

The Promotion

A story in idioms · Read carefully — every expression matters

HOW TO READ THIS STORY: Ten idioms are marked in bold with numbers [1]-[10]. Find each one as you read. Do not look up the meanings yet — try to guess from context first. The key is on page 2.

- Maya had been working at Greenfield Publishing for six years without a single promotion. Every Monday she arrived early, stayed late, and smiled at colleagues who had long stopped noticing. She never **[1] let the cat out of the bag about her frustration — not to her friends**, not even to her diary.
- When the senior editor position was finally advertised, her manager called her aside. "Look," he said, in the gentle tone people use before delivering bad news, "I think you should **[2] bite the bullet and apply**. You've earned it." Maya nodded, but everyone in the office already knew there was **[3] an elephant in the room**: the director's nephew, Daniel, had already been promised the job.
- Daniel appeared in the office **[4] once in a blue moon — usually to collect his pay cheque or ask someone to fix his laptop**. He dressed beautifully, laughed easily, and had absolutely no idea what a manuscript was. Yet somehow he kept being given credit for other people's work. Maya had suspected for months that she had been **[5] barking up the wrong tree by trying to impress the director directly**.
- Then, one Tuesday afternoon, her colleague Priya pulled her into the kitchen. "I'm telling you this **[6] straight from the horse's mouth** — I heard it from the director's own assistant," Priya whispered. "Daniel isn't getting the job. The board rejected the appointment. They want a fair process." Maya felt something loosen in her chest. She had been so certain that speaking up would mean **[7] burning bridges that she had said nothing at all**.
- The interview panel included two people Maya had never met. The third was Daniel himself, smiling warmly, asking thoughtful questions — **[8] a wolf in sheep's clothing** if she ever saw one. She answered carefully, professionally, honestly. She did not **[9] spill the beans about what Priya had told her**. She simply talked about the work she loved.
- The rejection letter arrived on a Friday. It was polite, brief, and said nothing useful. Maya read it twice, put it in the recycling bin, and ordered a very large coffee. That was **[10] the last straw**. On Monday morning, she handed in her resignation — and by Wednesday, she had three interviews lined up at other companies.

IDIOM KEY — meanings revealed

(read after your first attempt at the tasks on page 2)

[1] let the cat out of the bag to accidentally reveal a secret	[2] bite the bullet to endure something difficult or unpleasant bravely
[3] elephant in the room an obvious problem everyone is aware of but avoids discussing	[4] once in a blue moon very rarely; almost never
[5] barking up the wrong tree pursuing a mistaken or misguided course of action	[6] straight from the horse's mouth directly from the original, most reliable source
[7] burning bridges permanently damaging a relationship by your actions	[8] a wolf in sheep's clothing someone dangerous or dishonest who appears friendly
[9] spill the beans to reveal secret information	[10] the last straw the final problem that makes a situation unbearable

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Tasks · Think carefully before you write

TASK 1 | Comprehension — What Actually Happened?

Answer these questions in full sentences, using your own words.

1 Why did Maya never mention her frustration at work?

2 What was 'the elephant in the room' in paragraph 2? Describe it in your own words without using the idiom.

3 What news did Priya share with Maya, and why was it surprising?

4 Why did Maya resign at the end — what were the two things that pushed her to leave?

TASK 2 | Idiom in Context — Why This One?

For each question, explain WHY the writer chose that particular idiom. What does it add that a plain word would not?

1 In paragraph 3, Maya thinks she has been "[5] barking up the wrong tree." What does this suggest about how she feels about her own strategy?

2 In paragraph 5, Daniel is described as "[8] a wolf in sheep's clothing." Find two details earlier in the story that support this image.

3 The story ends with "[10] the last straw." Why is this idiom particularly effective as the final sentence of the story?

TASK 3 | Read Between the Lines

These questions have no single right answer. Support your opinion with evidence from the text.

1 Do you think Maya was right to stay silent for so long? What would you have done differently?

2 Is Daniel entirely to blame for the situation, or does the story suggest the problem is bigger than one person?
