

## NEVER MISTAKE A QUEEN FOR A LAPDOG

Yes-man 5

When Noreen turned around after sending the documents, she found Bianca already seated.

But Bianca had taken Noreen's usual spot.

Noreen froze for a moment, about to say something.

But Seth spoke first. "From now on, you'll sit over there."

Bianca glanced at Noreen with an apologetic smile. "I still have a lot to learn around here, and it'll be easier to ask Seth questions if I'm closer."

Seth had made his decision—what could Noreen say?

Without a word, she gathered her files and laptop and moved to a seat by the window.

No one else in the conference room dared to speak, but Noreen could feel the sympathetic glances from her colleagues.

And those looks of pity felt like needles against her skin.

Halfway through the meeting, Seth raised a question about one of the projects.

"Why hasn't this project moved forward yet? Who's responsible?"

His tone was sharp; everyone who knew him could sense he was about to lose his temper.

The entire room fell silent.

Under the weight of that silence, Noreen stood up. “I’m the one responsible.”

Seth shot her a cold look. His voice was even sharper now. “Explain.”

“I’m sorry. I was sick for a few days, so the timeline got pushed back-

It

She didn’t even finish before Seth cut her off. “That’s not an excuse. I’ve made it clear—no one is allowed to let personal issues interfere with work. That’s the rule.”

Noreen fell silent. She didn’t argue, just nodded. “I’ll catch up on the progress.”

Seth finally seemed satisfied.

Before the meeting ended, Seth turned to everyone with an announcement.

He said he was hosting a welcome party for Bianca that evening at Hesper Lounge,

11:55

and everyone from the company was invited.

Hesper Lounge was the most upscale club in all of Rivercrest City—expensive, exclusive.

A grand gesture, no doubt.

And it made Seth’s favoritism toward Bianca all the more obvious.

Everyone’s attitude toward Bianca shifted.

Even Sophia, who was usually oblivious to office drama, picked up on the tension.

As she helped Noreen tidy up the conference room, she whispered, “Noreen, are you okay?”

She was one of the few who had an inkling about what was really going on between Noreen and Seth.

Noreen managed a calm reply. "I'm fine."

"But you look so pale..." Sophia said, concern written all over her face.

Noreen touched her own cheek. "Is it that bad?"

Sophia nodded earnestly. "It's obvious."

"My stomach's acting up, you know how it is. Old problem," Noreen said, making up

an excuse.

"Are you going to the welcome party tonight?"

Noreen considered it, then shook her head. "I'll skip it. Could you let Mr. Harcourt know for me?"

Seth had invited the entire company to Bianca's welcome party. With so many people there, one more or less wouldn't make a difference.

Maybe Seth wouldn't even notice her absence.

It didn't matter anymore if she went or not.

"Good idea. Go home early and get some rest. Your health comes first," Sophia said, her voice gentle with concern.

Even Sophia could see something was wrong.

Yet Seth, who had once shared every intimacy with her, couldn't see it at all.

>>She used to fool herself—it was just that Seth was focused on his career, too busy

to notice the small things.

But now, she couldn't believe that lie anymore.

As if on cue, the pain in her stomach flared up again.

She still had a stack of work to get through, so she popped another antispasmodic and forced herself to keep going.

By the time she finally got home, she was so exhausted that all she could do was collapse on her bed, curling up and barely able to move a finger.

Bone-tired, body and soul.

She stayed curled up for a long time. When the pain eased a little, sleepiness overtook her.

Maybe a good night's sleep would help, she thought.

But just as she drifted off, her phone rang sharply.

That ringtone—it was Seth's, the special one she used just for him.

Once upon a time, it would have made her heart skip with anticipation.

Now, it just felt like torture.