

## Chapter 11

That evening, the silence between them felt heavier than usual. Another night together in the loft was exactly what Frances needed, especially after the emotional toll of the day. She craved Yaz's presence, her closeness, her warmth. She needed to feel Yaz's soft touch against her skin, the scent of her filling the space, to lose herself in her arms and let the tension melt away. The taste of Yaz's lips was the only thing that could wash away the bitter memories of the day's events. But more than anything, Frances longed to forget.

The loft was bathed in the soft glow of dimmed lights, casting gentle shadows across the room. A mellow tune drifted from the kitchen radio, its soothing melody blending seamlessly into the atmosphere. On the sofa, Frances lay curled up against Yaz, her body molded to fit perfectly against hers, as though they had always belonged that way. Frances could feel the day slipping away as Yaz traced slow, comforting lines across her stomach. Every now and then, her lips would press soft kisses to her neck, grounding her in the quiet, intimate moment they shared.

"When do you need to be at the studio tomorrow?" Frances asked

"Nine...you?"

"Eleven...It's my last day. Thank god...So breakfast together?" She smiled turning her head looking Yaz over her shoulder

"Definitely" she confirmed kissing her temple "Tell me about New York and about your friend, the photographer. "

Frances's smile widened, the weight of the day so obviously lifting with a topic. She rolled onto her back, her eyes dancing between Yaz's lips and eyes, her hand gently tucking a loose strand of hair behind Yaz's ear. "God, you're so pretty," she murmured, her voice filled with affection.

Yaz chuckled and leaned in, pressing a soft kiss to the tip of Frances' nose. "Tinker," she teased, giving Frances' stomach a playful tickle that drew out a laugh. "Don't think you can distract me."

Frances laughed, her fingers tangling in Yaz's hair, her voice filled with nostalgia as she began her story. "His name is Victor Halloway. We met when I was working as a cocktail waitress at a nightclub."

Yaz raised an eyebrow, intrigued. "You were a cocktail waitress?"

Frances sighed, a small smile playing on her lips. "Yeah, not my proudest moment."

"I'm not judgy," Yaz reassured her, curiosity lacing her tone. "Just intrigued."

"It wasn't glamorous, but it paid well enough to cover the rent and everything I needed for Lily."

"Was Lily living with you then?"

"Mmmhmm, I couldn't afford much else. I'd pay the lady next door to babysit while I worked." Frances's voice softened, a hint of longing in her words. "I struggled, but I miss that time. Having her with me, it was short, but its always in my mind... Anyway," she smiled, shaking off the heaviness, "I met Victor at a friend's birthday party. He was charming, fun, and totally uninterested in following his father's business empire."

Yaz giggled, "Sounds like a rebel."

"Oh, he definitely is. His father's always threatening to cut him off." Frances laughed, her eyes sparkling.

"So how did you two end up as friends?"

"He asked if I'd be interested in modeling. I did a few shoots with him, and it just snowballed. I did pin-up and fashion modeling. It paid well enough to get Lily into proper care and made me independent. Victor looked out for me, introduced me to the right people. I was young and naive, but he always had my back."

"That's sweet," Yaz smiled.

"Oh, you're gonna love him. He's the loveliest person you'll ever meet." Frances's eyes softened, her hand tracing the outline of Yaz's face with tender affection. "Almost as lovely as you," she murmured before pulling Yaz into a soft, lingering kiss, filled with unspoken love.

Yaz's hand slowly caressed the length of her, her touch light and gentle. Frances moaned softly into the kiss, her body instinctively arching as Yaz deepened the kiss, their movements syncing with the soft rhythm of their affection. They sank deeper into the cushions of the sofa, completely lost in the warmth of the moment, each touch an unspoken promise.

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Yaz sat at her workbench, carefully threading the final beads onto a delicate sheer scarf, using a fine Pakistani beading technique she had mastered learning from her mother. Her focus was intense, lost in the intricate details, but a soft knock on the door pulled her out of her concentration. She glanced up, surprised to see Susan standing in

the doorway of her loft workshop, a warm smile on her face. The visit was unexpected—they weren't supposed to meet until tomorrow.

