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10th Grade

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### **When The Noise Fades**

My life has always been loud. Growing up with five siblings meant chaos was always around me. Doors opening and closing, laughter and arguments overlapping, footsteps running across the house—it was never quiet. The noise was constant, but it was comforting. It made the house feel alive, and it made me feel like I belonged to something bigger than myself.

Even before we moved to Pennsylvania, when I was younger and living in Texas, life was full in the same way. The streets were crowded with kids playing soccer with trash cans for goal posts and making up games until the sun went down. My siblings were always part of the action. The older ones led the games, the younger ones followed, and I was somewhere in the middle, trying to keep up. We rode bikes, ran through the big ditch down the street, and laughed until our lungs burned. Age didn't matter—we all joined in together. I remember the trampoline knocking the wind out of me, the rollercoaster at Six Flags that almost made me pee myself, the small heartbreaks, the victories, and the pure, messy joy of being a kid with my siblings and friends. That chaos, both at home and outside, was my world, and I loved every moment of it.

As my siblings grew older and started their own lives—getting married, leaving for college, finishing high school—the house began to change. The noise didn't disappear completely, but it got quieter. I am now the oldest at home, and I will be the next to leave for college. I have never known a life without my older siblings around, and now, in this calm, I am

learning who I am without them. They are still important to me, but they live their own lives. It is strange to realize that every day of my life I have been surrounded by them, yet they have existed without me.

The quiet made me slow down. With all the busyness of my childhood, I rushed past small joys without noticing them. Now I pay more attention to little things and try to understand myself and the world around me. Being the oldest has also taught me responsibility. I am learning how much I can do, how my actions affect others, and how capable I really am.

I remember one evening when the house was completely empty. Instead of feeling relief, I felt exposed. The noise had always been there, protecting me from myself. I had just dropped my sister off at college and returned to a house that felt unusually quiet. My oldest brother lived in his own home, another brother had gone back to college, and my sister was away. There was no more bickering, no loud TV in the mornings, no friends staying late. The house felt empty, as if it was holding only the echoes of our presence. For the first time, I noticed my own thoughts and feelings. The quiet made me reflect on my habits, my choices, and even the ways I had taken my siblings for granted. I realized that calm is not just the absence of noise. It is a space to learn about yourself when nothing else is demanding your attention.

At first, I resisted the quiet. I looked for my younger siblings, wanting noise, someone to fill the empty space. To distract myself, I found other ways to stay busy. I babysat sometimes and started working a few days a month, watching kids while their parents ran errands. Receiving my first paycheck and opening a bank account with my dad felt like a small but important step toward adulthood. The calm gave me time to learn responsibility, independence, and perspective.

The quiet has taught me more than I expected. It has shown me patience, gratitude, and a deeper understanding of my relationships. I have learned to notice the little things that make life meaningful—the laughter, the chaos, and the moments of stillness. The calm has changed me. It has helped me see who I am without the constant noise, who I can become, and how I want to live my life.

I still miss the energy of those Texas afternoons, the sun on the streets, and running with friends until my legs burned. But now I understand the value of quiet. The contrast between the noise I once loved and the calm I now live with has taught me that both are important. Chaos teaches joy, connection, and resilience. Calm teaches reflection, growth, and gratitude. Both together have shown me who I am, who I can be, and why finding balance in life matters. My siblings, in all their noise and absence, have taught me that loudness and silence are both part of learning to live, to love, and to become yourself.