

## Chapter 6

Frances closed the last suitcase, feeling a mix of emotions swirl inside her. She left it by the door, where it joined the other six already lined up, waiting to be packed into the car. Today marked the start of her one-month trip to a filming location in Wyoming. The role was one she had waited for, a chance to dive into a character she felt could push her limits as an actress. The excitement of finally embarking on this journey filled her with anticipation, but it was tinged with a bittersweet ache.

This trip came at a time when her relationship with Yaz was just beginning to bloom. The thought of being separated from the woman she loved after only a month of being together tugged at her heart. They had spent countless hours together, sharing their dreams, their fears, and everything in between. Being apart felt like a wrench in the gears of something that was just starting to work, just beginning to feel right.

Frances walked over to the window, her gaze drifting outside where the afternoon sunbathed the garden in warm, golden light. She thought of the moments they had shared in that garden, moments filled with laughter, quiet conversation, and the deepening connection between them. Would the distance create a gap too wide to bridge? Or would it, perhaps, make their bond even stronger, proving that what they had was real and worth holding onto?

She sighed, running a hand through her hair, and turned away from the view. There was still so much to do, but her mind kept wandering back to Yaz. What would this month apart mean for them? And could she truly enjoy the thrill of her new role with her heart left behind?

The sound of the door creaking open broke her thoughts. She turned to see Yaz standing there, a soft smile on her face, but Frances could see the worry in her eyes too. Without a word, she crossed the room, pulling Yaz into a tight embrace.

"We'll be okay, won't we?" Frances whispered her voice tinged with the vulnerability she rarely allowed herself to show.

Yaz nodded against her shoulder, squeezing her a little tighter. "Of course we will."

Frances pulled back just enough to look into Yaz's eyes, finding the reassurance she needed in them. "I'm going to miss you so much," she admitted, her voice breaking slightly.

"And I'll miss you," Yaz replied, brushing a stray lock of hair from Frances's face. "But this is your dream, and I'm here, cheering you on every step of the way." her hand came up to cup Frances's cheek.

Frances smiled, her heart swelling with love. Their faces were inches apart, the air between them charged with spoken words and shared fears. Frances leaned in, brushing her lips softly against Yaz's, testing the waters of this new intimacy. Yaz responded immediately, her lips warm and inviting, deepening the kiss with a tenderness that made Frances's heart ache with love.

The world outside seemed to fade away, leaving only the two of them, wrapped in the quiet, powerful connection that was growing stronger with each passing day.

When they finally pulled apart, Frances rested her forehead against Yaz's, her breath coming in shallow gasps. She kept her hands on Yaz's waist, fingers tracing small, comforting patterns as if trying to memorize every detail.

"I'll call whenever I can," she whispered, her voice thick with emotion.

"Alright hun" Yaz replied, a soft smile on her lips as her fingers gently ran down Frances's arms, leaving a trail of warmth in their wake.

"Just don't believe the tabloids." Frances chuckled, though her heart ached

"Ooh, I don't know... it depends on what they say."

Frances shook her head, laughing softly. "You little smart aleck." she grinned, leaning in to steal another small kiss, unable to resist the pull between them.

A knock on the door startled them both, and they pulled apart quickly, their hearts still racing.

"Yes" Frances replied trying to steady her voice as her heart pounded

"Excuse me, Miss Frances, your car is here," Betty's voice came from behind the door.

"I'll be there in a second"

"Very well Miss"

Frances took a deep breath, glancing at Yaz. Her fingers instinctively laced with Yaz's, savoring the warmth and comfort one last time before they had to leave the room. "The driver will come soon to take you home."

"Alright," Yaz nodded, though her eyes glistened with unshed tears.

Frances took another deep breath, quickly touching up her lipstick in the mirror then crossed the room and opened the door. They walked together to the front entrance, where the driver waited patiently.

Frances forced a smile as she greeted the driver. "Morning, Mr Banks."

"Good morning, Miss Louise," the driver responded warmly.

Betty led the man to the luggage, her efficient demeanor a stark contrast to the emotional farewell happening just a few feet away.

Another car pulled up in front of the house, and the driver stepped out to open the door.

"That's my ride," Yaz said, trying to muster a smile.

"Yes..." Frances hesitated, then pulled Yaz into a warm, lingering hug. "Well, see you soon, darling. I'll miss you," she whispered, her voice barely audible.