"Susan!" Yaz exclaimed, standing up quickly, her eyes lighting up in surprise and delight. "Oh my god...What are you doing here? I thought you're coming tomorrow?" She said softly as she hugged her tight

"I couldn't wait. I was so excited. Here, I brought you all some cakes."

Yaz's eyes blurred with tears "What would I do without you?" She took the box leaving it on the kitchen counter "Soooo?" Yaz's eyes beamed with excitement "What do you think?"

Susan stepped inside, her eyes sweeping across the loft. Seamstresses bustled around, working on Lillian's dress, fabric draped across tables, the hum of machines filling the air. The space was alive with creativity, her smile widening as she admired the scene. "My god honey, this is amazing."

Yaz grinned, a little sheepish but proud. "It's not much, but it works for me."

"Not much?" Susan said. "This is incredible honey. I am so proud of you." She palmed her cheek gently

"Oh, let me introduce you to everyone.... I'm so chuffed" she hopped around exited

Yaz led Susan across the bustling workshop, a sense of pride swelling within her as she approached the seamstresses who were busy working on Lillian's dress. Each of the women, dedicated and focused, was contributing their talents to the creation of something truly beautiful.

Yaz gestured to the first woman, who was seated closest to them, carefully hemming fabric with delicate precision. "Susan, this is Mildred," she introduced with a warm smile. "I honestly don't know what I'd do without her. Mildred this is Susan, my substitute mum"

Mildred, a woman in her mid-twenties, with deep brown skin that glowed under the soft light of the loft, smiled up at Susan. Her black hair was tied back neatly in a ponytail, a few strands escaping around her face as she worked. Her hands, nimble and experienced, moved effortlessly over the fabric. "Nice to meet you," Mildred said, her voice warm and welcoming.

Susan smiled back, admiring her calm focus. "It's wonderful to meet you, Mildred. Yaz speaks so highly of you."

Mildred laughed softly, a quiet modesty in her demeanor. "Yaz makes it easy. She's a great boss."

Yaz chuckled, her hand resting briefly on Mildred's shoulder. "Don't let her fool you, she's the one who keeps everything running smoothly."

Moving on, Yaz introduced the other two seamstresses, Shirley and Barbara, both equally engrossed in their tasks, each offering Susan a warm greeting. The atmosphere was light and collaborative, and Susan could feel the energy in the room, the passion these women shared for their craft.

The space Yaz had built wasn't just about her, it was a thriving, inclusive workshop where talented women, from all walks of life, came together to create something magical. It made her even prouder of Yaz and the impact she was having.

Yaz, catching Susan's thoughtful expression, smiled softly. "I'm lucky to have found them," she said. "We make a great team."

Susan nodded, feeling a warmth spread through her. She glanced at the scarf Yaz was making

"What are you working on?"

"A scarf for Lillian to go with her dress," Yaz explained, holding up the nearly finished piece, its shimmer catching the light. "I'm using a technique I learned from mum. It's tricky, but worth it."

Susan reached out, touching the edge of the scarf gently. "It's beautiful. Lillian is going to love it." Pride radiated from her, but underneath it, a quiet worry gnawed at her heart.

She glanced around, her eyes lingering on the cozy loft space, the light streaming in through the large windows, the workstations perfectly arranged, close to everything Yaz needed. The realization settled in. This place could become Yaz's home, her world. A place where she thrived, far from the home they had shared, where their lives were intertwined.

Susan swallowed hard, pushing down her unease, knowing she had to be supportive, even if a part of her feared losing Yaz to this new chapter of her life.

"You've really created something special here. I'm so proud of you, Yaz."

Yaz, oblivious to the worry in Susan's heart, beamed at her words. "Thank you. It means so much to hear that from you."

Susan reached for her hand squeezing it gently, her smile warm, though her heart ached just a little. "I just don't wanna lose you," she whispered, her voice barely audible amidst the workshop's activity.

As Yaz looked at her, the realization dawned on her and her heart ached. She pulled Susan into a warm embrace "You won't," she said softly. "This place is just a part of my dream. You'll always be a part of my life, no matter what. You can't get rid of me that easy" she chuckled

Susan nodded, her smile returning fully, reassured, but still unable to fully shake the feeling as she hugged her tight.

