Competing Rights



مدارج



Ahmad pulled the tape tight across the first box in the club storeroom. At seventeen he had learned to tell from its weight whether all the school supplies were inside. His teammate Yusuf, who was eighteen, slid a pack of pencils toward him. Ahmad put it in the second box and left the lid open for the supervisor to check. The team would load them into the van before the club closed. Ahmad had promised to help with the first batch before he left.

That morning Ahmad had agreed to meet his fifteen-year-old brother Omar outside the library at five. Omar wanted to return one book and borrow another. On the way home they would pass through a narrow lane where repairs had closed half the pavement. Ahmad had promised to walk home with him from the library. Before going into the storeroom, he put the appointment in his phone and set a reminder for a

quarter to five. He slipped the phone into his pocket so it would not fall between the boxes and rolled up his sleeves. He had left himself enough time to walk to the library.

When the first row was ready, the supervisor came over with the shift sheet. A volunteer listed at the bottom had called to cancel. Could anyone stay to load the second batch? Ahmad looked at the remaining boxes and then at his name on the sheet. He thought they could move them quickly if they started now. He took out his phone and saw the library appointment on the screen. He held it for a moment, put it away, and told the supervisor he could take the extra shift.



Omar came out of the library with the new book tucked under his arm. The clock above the door said five. He moved aside to let people in and stood at the edge of the awning, where Ahmad could see him from the end of the street. When the stream of people thinned, he sent his brother

a message saying he was at the door as agreed. No answer came. He opened the book to the contents page and read two chapter titles before looking up. A bus stopped at the light, blocking his view toward the club. Once it moved on, the pavement was still empty.

As closing time drew near, Omar called his father. Khalid, the brothers' forty-four-year-old father, asked him to wait by the lit entrance and drove over. From the passenger seat, Omar pointed to the lane he would have walked through with Ahmad. The orange barrier still stood at the edge of the pavement, with cars passing close by. He kept the book on his knees all the way home. He set it on the kitchen table and went to fill a glass of water.

Ahmad finished loading the boxes and took out his phone at the storeroom door. Omar's message was below the reminder. He read the time it had been sent and checked the clock. At home, he found Omar in the kitchen, leafing through the book. Ahmad said he had only just seen the message and asked how he had got home. Their father had come for him, Omar said. “I kept thinking you'd be here in another minute.” Ahmad almost mentioned the extra boxes. He stayed by the table and let Omar finish.



The next morning Ahmad found his father, Khalid, in the kitchen, setting his keys beside a cup of tea. Ahmad pulled up a chair. Omar had told him what happened at the library, he said. What did the family need on library days? Khalid glanced at the calendar on the fridge and asked what the brothers had agreed. Ahmad said he had promised to meet Omar at the door at five and walk home with him while the lane was under repair. That was exactly what he had put in his phone.

Khalid turned his keys on the table. Omar knew the way to the library, he said. It was the walk back through the lane that mattered. Khalid had left an appointment he could have finished if he had known earlier that he needed to go. Ahmad asked if he was supposed to walk with Omar every time. They knew the date of the next visit, Khalid said. They could

talk again if the route changed. Ahmad looked at Omar's message again. That one line brought back the time, the door and even the spot where Omar usually stood under the awning.

After breakfast Ahmad opened his calendar to the day Omar would return the book. He marked the pickup and allowed time to walk from the club. He checked the prayer time for that day and set it aside before adding anything else. Then he opened the photo of the roster the supervisor had shared. Ahmad was on duty when he would need to leave. He enlarged the photo until he could read every name and time, then read his row again. He needed to speak with the team.



The following day Ahmad went to the club before his shift. He found Yusuf at the shelf, checking the numbers on the boxes against the driver's list. Ahmad waited until his teammate set down his pen and asked if they

could look at the roster together. On his phone, he pointed to the row with his name. He had agreed to help at home that afternoon and needed to leave before five. Could Yusuf cover the last part of his shift?

Yusuf brushed the dust from his hands and pulled the roster closer. He could stay past five, he said, but the start of his Saturday shift was difficult for him. Ahmad ran his finger along the next row. He could come in on Saturday morning and had time to get to the club. He offered to take Yusuf's first hour on Saturday if Yusuf could cover the end of his shift on library day. They went over the times again until each knew when to arrive and when to leave.

Then they took the sheet to the supervisor, who asked Yusuf what would be left on the table when Ahmad went home. They checked the list of boxes. Ahmad would sort the first batch to go out and leave Yusuf the list with a mark beside the last box checked. The supervisor changed the names on the roster and sent a photo to the team. Ahmad saved the new photo and told Omar he would meet him outside the library at five. This time he knew when he could leave the club and had allowed enough time to walk there.



On library day three boxes still needed checking. Ahmad marked the last number he had checked and handed Yusuf the list as agreed. He showed him the open box that needed a pack of pencils and told him where the rest of the supplies were. Yusuf reached up to the shelf and took down the pack. When Ahmad's reminder sounded, Yusuf had the list and knew where to start. Ahmad put on his jacket and left at the time he had set.

He took the main street to the library. The sun was low, and the shadow of the awning fell across part of the pavement. He arrived a little before five and stood beside the door. Omar came out a few minutes later, holding a book to his chest. He glanced toward the edge of the awning, then spotted Ahmad and waved. People leaving had to step around them here, he said. Could they meet by the lit sign to the right of the entrance next time? Ahmad walked over with him to see exactly where he meant.

They set off for home. At the barrier they waited for a car to pass before walking along the open part of the pavement. Omar told Ahmad he had returned the book on time even though he hadn't finished the last chapter. When the pavement widened, he opened the new book to show Ahmad an illustration. Ahmad carried it to the front door while Omar bent to tie his shoelace. Before they went inside, Ahmad changed the library note in his phone to say “by the lit sign, to the right.” Omar read it and pointed at the word “right.” Ahmad left it in.



On Saturday morning Ahmad found the storeroom shelf full of supplies for a new delivery. He hung his jacket by the door and started the hour he had taken from Yusuf. He laid out the driver's list and lined up the boxes in delivery order. When he couldn't make out one number, he

went back to the list and checked with the supervisor before closing the lid. At the end of the hour the first boxes stood by the door, with more supplies waiting to be sorted.

The supervisor asked who could stay for the next batch. Ahmad checked his calendar before answering. He had promised his father he would come home and help carry a heavy box in from the car. He could give the club another hour another day. He told the supervisor he was leaving and showed him where the list was. Then he checked his calendar and signed up for an open slot the following week.

Ahmad put the storeroom pen back in its box, took his jacket and left. When he reached home, his father was opening the car boot. Ahmad pocketed his keys and took one end of the box. His father asked how the hour at the club had gone. Ahmad said the first batch was ready. He waited until Khalid had a grip on the other end. Together they carried the box inside and set it down by the wall.

Reader activity. Think of a commitment you made to a close relative that got pushed aside by something you enjoy. Write it down for yourself and choose a time you can keep. Note one change you can make and who needs to hear about it in advance.