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LAST BELL

Lead Focused / Drama / 4-5 min
Cast 4 Female x3 Male x1

Diane has been principal for eighteen years. Tonight the school closes for good. Before she can hand over the keys, three staff members each walk in wanting something she is not sure she can give.

CHARACTERS

DIANE HOLLOWAY (LEAD) - 40s-50s, principal for eighteen years, steady on the outside, running on fumes.
WALT - 60s, head custodian, has worked in the building longer than she has.
PRIYA - late 20s, second-year teacher, furious and hopeful.
MARLENE - 50s, school secretary, Diane's closest ally, blunt.

SETTING

The principal's office of a small public elementary school, late afternoon on the final day before the building is permanently closed.

The principal's office. Boxes half packed. A cardboard box marked DISTRICT sits on the desk. Through the window, the buses pull away for the last time.

DIANE stands at the window. She does not turn when the door opens.

DIANE

If that's the district, tell them the keys go in the lockbox at six and not one minute before.

WALT

It's me.

DIANE

Walt. Sit. Don't sit. Nobody has time to sit, apparently. There's a man with a clipboard coming.

WALT

I want the bell.

DIANE

The bell.

WALT

The brass one. In the case by the front doors. It was in the old building before this one. It's been rung on the first day of school every year since 1954. I want to take it home.

DIANE

It's district property. It's on the inventory. It goes in the truck with the rest.

WALT

It'll go in a warehouse in a box with a number on it, and nobody will ever ring it again.

DIANE

I know that.

WALT

Then give me the bell, Diane.

PRIYA enters, carrying a folder.

PRIYA

I have the letter.

DIANE

Priya, I'm in the middle of...

PRIYA

Forty-one signatures. Every teacher, the nurse, both lunch ladies. It asks the board to delay the closure one year, and it needs your name at the top. Without the principal it's a petition. With the principal it's a story.

DIANE

The vote was in March.

PRIYA

Votes get revisited.

DIANE

Not this one. I sat in that room. I talked for eleven minutes. They had the numbers on a screen before I sat down.

PRIYA

So you're done.

DIANE

I'm putting eighteen years into cardboard boxes, Priya. I am not done. I am finished. Those are different words.

MARLENE appears in the doorway.

MARLENE

The staff's going to the diner at five. Everyone. I told them you'd be there.

DIANE

Marlene.

MARLENE

And I told them you'd say something. Two minutes. You can do two minutes.

DIANE

I have to be here for the lockbox.

MARLENE

The lockbox is a metal box. It doesn't need you to hold its hand.

DIANE

(sharp)

Can everyone please stop asking me for things for five minutes?

Silence. Nobody leaves.

DIANE

I'm sorry.

WALT

No, you're not. Go on.

DIANE

I've spent this whole year being calm. In the gym, in the hallway, in front of parents who were crying in the parking lot. I told the fourth graders that a building is just a building. I said it so many times I think I hear it in my sleep. And I don't believe it. I never believed it.

PRIYA

Then sign the letter.

DIANE

The letter won't work.

PRIYA

I know that. I'm not stupid. I want it on the record that we didn't go quietly. That's all a letter is. It's a record.

DIANE looks at the folder. Looks at Walt. Looks at Marlene.

DIANE

Walt, the bell is on the inventory as one item, brass, decorative. Nobody in that warehouse knows what it looks like.

WALT

I'll bring a box.

DIANE

Bring a box.

She takes the pen from Priya. Signs.

DIANE

Put my name on top. Big. If it's going to be a story, it should have a headline.

MARLENE

And the diner?

DIANE

I'll be there at five. I'll say two minutes. I may cry. If I cry, nobody's allowed to comfort me, or I won't stop.

MARLENE

Deal.

The three of them go. DIANE stands alone. She picks up the PA microphone from the desk. Clicks it on. The hum fills the empty building.

DIANE

Good afternoon. This is Principal Holloway.
This is the final announcement.

(a breath)

To anyone still in the building. Thank you.
Go home. Be loud. Be kind. Come back and
visit, even if it's only a parking lot.

(quieter)

That's all. That's really all.

She clicks off. She turns out the lights. She does not leave yet.

END OF SCRIPT