Yaz pulled away with a smile "Hey...we're having a lunch break. Let's have some coffee and those cakes. You can meet the girls more"

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Yaz sat at her desk, a schedule of deadlines and outfits sprawled out in front of her. She was reviewing fabric samples when Eleanor entered, heels clicking sharply against the floor.

"Morning" Yaz smiled

"Good morning Miss Khan" She smiled, though it didn't reach her eyes, and took a seat opposite Yaz.

"We need to discuss the schedule," Eleanor said, her voice clipped as she looked over the documents on Yaz's desk.

"Okay, I'm listening"

"I understand you have a... different approach to things, but we can't afford to fall behind, not with how tight the deadlines are."

Yaz stiffened at the comment which surprised her but she maintained her composure, however, and nodded. "I'm aware of the deadlines. I've organized the team, and we're on track. Nothing to worry about."

Eleanor's eyes flicked toward Yaz, her gaze cold and assessing. "Well, that's good to hear. I wasn't sure how you... managed your workflow." Her tone was light, but there was an underlying condescension in it, as though she were questioning Yaz's capability without outright saying it. "This isn't like... tailoring in the streets, you know? This is a high-fashion business. I do hope you are aware of it."

Yaz felt the sting of Eleanor's words, subtle but sharp. The implication that her skills were somehow inferior because of her background, because of who she was, hit her hard. She straightened in her chair, refusing to let the comment slide. "I assure you," she said evenly, "I know exactly what I'm doing. My work speaks for itself, and my team and I have handled far tighter deadlines before."

Eleanor's smile remained tight as she glanced at the fabric samples. "I'm sure you have. It's just that, well, sometimes certain... expectations can be hard to meet for some people." Her eyes lingered on Yaz for a beat longer than necessary, the message behind her words clear.

Yaz's chest tightened, but she refused to show it. She met Eleanor's gaze, her voice steady. "I've been meeting high expectations my whole life. This won't be any different."

There was a brief silence as Eleanor held Yaz's gaze, the tension thick in the air. Then, with a small, dismissive shrug, Eleanor stood. "Well, I'll leave you to it then. Let's hope everything goes smoothly."

"It will I can assure you" Yaz nodded, watching as Eleanor left the office, her footsteps echoing in the hall.

The door clicked shut, and the silence that followed felt heavier than before. Yaz remained at her desk, her hands resting on the fabric in front of her. The encounter had left her shaken more than she wanted to admit.

Eleanor's words, though carefully chosen to avoid overt racism, had carried enough weight to remind Yaz of the prejudice she faced. It wasn't the first time, and she knew it wouldn't be the last, but it still stung. Taking a deep breath, she clenched her fists for a moment before letting them go. She wouldn't let this woman's subtle cruelty get to her. Not today.

She stood up, determined to keep moving forward. There was work to be done, and she wouldn't let anyone, especially someone like Eleanor doubt her ability.

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Frances arrived at the small, upscale restaurant. She walked inside with her usual confident stride, her blonde curls catching the light. She was dressed in a tailored, navy blue dress that hugged her slender frame, accentuating her graceful figure. Her lips, painted a soft red, formed an easy smile as she spotted her friend, Helen, seated at a corner table. Helen, a vibrant presence with dark, wavy hair that framed her heart-shaped face, looked up and waved, her wide smile instantly lighting up the room. Helen was a striking contrast to Frances. Where Frances had a classic, elegant beauty, Helen exuded vivacity, her bright green eyes filled with energy. She was wearing a bold red dress that complemented her complexion, her style effortlessly chic.

Helen was a fellow actress with whom Frances had grown quite close over the years. She was always the life of the room, her talent not limited to acting but also encompassing singing and dancing, which made her the complete package for musical films.

"Hey, Fran!" Helen greeted, standing to embrace Frances warmly before they both settled into their seats.

"Hey yourself!" Frances smiled, brushing a strand of hair behind her ear as she sat down.

