

# The Last Bell Never Rings

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If life were a movie, there'd be a scene for this. The camera would linger just long enough to capture the weight of it all, the final glances, the hesitant goodbyes, the unspoken words hanging in the air. But life isn't a movie.

There was no dramatic pause, no perfect send-off. Just a humid June afternoon, scrunched eyes against the sun, sweat gathering at the edges of our caps. The air was thick and heavy, like the world itself was waiting for something to happen, for someone to say something that would make sense of it all. But no one did. Because what was there to say?

The hallways we knew by heart, the ones we could walk blindfolded, weren't ours anymore. The classroom doors we swung open a thousand times, the seats we always sat in? They would belong to someone else now. The cafeteria table where we spent every lunch, where we went from kids to teenagers to people who thought we had all the time in the world? Someone else would sit there. It would be like we were never there at all.

Maybe that's what scared me the most. The idea that we'd leave, and the world would keep moving as if we had never been here at all. That the people who filled my life for thirteen years would become nothing more than memories, blurred at the edges, softened by time.

I don't remember what the principal said, or if the band played out of tune, or if our teachers cried. I just remember gripping my diploma and feeling like I was holding a receipt. Proof of everything I was about to lose.

We always talked about the future like it was some distant thing. Like we had years before we had to figure out who we were, before we had to say goodbye. But then the ceremony ended, and suddenly, the distance between us wasn't measured in inches but in miles, in years, in the slow unraveling of people who once knew everything about each other.

And what did I say?

I should have said *thank you*.

For every stupid joke that got me through the worst days. For every time they made the world feel big and full of possibility instead of small and suffocating.

I should have said *I'm sorry*.

For the fights that didn't matter. For not realizing, until that very moment, how much I was about to lose.

I should have said *don't forget me*.

Not in the way everyone says it, not in the way that fades the moment summer starts. But in a way that meant something. In a way that made them hold on.

But I didn't say any of it.

Because how do you? How do you wrap thirteen years of inside jokes, of laughter, of grief, into a single sentence?

You can't.

I said *see you soon*, a blatant lie. I let the moment slip away, because that's what we do. We think there will be another.

And then, just like that, we were separated.

One minute, we were standing in that parking lot, pretending it wasn't over. The next, we were stepping into cars, driving in opposite directions, *and leaving*.

I watched my friends drive away, and I wanted to chase after them. I wanted to scream that I wasn't ready. That we didn't have enough time. That I still had so much to say.

But I didn't.

I just stood there, the sun beating down, as the people I loved most in the world disappeared, one by one.

That's why this is the most memorable day of my life.

Not because it was the happiest. Not because it was the saddest. But because it was the moment I learned a truth I can't unlearn:

There is no other time.

One day, without realizing, you sit next to your best friend for the last time. You say goodbye, thinking it's temporary.

Distance swallows the best intentions. And before you know it, the people you swore you'd never lose are just stories you tell yourself when you can't sleep.

You think you'll get the chance to say everything you never said.

But you won't. The person you once knew better than yourself slowly becomes someone you have to catch up with. Until one day, you realize you don't know them at all. And maybe that's okay. Maybe

growing up means learning to let go, to carry people with you in the quiet ways instead of the loud ones.  
But I wish I had told them.

That every memory, every laugh, every late-night conversation is etched into the person I am.

The hardest part of growing up isn't simply leaving.

It's realizing you never said enough before you did.