, I was cruising east on I-90, windows rolled down, and rock music blasting through my car's speakers. Headed for Maine, my home state.

I hadn't moved back to Maine in full since I left for college. A few weeks here and there with a suitcase and my guitar, sure, but never like this. The house I was headed for wasn't the one I grew up in. I remembered telling my parents when they first told me they were looking for a new house:

"You don't need a room for me because I'm not going to move back. I can just crash on a couch when I visit." It sounds cruel, thinking back on it now, but I know all of us knew what I meant. It was simply a statement on self-sufficiency, not the sneering, ungrateful stab it sounded like.

After arriving back, I carried my belongings into the finished basement of a house I'd only been to a few times. My large wooden desk from high school and a futon were setup in a corner next to a wood stove on a small brick platform. As I unpacked, things began to settle in. My guitar fit in nicely with the rustic aesthetic provided by the bricks and wood stove. Soon enough, my turntable and Bluetooth speakers were in place, engineering textbooks on a shelf beneath them. Despite how wrong everything felt, as soon as I lay down my rug, the room was starting to look right.

A month and a half later, I finish my online classes for the day. A quick lunch upstairs and a loop around the neighborhood with my dog, being careful not to come close to anyone else I encounter. She's gotten older and can't speed through two or three miles with me like she used to, but she's still just as excited to go for a walk. When I get back, I can hear the rich sound of my stepfather's guitar coming from the other room. I go in and he shows me a few new things that I can spend time practicing this evening after I try my hand at writing poetry yet again. I go downstairs, put a record on, and join a voice call with friends from campus. After dinner, I'll get

a chance to chat with my mother while we do dishes. Everything doesn't seem so wrong anymore.

Just different.