"I'm glad you could make it. Sorry, I was so busy, I just didn't have time for anything recently"

"I understand, don't worry about it. How's the musical coming along?"

Helen let out an exaggerated groan, though her eyes sparkled with excitement. "Oh, don't get me started! It's chaotic, as usual, but the numbers are coming together nicely. We've got this massive tap routine, and I swear, if I hear the song one more time, I'm gonna tap right out of there," she joked, taking a sip of her wine. "But honestly, I'm loving it. It's been a blast. What about you? You've got that new role, right? The comedy?"

Frances nodded enthusiastically. "Yeah, 'Girl Next Door'. It's light, funny. To be honest I wasn't aware this was exactly what I needed after the previous project. I play the sweet, unsuspecting neighbor who accidentally gets tangled up in this ridiculous crime plot. We're just doing the table readings at the moment, but so far I do like it."

"That sounds like so much fun!" Helen said, leaning forward with interest. "I've always thought you'd be great in comedy. You've got that wit."

"Thanks," Frances replied, blushing slightly at the compliment. "It's definitely a different pace, but I'm enjoying it."

They spent a few minutes chatting about their projects, laughing about the inevitable mishaps on set and the quirks of their co-stars. Frances teased Helen about her uncanny ability to memorize complex dance routines, while Helen mockingly complained about having to play a "perfect" romantic lead yet again.

"So, speaking of romance," Frances said with a playful smirk, leaning in. "Tell me about this new relationship of yours. Don't think I haven't heard the rumors."

Helen rolled her eyes but couldn't hide the smile creeping across her face. "Well, it's still pretty new," she said coyly. "He's a musician.... absolutely brilliant on the piano...and kind of shy, believe it or not. We've been keeping it quiet, trying to avoid the usual gossip."

"Oh, come on, spill!" Frances teased, giving her a playful nudge. "I need all the juicy details!"

Helen laughed, throwing her napkin at Frances. "You're the worst!" she said, shaking her head. "But he's great. Really sweet, down-to-earth. We'll see where it goes."

Frances grinned, happy to see her friend so content. "I'm glad you're happy. You deserve it."

Helen smiled back, her eyes softening. "Thanks, Fran. Enough about me, though. What about you? Anyone new in your life?"

Frances hesitated for a moment, her expression shifting slightly. "No," she said with a casual shrug. "Just me, myself, and I."

Helen tilted her head, watching her closely. "Really? No one at all?" she asked, her tone light but probing.

Frances kept her gaze steady, but there was a flicker of something guarded in her eyes. "Nope. Just focusing on work right now."

For a moment, there was a quiet pause between them. Then, Helen leaned in slightly, lowering her voice. "Fran," she said carefully, "there's been some talk. About you and... Yaz."

Frances stiffened slightly but kept her face neutral. "Talk?"

Helen nodded, her expression soft but serious. "Look, you know I don't care either way. You're my friend, and I love you. But people are talking, and you know how this town can be. I'm just saying... be careful. I don't want you to get hurt, and I don't want anyone to use this against you."

Frances's chest tightened. She wasn't ready to have this conversation, not with anyone. She forced a smile, trying to deflect. "There's nothing to talk about. Yaz is just a friend."

Helen didn't push, but her eyes conveyed what her words didn't. She reached out, gently squeezing Frances's hand. "I just want you to be safe, Fran. That's all."

Frances nodded, her smile faltering just for a moment. "Thanks. I'll be fine, don't worry."

The conversation shifted back to lighter topics after that, but the weight of Helen's words lingered in Frances's mind, even as they laughed and joked together. She knew her friend meant well, but it didn't make the situation any easier.

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Yaz sat at a small table in the break room, picking at her lunch while her thoughts drifted.



Across from her, Tim, a friend she had grown close to over time, joined her, his tray in hand.

“Hey, you okay?” Tim asked as he sat down, noticing the faraway look in her eyes.

Yaz smiled faintly, trying to push the unease aside. “Yeah, just thinking.”

Tim raised an eyebrow. “Thinking about Eleanor, by any chance?”

Yaz froze for a second, surprised. “How’d you know?”