Yaz closed her eyes, holding Frances tightly, as if trying to imprint the moment in her memory. "I'll miss you too," she whispered back, her voice thick with emotion.

They finally pulled away, their eyes locking for a brief, intense moment before Yaz turned and walked toward her car. Frances stood there, watching as Yaz sat into the car, her heart feeling both full and heavy at the same time.

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Frances sat in the back of the sleek black Cadillac, her heart heavy with anticipation and the bittersweet pang of leaving Los Angeles behind. She knew this role was a significant opportunity, but the thought of being away from everything familiar, especially at such a critical time in her life, filled her with a quiet sense of longing.

The drive to the airport was smooth, the early morning sun casting a warm glow over the city's iconic skyline. Frances watched as the palm trees swayed gently in the breeze, the streets gradually becoming busier as the day began. She thought about the last moments she had spent in her house, packing the final essentials and saying a quick goodbye, she would miss Yaz more than she cared to admit.

At the airport, the buzz of activity pulled her from her thoughts. She met with the rest of cast and crew and boarded the Lockheed Constellation, a gleaming modern plane with its distinctive triple tail and long, graceful fuselage. As she took her seat, Frances couldn't help but feel a rush of excitement mixed with anxiety.

"Morning" one of the cast members greeted her with a big smile and made himself comfortable next to her

"Morning" she smiled politely

"I need a coffee."

"Me too" she chuckled "I'm up since five"

"I haven't slept, the baby was crying the whole night"

"Oh noo...sorry about that"

"That's alright...I'm looking forward to catching up on my sleep for the next month"

Frances laughed sympathetically.

"Oh, Royce Henderson" he extended his arm "I don't believe we got officially introduced"

"Frances...Nice to meet you Royce"

The engines vibrated through her seat as they began to drive down the runway. Frances peered out of the small window, watching as the familiar sights of Los Angeles passed by, shrinking into the distance.

As the flight progressed, Frances took out a small leather-bound notebook, jotting down thoughts and notes for her role. The hum of the engines provided a comforting background noise, and she found herself lost in her work, occasionally glancing out of the window at the changing landscape below. The transition from the bustling city to the expansive deserts and towering mountain ranges was breathtaking, and she allowed herself a moment to appreciate the raw beauty of the country she was flying over.

"Thank you" Frances smiled to the stewardess when she was served with a hot cup of coffee and a sandwich

"Is this your first time going to Wyoming?" Royce asked

"Yes, I'm quite excited. I heard it was beautiful. You?"

"I've been once as a kid. It's gonna be nice to see it again. But be prepared to freeze at this time of the year"

"Well, let's hope I packed well" she chuckled

"I'm really exited for us to work together. I must admit, when I first met you at the rehearsal I didn't know what to expect. But more I get to know you, you just seem so down to earth"

"Thank you. That's very kind of you."

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After two hour flight they began their descent into Jackson Hole, Frances felt a mixture of relief and excitement. The small town nestled in the shadow of the Grand Tetons came into view, a picturesque scene that looked like something out of a postcard. The mountains were majestic, their snow-capped peaks reaching towards the sky, while the valleys below were lush, dotted with trees and the occasional cabin.

The plane touched down on the small airstrip, the wheels bumping lightly against the ground as they landed. Frances felt a slight shiver as she stepped off the plane, the air noticeably cooler than the warm climate she had left behind. She wrapped her coat tighter around her, taking in the sights and sounds of this new place. The airport was small and quiet, a far cry from the bustling terminals she was used to in Los Angeles.

A driver awaited her outside the terminal, a friendly man with a warm smile who greeted her with a tip of his hat. "Miss Frances, welcome to Jackson Hole. I'll be taking you to your hotel."

"Thank you" she smiled kindly

The drive through the town was short, but Frances was captivated by the rustic charm of the place. The wooden buildings, the rugged mountains in the background all contributed to a feeling of stepping back in time, into a simpler, more peaceful world. It was a stark contrast to the fast-paced life she had left behind in Hollywood, and she found herself appreciating the tranquility of it all.

The hotel was a charming, log-built lodge that exuded warmth and hospitality. As she checked in, the receptionist handed her a brass key attached to a leather fob with the room number engraved on it.

"We hope you enjoy your stay, Miss Frances. If you need anything at all, just let us know."

