



7 to 10
YEARS

BUILDING BEAUTIFUL INSIDE

THE EMPTY DESK

A Story by Arkedelic

STUDENT CONNECTIONS

THE EMPTY DESK

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THE EMPTY DESK

Dhru was just... gone.

One day he was there, sitting beside Sid, carefully sharpening his pencils and offering half of his guava candy.

The next day, his desk was empty.

No explanation. No farewell. Just a quiet announcement from the teacher: "Dhru has had to leave school. Let's all wish him well."

Wish him well?

Sid stared at the desk. The pencil marks were still there. The little sticker Dhru had stuck under the edge was still stuck. The space felt exactly the same.

Except it didn't.

By lunch, the Sunshine Squad was already buzzing.

"Maybe he moved cities," said Jane, unwrapping her sandwich.

"Maybe his parents are spies," said Nik. "And they had to go off-grid."



“Maybe he’s sick,” said Sam. “Or something happened.”

“I don’t care,” Sid muttered. “He’s gone.”

Mario blinked. “You okay?”

“I’m fine.”

But Sid wasn’t fine.

He didn’t join the Squad in the park that afternoon.
He didn’t laugh when Nik did his ostrich-dance in the corridor.
He didn’t finish his milk at lunch. Which, for Sid, was practically a national emergency.

By Wednesday, even the teacher noticed. “Sid, you’ve been quiet this week.”



Sid shrugged.

On Thursday, he didn’t come to school.

The Squad gathered at Sam’s house after class.

“He’s not sick,” Mario said, holding up Sid’s text.
“He said he ‘just didn’t feel like it.’”

“That’s not Sid,” Sam frowned.

Jane nodded. “He’s stuck.”

“Should we go over?” Nik asked. “We bring snacks, Sid opens up, we all cry, cue happy music?”

So they did.

They showed up at Sid’s house with biscuits, a sketchbook, and a box of sour lemon candy that Sid couldn’t resist.

His mom smiled. “He’s in his room. Hasn’t wanted to talk much. Maybe you all can help.”

They found Sid lying on his stomach, staring at the ceiling.

Jane walked in like a hurricane. “Right. We’ve had enough of mopey-Sid. Time for a game.”

“No thanks,” Sid mumbled.

Nik tried next. “Want to hear my latest theory about Dhru being a space alien whose mission ended?”

“No.”

Sam sat down gently. “Do you miss him?”

Silence.

Then, barely audible: “Yes.”

The room grew still.

“He was my friend,” Sid whispered. “Not the loud, crazy kind. But... the small, steady kind. He let me borrow his pens. We made up those silly paper flip games. He helped me learn the 7 times table. And now he’s just... gone.”

“Did he say goodbye?” Mario asked.

“No. No message. Nothing.”

“That’s the worst,” said Jane softly. “When there’s no ending, just a gap.”

Sid blinked hard.

Then he sat up. “I don’t even know where he is.”

“You don’t have to,” said Sam. “To remember him.”

They pulled out the sketchbook.





“Let’s make a page,” Mario said. “For Dhru. Like a memory journal.”

They each drew something.

Sid sketched Dhru’s exact pencil box — down to the nick on the corner.

Nik doodled a detective badge (“in case we ever go looking for him”).

Jane wrote, “You were the calm in Sid’s storm.”

Mario printed, “Not all friends need to stay forever to matter forever.”

Sam folded a little paper kite and pasted it on. “For when goodbyes take the wind out of you.”

By the time Sid smiled, it was the kind that wobbled a little.

But it was real.

“Thanks,” he whispered. “He was quiet. Most people didn’t even notice him. But I did.”

Mario patted his shoulder. “And now you helped all of us know him too.”

Back in school, the desk next to Sid stayed empty for another week.

Then someone new came in.

Sid didn’t move his chair. Didn’t shift away.

He smiled at the new boy and offered him half a guava candy.

THE END

THE GOODBYE WE DIDN'T GET

What You'll Need: Paper, pens or markers, and any small craft materials (stickers, coloured tape, ribbon).

HOW TO DO:

- 1 Think of someone you've had to say goodbye to — or never got to say goodbye to at all. This could be a friend, classmate, neighbour, or even a pet.
- 2 On your paper, create a “memory page” for them. You can:
 - o Draw or write about something you remember doing together.
 - o Add a short message you wish you'd been able to say.
 - o Decorate it with colours or symbols that remind you of them.
- 3 Share your page with the group if you feel comfortable — or keep it private if you prefer.
- 4 Optional: Place all the pages together into a “Memory Book” for the class or group to keep.

Reflection Prompts:

- How did it feel to remember this person?
- Was it easier or harder to think about the good times?
- If you could send them your page, what would you hope they'd feel reading it?