Tim hesitated for a moment, before finally sighing. “I overheard her talking about you earlier. She didn’t know I was nearby.” He paused, clearly uncomfortable. “Look, Yaz, I’m not going to repeat everything she said. I don’t think it’d do any good. But... it wasn’t good.”

Yaz’s heart sank, though she tried to keep her expression neutral. “What did she say?” she asked quietly.

Tim frowned, pushing his food around on his plate. “I’d rather not repeat it. Out of respect for you, I mean. But let’s just say she’s not exactly your biggest fan.”

Yaz leaned back in her chair, a weight settling in her chest. “Was it because of my work?”

Tim shook his head. “No. It’s more... personal.” His eyes met hers, and Yaz could see the concern in them. “Look, I’m not saying this to upset you. I just want you to be careful. She’s the type of person who can make life difficult for you if she wants to. She could cost you your job.”

Yaz swallowed, the thought of losing her position making her stomach twist. “You really think she’d try to do that?”

“I don’t know for sure, but I wouldn’t put it past her.” Tim sighed. “I don’t want to see that happen to you. You’re talented, Yaz. Really talented. And you’ve earned your place here. But people like Eleanor... they don’t always play fair.”

Yaz looked down at her plate, her appetite gone. She had worked too hard to let someone like Eleanor derail her career. But now the reality of the situation was sinking in, she was facing more than just professional rivalry. There was something deeper, more insidious at play.

“I’ll be careful,” Yaz said softly, though her voice was tinged with frustration. She hated the idea of having to watch her back, of second-guessing every move. But Tim was right. Eleanor had power, and Yaz couldn’t afford to underestimate her.

Tim reached out, giving Yaz’s hand a firm, reassuring squeeze. “You’ve got people here who’ve got your back. Don’t forget that.”

Yaz managed a small smile, her heart warmed by Tim’s support. “Thanks,” she said, her voice soft with gratitude. “It means a lot, really. Thank you for telling me, I really appreciate

it.”

“What are friends for?” Tim grinned, giving her hand another squeeze before letting go. “So, when will I get to see this workshop of yours?” His eyes suddenly lit up with excitement.

Yaz's mood visibly brightened at his enthusiasm, her lips breaking into a wide smile. “Whenever you want! You’ll come to the opening, right?”

“Excuse me? Of course I’m coming!” Tim teased, raising an eyebrow. “I’ve got to check out my competition, after all.”

Yaz let out a burst of laughter, the tension of the day melting away in the light-hearted exchange. It was moments like these, with friends like Tim, that reminded her she wasn’t facing the challenges alone.

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Lillian stepped through the door of Yaz’s workshop, her breath catching as her eyes darted around the room. The soft hum of sewing machines, the warm glow of sunlight pouring in through the tall windows, and the fabric draped across tables created an atmosphere that was both busy and serene. She had heard of Yaz’s talent, but standing here, surrounded by the beauty and creativity of her workspace, Lillian couldn’t help but feel in awe.

"This place is... incredible," Lillian murmured, her gaze sweeping over the room. The combination of materials, textures, and colors danced before her eyes, each piece contributing to the magic of the space. It felt alive, like a hub of creativity and passion.

Yaz smiled from her workbench, noticing Lillian’s wide-eyed wonder. "It’s home," she said simply, though the pride in her voice was unmistakable. "Ready to see your dress?"

Lillian nodded, her heart fluttering with excitement and nerves. She wasn’t sure what to expect, but Yaz had an impeccable reputation, and Lillian had high hopes. Yaz led her over to a mannequin that stood off to the side, the dress hidden beneath a sheer cover. With a flourish, Yaz pulled the cover away, revealing the dress in all its glory.

Lillian’s hand flew to her mouth, her eyes widening as she took in the sight. The dress was breathtaking. Made of soft ivory silk, it was an elegant fusion of vintage and modern styles. The bodice was delicately fitted with lace accents along the neckline and sleeves, adding a romantic touch. The skirt flowed beautifully, the fabric moving as though it were alive. The attention to detail was remarkable, each stitch, each bead, was perfect. It was more than she had ever imagined.

"Oh my god, Yaz..." Lillian whispered, her voice shaky with emotion. "It’s... it’s perfect."

