

NEVER MISTAKE A QUEEN FOR A LAPDOG

Yes-man 8

n arrow that, after seven long years, struck Noreen right between the eyes.

It hurt—terribly so—but pain had a way of sharpening clarity.

By the time she left Hesper Lounge, rain had started to fall outside. Late autumn showers always arrived without warning.

Noreen’s stomach, still unsettled after vomiting, offered her little relief. Her face

was drained of color.

She pulled out her phone to call a ride, but

Seth’s driver spotted her and jogged over. “Ms. Gilmore, is the party over? Where’s Mr. Harcourt? Didn’t he leave with you?”

“He’ll need a bit longer,” Noreen replied, her voice barely above a whisper.

Inside, the party was still going strong, and Seth—charming as ever—was in the company of his latest muse. He likely wasn’t coming out anytime soon.

The driver glanced back at the entrance, then at Noreen’s pale face. Taking matters into his own hands, he said, “Ms. Gilmore, why don’t I take you home? It’s pouring and hailing a cab at this hour won’t be easy.”

Noreen didn’t protest. She felt so wretched, stubbornness seemed pointless.

They’d barely made it halfway when Seth called, his voice clipped and cold as it came through the car’s speaker. “Where are you?”

The driver answered honestly, explaining that Noreen had felt unwell and, assuming Seth would be a while, he’d decided to take her home.

Seth's response was icy: "Do you remember who signs your paychecks?"

The driver stiffened. "I'll come back for you right away, sir."

But just before the line disconnected, Seth's tone melted into something gentle, almost warm. "The car will be there soon, Bianca. It's cold out—wait inside."

Bianca's reply was soft and sweet. "Will you keep me company, Seth?"

Noreen never heard his answer; the call had already ended.

The driver looked uneasy.

11:56

Noreen spoke up. "Zachary, just drop me at the curb. I'll get a cab myself."

She knew this stretch of road—there wasn't a taxi in sight, nor even an awning to keep off the rain.

The driver, guilt-ridden, handed her the car's umbrella before she got out.

Maybe luck pitied her for once that night, because only a few minutes after stepping out into the rain, a car finally pulled over.

Even so, by the next morning, Noreen was feverish and shivering.

Her body, still frail after a miscarriage, was no match for the cold and the constant strain on her health. Her immune system was shot; even a light drizzle left her defenseless.

But she had an appointment that day with Mr. Chase from Valiant Capital Group—the same project Seth had called her out for during the meeting.

If she postponed again, there was no telling what snide remarks Seth would throw her way.

Noreen glanced at the thermometer: 101.3°F. Not life-threatening, but miserable all

the same.

She could take something for the fever, but unfortunately, Mr. Chase was a notorious drinker. He insisted on discussing business over drinks.

With a sigh, Noreen tossed the medicine back in the drawer, grabbed her files, and headed out without looking back.

She'd just ordered food and drinks when Mr. Chase arrived.

Seeing the spread—everything he liked—he broke into a satisfied grin. “Ms. Gilmore, are you sure you won’t consider jumping ship to Valiant Capital? Name your salary and the job’s yours!”

“Thank you for the offer, Mr. Chase, but my contract with Aurelion Group isn’t up yet. I’m not looking to make a move right now.”

It was the answer she always gave.

Noreen’s reputation preceded her—her skill was well-known, and she was always in demand. There was no shortage of people trying to poach her.

Once, at a dinner, a tipsy business partner even tried to recruit her right in front of

11.56 /

Seth.

Seth hadn’t said a word at the time, but that night he’d taken his frustration out on

her in bed.

In the end, it was Noreen who signed a long-term contract with Aurelion Group, just to coax Seth into letting it go.

11:56