

Fire

After All He Had Done

The invitation named Leena as the project's presenter.

Daniel read it again. He had brought her onto the team, secured the funding, and spent six months getting this work in front of the board. He had pictured himself standing at the head of the room, finally showing them what he could do.

Now Leena would be standing there.

He walked to her desk.

"You accepted?"

"They asked me this morning. I was going to tell you."

"You could have spoken to me first."

"I didn't realize I needed your permission."

Permission. The word made him sound petty. This was about loyalty.

He remembered recommending her when others had wanted someone more experienced. He had stayed late to help with her first proposal. When she doubted herself, he had encouraged her.

He had thought she would do the same for him.

"I've backed you from the beginning," he said.

"I know. And I appreciate it."

"Then how could you do this?"

Leena looked at him. "Daniel, I'm presenting our work. I'm not taking it away from you."

But that was exactly how it felt. She had accepted something that should have been his. Worse, she seemed to think she had done nothing wrong.

He returned to his office and shut the door.

An hour earlier, he had been pleased with the project. Now he could barely look at it without thinking of her. The board had gone around him, and Leena had let them. He opened the presentation file. If she was going to speak, he would decide what she said. He removed two slides, rewrote the opening, and sent her a message requiring his approval of any further changes.

Her reply arrived a few minutes later.

“Can we talk before you change anything else?”

Now she wanted cooperation.

He began listing everything he had done for her. He wanted her to understand the size of what she had broken. An apology would help, but only if she also told the board he should present.

Outside his office, someone congratulated Leena. Daniel heard her thank them.

He closed the file.

She could still make this right. That was the thought he kept returning to. She could turn down the invitation. She could show him that his support had meant something. Until then, even the good work they had done together felt like evidence against her.

This can change.