Yaz beamed, stepping back to admire her work alongside Lillian. "I’m glad you like it."

"I love it," Lillian said, her eyes never leaving the dress. She reached out, her fingers

brushing lightly over the fabric, feeling the quality and craftsmanship. "It's more than I ever dreamed of."

Yaz smiled, the relief and pride evident in her face. "I wanted it to be perfect for you."

Lillian turned to Yaz, her eyes glistening. "Thank you, Yaz. This means so much to me."

Yaz's heart swelled as she watched Lillian admire the dress. Moments like these made all the hard work worth it. "Wanna try it on?"

"I can't wait" Lillian's eyes glistened with excitement

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Frances lay on her side, gently running her hand across Yaz's back, her touch slow and soothing. Yaz, resting against Frances, returned the tenderness with soft kisses, her lips brushing Frances's with a quiet warmth. For a few moments, there was nothing but the sound of their soft breaths, a peacefulness enveloping them both.

"Had lunch with my friend today," Frances murmured, her voice light but holding something underneath it. She took a breath, her hand still tracing along Yaz's skin as if the movement grounded her. "She asked me about you... about us."

Yaz paused, lifting her head slightly to look at Frances. "What about us?" she asked, her brow furrowing with a hint of concern.

Frances hesitated for a moment, choosing her words carefully not wanting to worry her, yet wanting to be honest. "She's heard... rumors. There's been some talk, people wondering if we're more than just friends."

Yaz's expression shifted, her concern deepening. "Oh my god ...And what did you say?" Her heart skipped a beat, her mind racing

Frances's eyes softened as she looked at Yaz, her touch becoming more deliberate, a quiet reassurance behind it. "I told her nothing's her business. I wasn't going to feed into gossip. But she's a good friend, Yaz. She's not trying to cause trouble. She's just worried about me."

Yaz's heart quickened, her concern now fully visible. "Now I'm worried."

Frances pulled her closer, pressing a soft kiss to her forehead. "Don't be. I'm telling you this because I don't want any secrets between us." She smiled, smoothing Yaz's hair. "She cares, that's all. She's seen how rumors can spread in our world, but she's not going to hurt us. I've never confirmed anything, and I won't...not without your say."

Yaz let out a breath she didn't realize she was holding. "You trust her?" she asked softly.

Frances smiled, her fingers brushing through Yaz's hair. "Yes, I do. She's known me a long time, and she's kept my past relationships private." Frances smiled softly, her lips brushing Yaz's as her hand gently cupped her cheek. "Don't worry"

Yaz nodded, relaxing slightly in Frances's arms. "I trust you. I just don't want anything to ruin us."

Frances kissed her gently, her lips lingering as if to seal her promise. "Nothing is going to ruin us, darling. And if anyone tries, we'll handle it...together."

Yaz smiled, though a small part of her still held onto the worry. But the way Frances held her, spoke to her, made her feel safe. "I love you"

"Love you too" she said softly and kissed her gently. "Are you excited about New York?"

"Yeees" her eyes glistening "Who else is going?"

"My assistant, stylist for the shoot, make up artist and security"

Frances smiled, tracing her fingers softly over Yaz's back. "You're gonna love New York, you know. It's chaotic but magical, especially this time of year."

Yaz's face lit up. "I can't wait to see it. Especially with you...but it all feels so... I dunno, weird. Like, how does the trip even work? You have security? That feels surreal."

Frances chuckled, her breath warm against Yaz's skin. "I know it seems strange, but it's how it is. The security is mostly for the press. They can be relentless. We need someone there to handle them, keep things smooth."

Yaz raised her eyebrow. "So, we're going to have people following us around?"

"Not all the time," Frances reassured her. "Most of the time, they stay in the background. They won't be staying with us. They'll be at a nearby hotel."

Yaz giggled, finding the whole thing unusual. "It just feels odd, having someone watching like that."

Frances smiled, brushing her thumb over Yaz's cheek. "Trust me, you get used to it. Plus, it's really just to make sure we're not being bothered when we want some privacy."

Yaz relaxed a little more, laughing softly. "And the photoshoot?"