"Thank you. I will need to make a phone call"

"The phone is in the room"

"Brilliant, thank you"

Her room was cozy, with a large stone fireplace dominating one wall and a window that offered a stunning view of the mountains. Frances set her suitcase down and took a deep breath, the scent of pine and wood smoke filling the air. She walked over to the window, staring out at the landscape before her. It was beautiful, no doubt about it, but as she stood there, running her hand over her arm she couldn't help but feel a twinge of loneliness. She missed Yaz.

The thought came unbidden, and she found herself reaching for the small framed photograph she had tucked into her bag. It was a simple picture of her and Yaz, taken two weeks ago on a sunny afternoon back in Los Angeles, but it meant the world to her. Frances placed the photo on the nightstand, a small smile playing on her lips as she looked at it. The relationship they had was still new, but it was strong, and she felt its absence keenly.

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After a long day of rehearsals and final preparations for tomorrow's shooting, she was finally back in her room.

She sat on the edge of the bed, the crackling fire added a sense of cozy comfort, but Frances felt the growing ache of loneliness.

She reached for the telephone on the nightstand, its rotary dial smooth and cool under her fingertips. The black receiver felt heavy as she lifted it to her ear, the silence on the other end only amplifying her longing.

Frances took a deep breath and then pressed the plunger to summon the operator. After a moment, a pleasant, professional voice crackled to life on the line.

"Operator. How may I assist you?"

"Yes, Frances Louise, I need to place a long-distance call to Los Angeles, California," she said, her voice steady though her heart raced. "The number is Butterfield 3-2187."

The operator's tone was efficient and practiced. "Very well, ma'am. Please hold while I connect you."

There was a brief pause, followed by the distant sound of switches being activated, the soft clicks and buzzes of the telephone exchange working to make the connection. Frances waited, her fingers absently tracing the coiled cord of the phone, her mind filled with thoughts of Yaz.

Frances walked over to the window, pulling the cord tighter around herself as she looked out at the dark, snow-covered mountains. The scene was beautiful but lonely, the vastness of it all making her feel small and distant from everything she knew.

The line clicked, followed by a soft hum. Frances waited, her fingers tapping nervously on the windowsill. Each ring on the other end seemed to stretch out endlessly, and her hope began to fade. Just as she was about to lose hope, the voice on the line broke through.

"Hello?" came a groggy voice, muffled by sleep and distance.

"Hi darling," Frances said, her voice soft and warm.

"Heeeey... I didn't think I'd hear from you today," Yaz replied, her voice filled with surprise and affection

"Sorry to wake you, it was a long day," Frances said.

"Nooo, don't apologize...I fell asleep on a sofa in a front room. I'm just happy you called. How are you? How was the flight? Are you in a hotel?" Yaz's questions came in a rush, each one filled with genuine care, bringing a bright smile to Frances's face.

"The flight wasn't bad... Yes, I'm in a hotel now. It's very cozy. It's a lodge, I have a beautiful fireplace in my room, and I can see the mountains from the window."

"Oh waaaw... It sounds gorgeous," Yaz exclaimed, clearly impressed.

"It is... It would be even prettier if you were here," Frances pouted as she gazed out the window.

"I wish I was... but then you wouldn't get any work done," Yaz laughed.

"True... How was your day?" Frances asked, shifting her tone to a more relaxed note.

"Boring," Yaz chuckled. "Just puttering around the house, doing some gardening with Susan, we cooked lunch together... Nothing special."

"Sounds perfect... I miss you," Frances said, her voice tinged with longing.

"Same here... " she whispered, carefully picking her words "It hasn't sunk in yet, to be honest. I'll probably be depressed starting tomorrow," Yaz admitted with a small laugh.

"Me too...I hate this..." she sighed deeply

"Are you starting a shoot tomorrow?"

"Yes...We're being transported to the location... It's apparently quite a bit further from the town. But at the end of each day, we will be back in a hotel. I don't know when I'll be able to call though." She explained.

"That's alright... Don't stress... Whenever you can..."

"I'll have to go darling. It's really late, and I'm getting up at five," Frances said reluctantly. "Just wanted to hear your voice"

"Alright hun, no worries. I'm glad you called. Made me really happy.

"Sleep well, darling... It was so nice to hear your voice."

"You too... I'm going to sleep like a baby now."

