

NEVER MISTAKE A QUEEN FOR A LAPDOG

Yes-man 3

Jude's gossiping was relentless, the kind that never seemed to run out of steam.

Everyone else in the room kept egging him on, voices rising until the whole place felt like a rowdy tavern.-

Noreen couldn't make out what Seth was saying through the din; all she could focus on was the sharp, twisting pain in her stomach.

But the ache in her gut was nothing compared to the sharp, hollow agony in her chest.

October tenth.

The date burned in her mind—the day she'd landed in the ER with alcohol poisoning and lost the baby.

She'd clawed her way through hell alone, while he was off rekindling things with his golden girl.

"Miss Gilmore, are you all right? Are you feeling unwell?"

A passing waitress had stopped in her tracks, startled by the sight of Noreen crouched on the floor, face drained of all color.

Noreen asked her to call an ambulance.

By the time she was lying on the stretcher, drenched in cold sweat, Seth's name lit up her phone.

Any other day, no matter how tired or busy she was, she'd have answered his call in a heartbeat.

But today, the pain was overwhelming.

So overwhelming, in fact, that for once, she didn't care. She didn't want anything,

not even Seth.

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Noreen spent five days in the hospital with a severe case of gastritis.

The doctor said it was a consequence of the last time—she hadn't taken care of herself after the alcohol poisoning and miscarriage.

Throughout her stay, Seth never visited. Not a single text, not even a call.

11:54

Maybe she'd never mattered in his world—not really. She just hadn't realized it before.

Monday morning, Noreen returned to work. Her assistant, Sophia Cole, dragged her aside with an air of conspiracy. "Noreen, have you heard? We've got a new parachute hire coming to Aurelion Group! And it's a woman!"

"A parachute?" Noreen frowned, unconvinced.

Seth had always been strict about hiring from within. Even Noreen herself had started as an intern at the bottom of the ladder. There'd never been a precedent for outside hires—let alone parachuting someone straight into management.

But Sophia was adamant. "I swear, I saw Mr. Harcourt's signature on the offer letter myself! She's going to be Director of Investment Division III!"

Noreen's heart skipped.

That was the position Seth had promised her.

She'd given years of her life to Aurelion Group, and everyone knew it. By company standards, she should have been promoted to director long ago, running her own projects.

But Seth had insisted he couldn't do without her as his secretary, said no one else could replace her. He'd always promised the director's chair would be waiting for her. Once Aurelion Group went public, he'd hand her the promotion himself.

"Really?" Noreen tried to sound casual, though her eyelid twitched with anxiety. "Do you know her name?"

"Something like Bi... Bi...ca?" Sophia confessed, squinting as if she could read the name off her memory. "Didn't catch the rest."

Noreen's hand trembled. The mug slipped from her grasp and clattered to the floor, hot water splashing everywhere.

Sophia jumped. "Noreen! Are you burned?"

"No."

The water wasn't hot, but somehow it left her feeling more scalded than boiling water ever could.

"Bianca Lowell," she said quietly.

Sophia looked confused. "What?"

213

11:54

Noreen took a steadying breath. "Her name is Bianca. She's about to be appointed as Director of Investment Division III."

“That’s it! That’s the name! Noreen, do you know her?”

“No.”

She picked up her mug and went to refill it.

News of the parachute hire spread through the company like wildfire. People kept coming to Noreen for confirmation until her patience finally snapped.

“If you’re all so curious,” she said, her tone sharper than usual, “why not just ask Mr. Harcourt yourselves?”

Her words had barely faded when the entire executive office fell silent. Then a woman’s soft voice broke the hush.

“Seth, *your* employees seem to have quite the temper.”

Noreen turned toward the voice and felt the sting of seeing them—standing side by side, an inseparable pair.

After days apart, Seth barely spared Noreen a glance, his expression cool as he introduced the woman at his side.

“Everyone, I’d like you to meet our new Director of Investment Division III, Ms. Lowell. From now on, she’ll be taking charge of Division III’s projects.”