

NEVER MISTAKE A QUEEN FOR A LAPDOG

Yes-man 1

It's said every man has a woman he once loved but could never have—the one who haunts his heart, the one who got away.

Noreen Gilmore always thought Seth Harcourt was the exception. After all, they'd shared a passionate youth, tangled up in each other's lives for years.

But the world, it seems, is just one grand stage for lost loves. And Seth, for all his stoic charm, was no different.

Noreen had been with Seth since she was eighteen—seven years, more than two thousand days and nights. They'd shared everything lovers could, and yet, *none* of it compared to that fleeting, unforgettable girl from his past.

The irony of it all almost made her laugh.

Seven years, and she still couldn't see clearly into a man's heart.

So just how deep did that love run, that Seth could bury it for so many years and never let her close enough to dislodge it?

Lost in thought, Noreen barely registered Seth's growing impatience. He tightened his grip, a silent warning to pay attention or risk his displeasure.

Seth was always intense in bed—forceful, relentless. In the heat of things, his sweeping movements sent a black velvet box tumbling from the nightstand. He caught it midair, careful not to let it fall on her.

He glanced at it, curiosity flickering across his face. “What’s this?”

Noreen slipped the box from his hand, tossed it aside without emotion, and wrapped her arms around his neck, pressing her lips to his throat. “You’re getting distracted at a time like this? Tired of me already?”

Seth couldn't resist her. Whatever curiosity he had vanished in an instant.

As he lost himself in her, Noreen's gaze drifted to the black box lying forgotten on the floor. Her eyes shimmered with unshed tears.

Seth, you'll never know what's inside that box.

A month earlier, Aurelion Group had gone public. Seth's friends threw him a small

celebration.

Noreen dressed to the nines, determined to propose to Seth that night.

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Proposing was supposed to be the man's job. But Noreen loved Seth so much that she was willing to set aside her pride—she'd ask him to marry her.

No one knew she'd waited seven years for this day.

Seth's career was everything to him. Noreen switched her major to finance for his sake, even though it bored her to tears. She turned down an offer from a prestigious overseas university and joined Aurelion Capital, starting at the bottom just to be near him.

She worked her way up from the lowest rung to become his executive assistant. No one but Noreen knew how much she'd sacrificed.

There were so many nights, when love burned brightest, that she wanted *to* ask

Seth:

Will you marry me?

But she always swallowed the question.

Her mother used to say—never ask for gifts or love. If someone gives it willingly, it's a blessing; if you have to reach out and take it, it's charity.

And Seth was never one to talk about his feelings. Still, after all these years, she was the only woman by his side. No one else had ever come between them. It felt inevitable, like they were simply waiting for the right time.

For that future, Noreen had fought tooth and nail for Aurelion Group, taking on every challenge, no matter how big or small. She couldn't remember how many nights she'd spent drinking with clients, or how many times she'd ended up in the hospital.

The time she suffered alcohol poisoning and lost their child, she nearly died on the operating table.

Her best friend Claire Chase asked her once, "You nearly died for this man, Noreen. Don't you regret it? Was it worth turning yourself into this for him?"

Noreen didn't hesitate. "It was worth it."

Claire gave her a nickname—Love's Warrior. She said, "I hope you don't lose."

Back then, Noreen had answered with unwavering certainty, “Seth won’t let me lose.”

That belief kept her going all the way to Aurelion Group’s IPO.

No one knew that the day Seth rang the bell at Harborview City, Noreen locked

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herself in her room and cried her heart out. When she was done, she dried her tears and started planning the perfect proposal.

Seth was busy, after all. The IPO meant new projects, endless congratulations from friends, family, and business partners. He barely had time *to* think about their relationship.

So she decided to take the leap herself—to shoulder some of his burdens, and maybe, finally, secure their future together.

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hapter 2