Return

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Abstract

I DROVE into the parking lot and headed toward the lane where I always had parked. As I turned in a sign glared, “One way”. Strange . . .
I DROVE into the parking lot and headed toward the lane where I always had parked. As I turned in a sign glared, "One way".

Strange . . . "That wasn't there before," I mumbled to myself as I put the car in reverse. I found a space, parked, and quickly hopped out. I grabbed the papers I was to deliver to Mr. Baker.

Hurrying toward the main entrance, I noticed that the ivy that had once been tiny shoots now covered the school. I tugged at the heavy door and slipped inside.

Students were squealing "Hi's" to each other as they scurried between classes. They all looked so young! The girls wore mini-skirts and thick make-up; the boys tight jeans and long hair. It had been knee-length skirts and dress pants when I was in high school. . . . that, or else after school detentions.

I felt conspicuous in my tailored suit and high heels. I backed into a corner to avoid being caught in the chattering crowd. Lockers banged. That grating metal crash I'd almost forgotten was now consolingly familiar. Midway down the hall someone dropped a notebook, and papers scattered.

A bell clanged and with final shouts of, "See you at lunch," and "Don't forget we've got cheerleading practice tonight," the crowd disappeared into classrooms.

A teacher hurried past me. Recognizing him I blurted, "Mr. Baker!"

He smiled vaguely and said, "Oh, hello there," and darted into his room. I decided to leave the papers in his office. . . .

After setting them on his desk, I started slowly down the hallway. Brilliant colors leaped off the walls. One was neon orange, the opposite one electric blue. What had happened to our school colors, "good old red and white"? Probably the new color scheme was an attempt to keep students moving between classes.
For old times' sake, I peeked into the student lounge. Dismayed, I stared at the strange room. In the corner where my favorite overstuffed chair had been, a conglomeration of metal, and chartreuse and yellow cushions now stood. Wooden benches dotted with orange throw pillows ran the length of the walls. I scanned the far wall for the place where we had once painted and scribbled, "Rah, rah '66", and "Beat Lyons". Our artwork had been neatly covered with fresh beige paint. The pictures of our football coach and athletic teams had been replaced by paintings with bold black lines and blobs of green, pink, and orange.

Ash trays overflowed on polished tables. We hadn't been allowed to smoke. . . . a coke machine winked at me from a corner. They had finally won that battle against the school dietician.

As I wandered aimlessly among stiff chairs and tables, my heels clicked on the tile, echoing in the silence. The worn carpet, which had once covered the floor, had been rolled up and stood in a corner.

I shivered. The new air conditioning system was overworking.

I turned to leave but saw a pile of framed pictures on a high shelf. I hurried over and stretched to take them down. 1968 . . . . 67 . . . 66! There we were, all smiling, excited, young . . . scattered now.

I put them back on their shelf, 1966 on top, and walked quietly out of the room.

I hurried down the corridor, anxious now to leave. A monitor stopped me.

"Pass, please!"
"I'm not a student here anymore."

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The Jesus Machine, a human collage
Of wounds and cuts and good words said,
And, now remembered, his cross and nails;
While all the words lie dead.

*Michael Firth*