"Oh, it'll be great! My friend, Victor, is an amazing photographer. He's setting it up for the day after we arrive. It's all pretty casual, really, you'll see. It's fun."

Yaz smiled, the excitement in her eyes growing. "You make it sound so simple, but it feels like a different world, one I've only seen from the outside."

Frances squeezed her gently, their legs tangled together under the covers. "I know it's new

to you, but you're becoming part of it now, with me. And don't worry...if it ever gets overwhelming, we'll take it one step at a time."

Yaz chuckled, nestling closer into Frances's arms.

They lay there in comfortable silence for a while, giggling occasionally as Yaz asked more questions about how the trip would work. She found the idea of traveling for a shoot in New York both fascinating and amusing, her fingers tracing lazy circles on Frances's arm as they talked about it all. Slowly, Yaz was beginning to feel more a part of this glamorous world, a world she had only admired from a distance, and now she was entering it more and more alongside the woman she loved.

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The kitchen was softly lit as Yaz and Susan shared a quiet, intimate dinner together. The scent of freshly cooked food filled the air, but there was an underlying sense of bittersweetness between them. Tomorrow, Yaz would be flying to New York, and although the excitement of the trip buzzed in the background, the reality of leaving behind Susan, even just for a little while, always weighed on her heart.

Susan smiled warmly across the table, her eyes filled with a mix of pride and a hint of sadness. "I'm really going to miss you, you know. The house always feels so empty without you around, making me laugh and filling every space with your energy."

Yaz's heart softened. "I'll miss you too. I've never been so far away from you since I arrived here. It will feel strange to be in another state." she said, her voice a little quieter, a touch more reflective. "But I'll bring you something back from New York! Something special, just for you."

Susan chuckled, her hand reaching out to squeeze Yaz's. "You don't have to do that, sweetie. Just come back in one piece. That's all I care about."

Yaz grinned, leaning back in her chair. "Nope, you don't get a say in this. I'm gonna find something perfect for you. You'll see! It will be my pre Christmas present."

They shared a quiet laugh, but Yaz's face grew a bit more thoughtful as she looked down at her plate. "I've been thinking," she said softly, "about the opening of the workshop. I want to make you something...something beautiful. A dress, just for you. I've been working on some ideas, and I think you'll love it."

Susan's eyes widened in surprise, touched by Yaz's words. "A dress? For me? Oh, darling, you don't have to..."

"But I want to," Yaz interrupted gently. "You've always supported me, been there for me, and this is something I can give you in return. I want you to feel as special as you make me feel."

Tears glistened in Susan's eyes, and she smiled, wiping at them with a napkin. "You're

making me emotional now, Yaz.”

Yaz reached across the table, taking Susan’s hand. “I mean it. You’ve been like family to me, and I want you to feel special that day, cause you’re special to me.”

“Oh, honey.” She palmed Yaz’s cheek gently “You mean so much to me. I’m gonna feel special just being there seeing you succeed”

“I wish my parents could see it too... It breaks my heart that they won’t be there for the opening.”

Susan squeezed Yaz’s hand a little tighter. “I know, honey. But they are so proud of you, just like I am....seeing everything you’re accomplishing.”

Yaz nodded, her throat tightening with emotion. “I hope so. I just want them to see how far I’ve come, you know? I want them to know that all their sacrifices, all their hard work, it wasn’t in vain.”

“They know,” Susan said softly, her voice full of warmth and love. “They know, and they’re with you, every step of the way, even though they are miles away.”

They sat in silence for a moment, letting the emotions wash over them, before Yaz smiled through her tears. “So, are you going to wear the dress to the workshop opening?” she asked, trying to lighten the mood.

Susan laughed, wiping her eyes. “Absolutely. I wouldn’t miss it for the world.”

As they continued their meal, the weight of their conversation lingered in the air, but there was also a deep bond between them, one that filled the room with love and understanding. Tomorrow, Yaz would leave for New York, but tonight, she was here, sharing a special moment with Susan, one she’d carry with her no matter how far away she went.

