Stand Beside Him, Don’t Speak for Him



مدارج



Ziyad tapped the handle of his screwdriver on the workbench at the youth club. He had turned seventeen two weeks earlier, and ever since, Malik, a year younger, had jokingly let him choose the first tool. Ziyad held the screwdriver out to his friend Hamza, who was a month older than him. The two had agreed last week to repair a lamp with a missing switch. Hamza took the screwdriver, set it on the bench, and turned his chair just far enough to face the door. Malik gathered the screws into a jar lid. The space where Hamza usually set down his parts stayed empty.

A water pipe had burst in Hamza’s family flat that morning. They had to move out while the repairs were done. Hamza had taken the bag that happened to be next to the door. At the club he pulled out his notebook, turned two pages, and checked the small pocket. The lamp part was still at home. He picked up the base to show Ziyad where the new switch

should go, then stopped at the first screw and put it down. His thumb ran back and forth over a folded corner of the notebook. Ziyad shifted the box of screws away from the edge and made room beside him.



The club supervisor came past and asked who could finish the work on Thursday. Malik offered to post the names in the group chat. He typed his name and Ziyad’s, then looked at Hamza, who still had his head down. Malik tapped the message box again and began explaining why Hamza might miss the next session. He thought a reason would head off questions. After two words, the cursor kept blinking. Malik left the message unsent.

When the supervisor called Malik over to help put the tools away, Malik set his phone face down on the bench. Hamza lifted his chair so its legs would not scrape the floor and carried it over to the seat by the door. He could see the rest of the team from there without having to follow

every conversation at the bench. Ziyad picked up his notebook and almost followed. He stayed where he was long enough to ask whether Hamza wanted company. Hamza did not answer straight away. He set his notebook beside him, shifted it onto his lap, and nodded for Ziyad to come over.

Ziyad left room for the bag between them. Hamza said he had spent the morning opening and closing it whenever he remembered something he had left in the flat. He was seventeen and had come home from school to the same place for as long as he could remember. When he left school that afternoon, he remembered he had a different address to go to. Then, when Ziyad handed him the screwdriver, he could not think where to start. Ziyad nearly asked where the family had gone. He waited as Hamza smoothed the folded corner of his notebook with his thumb.



They heard sixteen-year-old Malik laugh by the cupboard as he stretched to put a box back on its shelf. Hamza looked over briefly. Then he said the hardest thing about telling someone was wondering who else might hear it. He paused and asked Ziyad to keep what had happened in the flat and his family's details between the two of them. Ziyad said he would. He stayed where he was until Hamza had finished speaking.

Malik came back from the tool cupboard and found Hamza and Ziyad sitting by the door. He stopped at the end of the bench, phone in hand, and asked if Hamza wanted to answer the supervisor's question about Thursday himself. Hamza said he would miss that session. Malik lifted his phone and asked what he could say in the club chat. Hamza pointed to the line in the list of names and said his absence was all the team

needed to know. Malik reread the line he had started earlier. On a new line he wrote only that Hamza would be away. He turned the screen toward Hamza and waited for his nod before sending it.

Ziyad pointed to the workbench and asked what Hamza wanted to do about the lamp. Hamza thought of the part he had left in the flat. One of the club kits had a switch of the same size. They had tried it together a week earlier while checking the base. Hamza could try it when he came back if the kit was still at the club. It usually went into a shared cupboard, and another team might take it to the next room. He asked Ziyad to leave it on the club’s pickup shelf so he could collect it when he chose.



Ziyad repeated the arrangement to make sure he had it right. He would leave the kit with the supervisor and tell Hamza when it was ready. The lamp could wait until they were both back at the bench. Hamza said that

was enough. Malik put his phone away. Ziyad wrote down the name of the kit and the shelf number.

When Hamza returned to the club, the tool kit was on the pickup shelf. The supervisor had stuck a slip with Hamza's name on the lid. Hamza took the kit and handed back the slip so the shelf could be used for someone else. At the bench, the switch fitted the lamp base. All he had to do now was secure the wire and put the cover back on. But at the next session he forgot where he had set the screw he had just taken out. At school he read the same line on a worksheet three times. He made a pencil mark in the margin to keep his place. By the time he went back to it, his classmates had finished the first question.

That evening Hamza's father, forty-three-year-old Mahmoud, had the plumbing bill spread out on the table. Hamza waited until he folded it, then told him about the worksheet. He wanted to ask the school counselor how to catch up. Mahmoud asked whether Hamza would prefer to arrange the meeting himself or have his father call. Hamza asked him to make the call and let him explain the worksheet himself. Mahmoud wrote the appointment on the back of an envelope and left it by Hamza's bag.



On the day of the meeting, Hamza asked Ziyad to walk with him to the school gate. They crossed from the car park, where Mahmoud was waiting by the entrance. Hamza said he wanted to go to the counselor’s office with his father. Ziyad handed him the notebook he had been carrying for him and walked back to the car park. Hamza opened the notebook at the folded page and took his first question inside with him.

At the next club meeting the supervisor opened the tool cupboard and brought out the lamp Hamza had left on the bench. Ziyad had brought a strip of paper to lay the screws out in order. He slid it closer and asked Hamza once where he wanted to start. Hamza chose to sort the screws. He could tell the long ones from the short ones by lining their heads up at the edge of the strip. He separated them with a pencil and put the screw he could not place into the jar lid. Beside him, Ziyad began checking the plug of another lamp that needed fixing.

At the other end of the bench, Malik looked on his phone for the Thursday list. Above it was the line he had started the day Hamza sat by the door. He had left it in his notes when he opened the club chat to send the absence notice. He read the first two words and deleted the draft. In the chat he found the line Hamza had agreed to, followed by a question from the supervisor about closing time. Malik put his phone away. The supervisor showed him a low shelf for the empty boxes. Malik took two and left the third for Hamza’s screws.



Hamza set his pencil down and went into the hall for a drink of water. The loose screw stayed in the lid. When he came back, the strip was where he had left it. He held the screw against a hole in the lamp base and said he wanted to try it himself. Ziyad steadied the base while Hamza turned the screw with his fingers to see if it would go in.

The screw went in. Hamza asked Ziyad to hold the base still while he tightened it with the screwdriver. He put the cover back and handed the lamp to the supervisor to check the wiring before they tried it. The supervisor checked the cable, put the lamp back on the bench, and plugged it in. Hamza pressed the switch. The light fell across the strip of paper they had used to sort the screws. Hamza lifted the strip. There was still a place for a screw they had never used. Ziyad laughed, said it belonged to the other lamp, and put it back in its box.

When the supervisor began turning off the lights, Ziyad asked whether Hamza wanted him to book the bench for them next week. Hamza said he would choose a day after he saw his school timetable. He asked to leave the lamp on the shelf in case the team that came in early needed it. Ziyad held the cable so it would not drag while Hamza carried the lamp over. At the door Hamza asked whether Ziyad could come a few minutes before their next meeting. Ziyad said he could. Hamza wrote down the starting time and left his own arrival time blank until he saw his timetable.

For the reader activity, imagine a teammate will miss practice and wants to keep the reason private. Pick one thing you could do, such as leaving their tools with the supervisor. Write the question you would ask to get their permission. Then write a short message sharing only what they agreed to. Name one detail you would keep private and decide how you would answer if another teammate asked about it.