

Not Quite Ready

Maya Osei had spent twenty-three years in aerospace engineering, the last eight of them in a senior role that required her to do something she had not anticipated when she took it: think carefully about how people learned. She had always assumed that technical knowledge transferred the way it did in textbooks, through clear instruction and sufficient practice. What she had discovered was that it transferred more slowly and less predictably than that, and that the most important thing a senior engineer could offer a junior one was often simply time. That conviction had shaped how she worked with Daniel Park.

Daniel had joined her team two years ago, fresh from a graduate program with strong fundamentals and a genuine seriousness about the work. He was not the fastest learner Maya had supervised. He was careful to the point of deliberateness, thorough in ways that sometimes looked like hesitation, and prone to seeking confirmation before moving forward in situations where a more experienced engineer would have trusted her own judgment. Maya had watched this pattern and had made a decision early on to give him room. She had assigned him progressively more complex work, debriefed with him regularly, and resisted the pressure she sometimes felt to simply show him how she would have done it. She believed he was developing, but also that he needed more time than most.

The Halcyon project had arrived on her desk three weeks ago. It was a structural analysis assignment for a new component in a next-generation aircraft system, technically demanding and with a delivery timeline that left little room for iteration. It was exactly the kind of project that would accelerate Daniel's development if he handled it well. It was also exactly the kind of project that could go badly if he was not quite ready for it.

Maya had been turning the question over ever since. She had reviewed Daniel's recent work carefully, looking for the signs she had been watching for: the moments where his judgment had sharpened, where he had moved with more confidence, where the thoroughness had started to look less like uncertainty and more like rigor. She had found some of those signs. She had also found gaps that she could not fully account for, places where she was not sure whether what she was seeing was the last stage of development or a ceiling she had not yet identified.

What she kept returning to was a harder question beneath the practical one. She had invested two years in Daniel's development, and she believed in that investment. But she was aware that belief in a person could shade into something that served the believer as much as the believed in. Her patience with Daniel had felt like a professional virtue. She was less certain, sitting with the Halcyon file, that it had always been distinguishable from an unwillingness to reach a conclusion she did not want to reach.