"Yaz"

"Mmmm?"

"I do love you, you know" Frances said for the first time, her heart full and vulnerable.

Yaz's heart skipped a beat, there was a moment of silence and she quickly rushed to close the kitchen door before she replied, her silence tugging on Frances's nerves "Love you too." She whispered.

A wave of relief washed over the other woman. She smiled gently, her heart pounding

"Night, night darling"

"Nighty night hun"

As she prepared for bed, Frances took one last look at the photo on the nightstand, her heart swelling with a mixture of love and longing. She whispered a soft goodnight, hoping that Yaz could somehow feel it too, even from so far away. Then she slipped under the heavy quilt, the warmth of the fire and the comfort of the room slowly lulling her to sleep, as the mountains stood guard outside, timeless and unmoving.

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It had been two weeks since Frances left for Jackson Hole, and Yaz found herself slipping into a new rhythm, though the ache of her absence lingered. To keep her mind occupied, she threw herself into her work at the studio. The project she was working on, a set of intricate costume designs demanded long hours and intense focus, and Yaz welcomed the distraction. Late into the evenings, she would sit at her drafting table, the soft glow of her lamp illuminating the delicate lines of her sketches. The quiet hum of the studio, with its shelves of fabric and spools of thread, was comforting, yet it wasn't enough to chase away the emptiness she felt without Frances.

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The next morning Yaz was deep in conversation with Laura when the door to the Wardrobe Department burst open. Nancy, one of the seamstresses, stormed in, tears streaming down her face. Yaz watched as Nancy, distraught, spoke with the other girls while hastily packing her belongings. As soon as Yaz wrapped up her conversation with Laura, she approached Nancy with concern.

"Hey, what's going on? Are you alright?" Yaz asked softly.



Nancy shook her head, her voice trembling. "Nooo, I just got sacked."

"You what? Why?" Yaz's eyes widened in shock.

"Because I took too many days off. And what was I supposed to do?" Nancy's voice was filled with desperation.

"Hey, this isn't your fault. I'll speak to Charlie," Yaz said, her resolve hardening.

"There's no point, Yaz. He made himself very clear." Nancy dropped her bag onto the table and covered her face with her hands. "Jesus... what am I gonna do?"

"Just wait here," Yaz said firmly, before rushing down the hallway.

She knocked briskly on Charlie's door.

"Come in," came the clipped response from inside.

Yaz entered, her anxiety barely concealed. "Hi..."

"Oh, hello Yaz, what's up?" Charlie looked up from his desk but remained seated.

"Charlie... why did you sack Nancy?"

Without lifting his gaze, Charlie continued to write. "I can't talk about this with you. If there's anything else you need..."

"Is this about her taking days off?"

Charlie threw his pencil down with an exasperated sigh and leaned back in his chair. "I can't discuss details about other employees with you, Yaz."

"She's a single mom with a little girl who's extremely sick right now... she's a good worker."

"Even so, we're not a charity," Charlie said coldly.

"I'm aware of that, but come on... seriously? What is she supposed to do?"

"I'm sorry, Yaz, but my hands are tied. Believe me, I don't like this any more than you do."

"I'll take over... I'll work weekends."

"That's not how things work around here. I'm sorry. Look, I've got things to do."

Yaz slammed her hands on the table, leaning in. "Come on, Charlie. Give us a break. We're working our bloody asses off around there. She worked hours of overtime last month... unpaid! Knock it off. Or should I bring it to the union how many hours we work and how many we're actually getting paid for?"

"You're not in a position to threaten me," Charlie said pointing a finger at her.

"I'm not threatening you, Charlie. I'm pleading for any ounce of humanity in you!" Yaz's voice rose, filled with frustration. "She's one of the best workers we have. Give the woman a break... at least until her kid gets out of the hospital. What is she gonna do? You're throwing her out on the street."

Charlie huffed. He went quiet for what seemed like eternity then rolled his eyes. "Two weeks, Yaz. I'm giving her two weeks."

A wave of relief washed over Yaz. She smiled widely and slammed her hand on the table in triumph. "Yes!!!"

"Go... get lost," Charlie said with a chuckle.

"Yes, sir. Thaaaank yooooou"

"Don't make me regret this"

"I won't.... promise"

Yaz walked out of his office, her face alight with a triumphant smile. She leaned against the door for a moment, savoring the victory, then pushed off and rushed back to deliver the good news to Nancy.