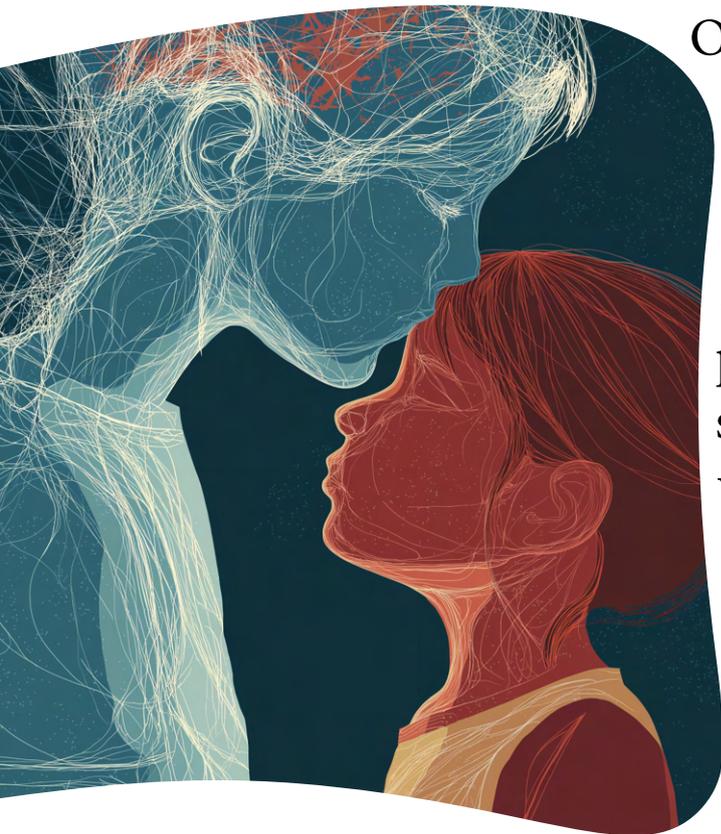


Why This Works: This activity gives children a way to process and honour relationships that ended without closure. It validates that even small, quiet friendships leave a mark worth remembering. By creating a tangible “goodbye,” children can carry forward the connection without staying stuck in the sadness of the loss.



FIVE FASCINATING FACTS ABOUT WHY SOME FRIENDS STAY IN OUR HEARTS

1. WHY WE MISS PEOPLE EVEN WHEN WE DON'T SEE THEM OFTEN



Our brains form “connection pathways” when we spend time with someone we care about. These pathways link feelings, memories, and shared routines. When that person is suddenly gone, the brain still expects to see them, which is why their absence feels so strange and heavy, even if we didn’t spend every day together.

(Source: American Psychological Association – “The Science of Social Bonds”)

2. THE ROLE OF RITUALS IN COPING WITH CHANGE

Psychologists say that small rituals like writing letters, making memory pages, or sharing favourite snacks in someone’s honour help our brains process change. These rituals give us a sense of closure, even if we didn’t get to say goodbye in person. They signal that while a chapter has ended, the memories can still be carried forward.

(Source: Harvard Business Review – “The Power of Rituals”)

3. FRIENDSHIPS THAT LEAVE A LASTING IMPACT

History is full of friendships that lasted in spirit, even after friends were separated. For example, Helen Keller and Anne Sullivan remained deeply connected long after Helen's schooling ended, influencing each other's lives forever. Many Olympic athletes also speak of teammates who moved away but still shaped their training and values years later. The impact of a good friend often lasts far beyond the time spent together. (Source: National Women's Hall of Fame – Helen Keller biography; International Olympic Committee archives)

4. WHY SOME GOODBYES FEEL HARDER THAN OTHERS

Researchers have found that sudden changes, where we have no time to prepare, can make the feelings of loss stronger. Even if the friendship was quiet or not very public, the lack of warning leaves our brain scrambling to understand what happened, which can make the sadness last longer. (Source: University of California – “Emotional Response to Sudden Change”)



5. KEEPING A CONNECTION ALIVE

Some people keep their friendships going across distances through letters, drawings, voice messages, or even shared online games. Studies show that staying in touch, even in small ways, helps reduce feelings of loss and keeps the friendship meaningful over time.

(Source: Pew Research Center – “Friendships in the Digital Age”)



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THE NOTE IN THE LOCKER

On Monday morning, Saira opened her locker to find a folded piece of paper with her name on it. The handwriting was familiar.



It was from Anya — her lab partner and the only person who could make Saira laugh during long science experiments.

“I won’t be in school for a while. Take care.”

No explanation. No reason. Just that.

By lunchtime, Anya’s seat in the lab was empty. Her books were gone from her locker. Nobody seemed to know why.

For the rest of the week, Saira found herself looking towards the door every time it opened, half-expecting Anya to walk in. She didn’t.

On Friday, as Saira was packing her bag, she noticed something taped under the lab table — a small envelope with her name written in the same handwriting. She hesitated, heart beating faster, and then...

COMPLETE THE STORY

- What was inside the envelope?
- Did it explain where Anya had gone?
- How did Saira feel after reading it — relieved, sad, confused, or something else?
- Did she decide to write back, keep the note, or do something entirely different?
- What would you do if you were Saira in this moment?

You decide how the story ends.

See you next Monday
with another interesting story!



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