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CHAPTER 04 · IF WE CAN'T SAY THE HARD TRUTHS

The Thing Mateus Didn't Say

A story about the courage to speak

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Mateus and his best friend Rui had been inseparable since the age of six. They walked to school together. They shared lunch. They knew each other's secrets.

Then one Thursday, something happened that Mateus didn't know how to talk about.

Rui had shown everyone a drawing Mateus made — a funny cartoon of their science teacher — and everyone had laughed. Not meanly, exactly. But Mateus had made that drawing just for Rui, not for everyone, and when he saw people passing it around he felt something hot and tight in his chest.

He didn't say anything. He told himself it wasn't a big deal.

But it was.

The next week, he walked to school alone. He sat at a different table at lunch. When Rui looked at him confused, Mateus just shrugged and looked away.

Rui stopped trying after a few days.

Two weeks passed. Mateus told himself he was fine. He wasn't fine. He missed his friend so much that his lunch tasted like nothing, and mornings felt grey and long.

His older sister noticed. "What happened with Rui?" she asked.

"Nothing," said Mateus.

She gave him the look that meant she knew he was lying. "Has he apologised?"

"For what? I never told him what he did."

She was quiet for a moment. Then she said: "So you're punishing him for something he doesn't know he did?"

Mateus hadn't thought of it that way.

That evening, he wrote Rui a message. It took him four attempts. The first three were either too angry or too apologetic. The fourth one said: *You shared my drawing without asking and it hurt my feelings. I should have said so instead of disappearing.*

He stared at it for ten minutes. Then he sent it.

Rui replied in two minutes: *I didn't think. I'm really sorry. Can we talk?*

They talked for an hour.

Later, Mateus thought about how much time he had wasted being silent. The silence had felt like protection, but it was really just loneliness wearing a disguise.

The truth was hard to say. But the truth was also the only door back to where he wanted to be.

*The words that are hardest to say are usually the ones that matter
most.*

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A companion to “If We Can't Say the Hard Truths”

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