

It was very hard for Sam to keep from screaming at the unfairness of it all

She had been working at the newspaper for years. She wasn't always the best writer, and she certainly could have been a bit more social with the rest of the office staff, but she was good at her job, and she had become invaluable to the editor Derek had always valued her opinion for what it was, and he trusted her more than anyone else at the paper.

But that was before Christine,

Christine started into the newsroom like a Category 5 hurricane. She tore down everything Sam had worked so hard to build and left a trail of destruction in her wake. Within her first month, she'd managed to get four good reporters fired, and at least a few others were on the chopping block.

And Derek seemed to love her immediately

It didn't matter to him that Sam had given the paper everything or that he used to trust her implicitly. When Christine winked, complimented him, and broke things off with her fiancé to get to know him better, all of that went out the window. It was like Caesar and Cleopatra all over again.

She demanded Sam's resignation two weeks later

It was sheer luck that Christine wasn't in a position to influence hiring. No matter how much she complained about Sam's work, she couldn't get her way

And then came the last straw: Derek promoted Christine to the job Sam had been promised, and that was it. A carefully crafted letter of resignation made its way to her direct supervisor's desk

Truth be told, Sam still wasn't sure whether it was the right decision. But she'd given her two weeks' notice, and her desk would have to be cleared out by then. She had to focus on that. When she walked back into the office that Wednesday night, there he was. She had hoped that today would be the day he'd decided he didn't have to work until all hours and let her clear out her desk in peace. But Derek, who always seemed to have a sixth sense about her, picked his head up the second she made it across the room.

There wasn't much left: a calendar, a mug, a few notebooks, and a well-worn chemistry textbook lined the box she brought for her things. He at least had the decency to let her finish packing before calling her over

This wasn't going to end well, and she knew it.

"Are you okay?" he asked once she was settled into the uncomfortable chair across from him. She nodded mutely, and he cleared his throat

"Good. Uh...you'll have to forgive the lack of professionalism here, but."

She tilted her head. "But what?" she asked graciously, wondering briefly if he knew how thin a line he was treading. His eyes fixed on her, and it was like she was seeing the Derek of three months ago. She couldn't breathe.