

# NEVER MISTAKE A QUEEN FOR A LAPDOG

Yes-man 7

apter 7

## Chapter 7

Sophia's face tightened the moment she heard there'd be drinks.

"No way. Noreen's not feeling well—she shouldn't be drinking."

Last time Noreen ended up with alcohol poisoning, Sophia had been the one with her at that business dinner. She remembered every detail, and the memory still haunted her. The doctor even said that if they'd gotten to the hospital any later, Noreen might not have made it.

Jude looked annoyed. "Come on, Sophia. You're seriously underestimating Noreen. Everyone knows she can hold her liquor better than most guys here. Remember when she and Seth went up north for those negotiations? Twenty people at that dinner, and she kept pace with every round—didn't even flinch. And now you're telling me she can't handle three glasses? Is it just me, or is she picking favorites? Or is she trying to disrespect Bianca in front of everyone?"

Bianca jumped in, trying to smooth things over. "Jude, give Secretary Gilmore a break, will you? She's a lady—don't make things hard for her."

Jude refused to back down. "How am I making things hard? I'm just stating the facts."

She looked at Seth for backup. "Seth, am I being unreasonable here?"

Seth barely looked up, his gaze unreadable as it flickered over Jude's face. His lips curled in a cool, indifferent smile. "Not at all."

With that, Jude felt vindicated. "See? Even Seth thinks I'm not. Bianca, you're just too soft-hearted. Unlike Noreen—she's a real player in the business world. She

knows how to look out for herself."

Noreen didn't rise to the bait. Instead, she fixed her gaze on Seth, searching his eyes for any trace of something else—a hint of concern, maybe even the smallest sign that he'd step in for her. She waited, hoping he'd say something—anything—to get her out of this. Just one word, or even a half-hearted "that's enough." It was the kind of desperate hope that comes right before giving up.

But Seth stayed silent. His eyes held nothing but cold detachment.

In that moment, something inside Noreen shifted. It was as if someone had dumped a bucket of ice water down her back, freezing out the last bit of hope she'd been holding onto.

She forced a faint smile, her expression distant. Leaning forward, she picked up the

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wine glass in front of her, her voice steady. "Looks like I'm the one breaking the rules here. Fine. I'll drink."

She'd learned plenty of tricks to survive these business dinners—lining her stomach. beforehand, sipping slowly, milk or yogurt to cushion the blow. Those strategies had helped her outdrink plenty of seasoned negotiators. But tonight, she ignored every one of them. She just drank, fast and reckless.

One glass.

Two.

Three.

The burn of the liquor seared her throat and made her stomach cramp even more painfully than before. Still, she forced herself to smile and lifted her empty glass toward Seth. “There. I finished. May I go now, Mr. Harcourt?”

Noreen never heard if Seth gave her permission to leave. She didn’t wait for his answer—she just got up and walked out.

Her stomach churned violently as she hurried down the hall. She was terrified she might throw up right there in front of everyone. She barely made it to the bathroom before she was doubled over the sink, heaving until her vision blurred. Somewhere in the middle of it, she caught herself thinking—almost bitterly grateful—that at least she’d taken her stomach meds before drinking, not antibiotics.

Nobody’s born a heavyweight. Before joining the Aurelion Group, Noreen hadn’t touched a drop of alcohol. The first time she went with Seth to a business dinner, the clients insisted they show some “good faith” by drinking. The problem was, Seth was allergic to alcohol—he couldn’t touch the stuff. So Noreen stepped up and took his place. She had no idea what she was doing, choked on her first sip, but when she thought about how hard Seth had worked for that opportunity, she forced herself to swallow it down.

That was the first project she ever won for him.

Seth once told her she was the pride of the Aurelion Group, and that when they finally made it, they’d celebrate their success together. For that promise, Noreen never let him touch another drink at a business dinner. No matter what, she always took his place.

Her ability to drink wasn’t some natural gift. It was forged, one bitter glass at a

time.

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**Chapter 8**