

150 Too late.

Daniel picked the frame from the desk and stared at the picture of one of the best memories of his life. Ryan's friendship was one of the best things that happened to him, and he would never regret it—not even when he fired him for no good reason. 1

A knock at the door caught his attention and he turned to look. "Come in," he affirmed, and Kimberly pushed the door open before she stepped into the room.

"Mr. Evan!" she greeted, her voice laced with guilt. One could hear her blaming herself for all of this.

"Mr. Evan?" Daniel raised a brow in sternness before breaking into a smile. "Until now, in this company, I was just Daniel to you. And now suddenly, you call me with such respect?" He paused briefly, then continued with a light chuckle, "...have you gotten something wrong? I haven't been promoted —rather, I have been fired. Usually, people honor someone like this when they have been elevated to the position of power, not when they are being shown the door."

Kimberly felt worse. Almost crying into tears, she said, "Daniel, I am sorry. It was my fault. I

shouldn't have mentioned your name. I should have ..."

"Aye, Kimberly!" Leaving the frame back on the desk, he quickly went to console her. Rubbing her shoulders, he tried to comfort her. He was just trying to make some joke. He never thought to blame the woman –not when she actually hadn't been wrong. "Shushh! You did nothing wrong to mention me. I did give you the suggestion to post a statement that denied Ryan's engagement with Arwen."

"But you did it because I came to ask for your help." Kimberly reasoned her guilt, adding, "None of this would have happened if I hadn't gotten you involved in this. I am so sorry." 1

Daniel nodded in understanding and for a moment Kimberly truly thought that he also blamed her for his situation. But then she heard him suddenly say in disappointment. "So, you also believe that what I advised was wrong? That there could be another possible way to save it and I have been too impatient to think of another way?" Daniel asked.

It took a moment for Kimberly to comprehend his words. And when she did, she shook her head, refusing to accept it was his fault. "No! Definitely no, Daniel," she said before continuing. "This was the best that we would have thought

about. There was no better way to stop Mr. Foster from getting implicated."

Daniel smiled. He knew that as well. But he had no interest in explaining it because he knew Ryan was also aware of it. It was just that he didn't want to accept it. "Then there is nothing to take the blame for. We did nothing wrong, Kimberly. We are just stuck in the wrong situation at the wrong time. But once this time would pass away, everything would be settled."

Kimberly didn't know what to say. She had always appreciated Daniel for his work, and the way he handled the situation. He was a gem at Foster Ventures, well known around the circle. But it was unfortunate that she would no longer be able to work with him.

Sighing, she stared at him before he pressed a small, soft smile on his lips and turned back to pack his stuff. Returning to the side of his desk, he once again picked up the photo frame and reminisced about the beautiful memory that was captured in it there.

"You and Mr. Foster had been friends since high school?" Kimberly asked when she noticed him staring at the photo for a little longer. 1

Daniel hummed and nodded. "We were dormitory mates." A faint smile tugged at his lips as if he was content and held no grudge.

Seeing him like that, Kimberly asked, "Do you not blame him for today?"

"There is nothing to blame. Why would I?" Daniel replied without any tinge of sadness. "The one who fired me today was the CEO of Foster Ventures. My friend wouldn't do that. Furthermore, Ryan didn't mean it. He would realize things better when his anger calms down."

"Then does that mean that you will be rejoining again?" she asked, her eyes sparkling in anticipation as she continued. "I mean if Mr. Foster has just acted on his anger, he will be soon realizing that what we did was exactly right. He will ask you to come back. You will be re-joining then, right?"

Daniel stared at her and simply smiled. He didn't reply —neither in yes, nor in no which just let the suspense hang in the air. Kimberly was desperate to know, but she reluctantly held herself back, knowing that it wasn't right for her to ask.

"I am done here," Daniel finally said as he cleared almost everything he had on the desk. Then looking up at Kimberly once again, he said, a soft smile tugging at his lips. "Take care of yourself, Kimberly. Remember you did nothing wrong. You just acted in the company's best interest."

Kimberly nodded, still finding it hard to let go of her guilt. Daniel didn't say more. Grabbing his packed boxes of belongings, he gave her a small nod before walking to the door. He turned around to glance back at his room one last time before stepping out of it as if that place never belonged to him. As he left, the door clicked shut behind him, leaving an emptiness in the room that mirrored the void his departure left in the company.

As Daniel was passing by Ryan's cabin, his steps halted briefly. He could hear the faint sound of muffled footsteps inside, evidencing Ryan's agitation. He could hear the faint sound of muffled footsteps inside, signalling Ryan's agitation. It wasn't hard to guess what was going on through his mind —regret, perhaps, or stubborn anger refusing to admit he was wrong.

1

A soft sigh escaped Daniel's lips as he shook his head. He could knock and confront Ryan one last time, or offer him closure he might be too proud to ask for. But instead, he turned away.

'Not today,' he thought. 'Ryan needs to figure this out on his own.' With that, he turned and left. And just as he did, Ryan opened the door to stop him. But it was too late. Daniel had already left.

6