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The morning of their departure was quiet as Yaz waited on the curb outside the house, watching as a black Cadillac pulled up. The car, sleek and polished, was a clear sign that this was no ordinary trip. The driver, in a crisp uniform with a small cap, stepped out and tipped his hat to her.

“Miss Yaz?” he asked, taking her suitcase and placing it in the trunk before opening the door for her.

She turned to Susan giving her tight hug. “Have a safe trip honey” Susan murmured into her shoulder

“I’ll call you as soon as I can, I promise”

“Have a nice time honey” Susan smiled as they parted

"I will" Yaz smiled giving her hand a squeeze as she saw tears gathering in the corners of Susan's eyes. "I'll be back before you know it"

She settled into the plush leather seat, taking a deep breath giving Susan one last wave as the car glided through the street. The weight of the moment pressed against her.

At the airport, the car pulled directly to a private entrance, avoiding the hustle and bustle of the main terminal. Yaz was immediately struck by the sight of Frances, who stood elegantly at the gate, dressed in a tailored, cream-colored coat with a matching small hat perched perfectly atop her curls. Her presence radiated the effortless glamour of a Hollywood starlet. Frances spotted her and waved with a bright smile, walking over.

"There you are darling! You look beautiful." Frances greeted her warmly with a quick hug. "You ready for your big trip?"

Yaz smiled nervously. "I think so. This is all a bit... new."

Frances chuckled softly, slipping an arm through Yaz's. "You'll get used to it. Let me introduce you to everyone."

Standing beside Frances was a small group of people, each clearly part of her inner circle. "Yaz, this is Nicole, my assistant. And this is Lena, my stylist. You already met my make-up artist." All the women were immaculately dressed, each with a polite but professional demeanor.

"Nice to meet you," Yaz said, offering a small smile.

Yaz blinked, taking a note of the security standing nearby, trying to absorb it all. "So, are they gonna follow us everywhere?" she leaned into Frances's ear pointing vaguely at three men dressed in suits with hats on.

Frances nodded, as though it were the most natural thing in the world. "They're discreet, don't worry. They'll stay close, but they'll give us space"

Yaz let out a small laugh, shaking her head. "This is so different from anything I'm used to."

Frances smiled warmly, placing a hand on Yaz's arm. "Don't worry darling...It might take a little time, but you'll get used to it."

"It's taken a while? Should I go and ask what's going on?" Nicole asked

"I'm sure it's fine. We can wait few more minutes" Frances said unburdened

As they made their way to the gate, Yaz was introduced to a different way of flying altogether. Frances didn't fly commercial, she had her own arrangements through the studio. A sleek, silver DC-6 aircraft awaited them on the tarmac, the logo of the airline emblazoned on its side. Flying was a luxury in itself, but to fly with someone like Frances, it

was an even more exclusive experience.

They boarded the plane, and Yaz was immediately struck by the elegance of the cabin. The seats were wide, upholstered in soft leather, and there was a sense of refinement in every detail, from the plush carpets to the polished wood accents. Stewardesses, dressed in perfectly tailored uniforms, greeted them with warm smiles and glasses of champagne, offering a level of service that made Yaz feel as though she had stepped into another world entirely.

Yaz took her seat next to Frances, still trying to process everything. "This is... something else," she said, looking around the cabin in awe.

Frances laughed softly, patting Yaz's hand. "Don't be nervous. You look like a deer caught in head lights." her thumb brushed over Yaz's hand gently, offering comfort.

As the plane took off, Frances leaned back in her seat, turning to Yaz with a soft smile. "Once we're in New York, we'll have a few things to do. Today we just relax. The shooting is tomorrow. I can't wait for you to meet Victor. You'll love him. He's a bit eccentric but very sweet. After that, we'll have time to explore. Nicole made a few arrangements for us. You'll see."

Yaz smiled, her heart racing with excitement. "I still can't believe I'm going to New York. It's like a dream."

Frances chuckled, brushing a strand of hair from Yaz's face. Her move bold but automatic. "Well, you better get used to it."

As they settled into the flight, chatting quietly, Yaz couldn't help but feel her world was suddenly expanding. It felt both thrilling and terrifying at the same time. She wondered how she will fit into it, or will she fit at all.

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