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Back in Wyoming, Frances was enduring a nightmare of a day. They had been on set since the early morning hours, battling brutal weather with temperatures plummeting well below zero and a biting wind that cut through everything. Her mid-19th-century costume did little to keep her warm, and the hem of her dress was soaking wet from the snow. She stood outside with her co-star, mid-scene, when the director's voice sliced through the cold air once again.

"Cut!"

"Again?" Her co-star looked at Frances, his expression a mix of desperation and frustration.

She huffed, shaking snow off her dress. Her feet were frozen, and her fingers were so numb she could barely feel the fabric beneath them.

"Frances... can you move a bit closer to the caravan?" the director called out.

"Yes, of course," she replied, moving a bit more to the left. "Is this alright?"

"A bit more... yes, that's it... Alright, let's do this again."

After what felt like countless takes, they finally wrapped up the scene. Frances wasted no time running into the trailer, holding the soaking wet, freezing dress away from her legs.

"Oh my God!" the costume assistant gasped when she saw her.

"Pleeease get this off me," Frances begged, her teeth chattering.

"Sure... My God, you're frozen solid!"

"I'm shaking... I can't feel my feet," Frances muttered as she fumbled with the buttons.

The woman quickly helped her out of the dress, and Frances tossed her boots aside with relief. She was handed a warm dressing gown, and she wrapped herself up tightly, sinking into a chair at the makeup table.

"Here, you could do with this, hun," the makeup artist said, bringing over a steaming hot cup of tea.

"Oh my God, thank you so much," Frances said, cradling the cup in her hands, savoring the warmth.

A sharp knock at the door of the trailer made Frances roll her eyes. "Now whaaat?"

The makeup artist opened the door, revealing the director, Mr. Carter. "Can I help you, sir?" she asked, trying to keep her voice polite.

"Get her ready in half an hour. We're losing light," he barked.

"That's a bit of a tight schedule, sir," the woman replied, her tone measured.

"All you have to do is slap some makeup on her and get her dressed. Go on... less talking and more working," he snapped before turning on his heel and walking away.

The woman closed the door with a sigh. "Can you believe this?"

"Jerk," Frances mumbled, taking a long, comforting sip of her tea.

Dressed in new costume with fresh make-up and her hair fixed she left the trailer stepping back into the relentless cold.

"Let's wrap this up" the director said optimistically. Frances looked at her co-star. Their eyes spoke more than words could ever say.

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Back in her hotel room, Frances finally felt the warmth seeping back into her bones after a long, comforting bath. It had taken a while to shake off the chill that had settled deep into her body after hours on set in the freezing cold. Now, wrapped in a cozy dressing gown, she padded across the room to the phone, craving the sound of a familiar voice.

"Yes, I need to place a long-distance call to Los Angeles, California," she said, her voice still tinged with exhaustion.

Their phone calls were carefully planned, late in the evening when Susan was already in bed so Yaz can talk freely.

As she waited for the call to connect, Frances sat by the window, watching the snow fall gently outside. It blanketed the trees and rooftops in a serene, almost magical way. Any other day, she might have found the scene idyllic, even peaceful, but today, it only made her dread the next day of shooting even more.

Finally, the line clicked, and a familiar voice filled her ear. "Hello!"

Yaz's voice was like a soothing blanket, instantly easing the tension in her shoulders.

"Hey darling ..." Frances sighed, closing her eyes as she leaned back in the chair. "You have no idea how good it is to hear your voice."

"Hey honey! How are you holding up out there? You sound exhausted."

"I am," she admitted, letting the exhaustion seep into her voice. "I can't take it Yaz. I just wanna go home"

"Oh my god.... What happened?"

"Today was brutal. We had to do twenty-five takes of the same damn scene. Twenty-five, Yaz! In that freezing wind, with snow soaking through my dress. It was a nightmare."

"Twenty-five?" Yaz's voice was incredulous. "What the hell for?"

She groaned, rubbing her temples. "The director's lost his mind, Yaz. He kept insisting the timing was off, then it was the angle, then the lighting... I swear, he's a psycho. And to make it worse, we were out in a freezing wind the whole time. I couldn't feel my toes halfway through, and my dress was soaked from the snow."

"Oh, honey," Yaz's voice was filled with sympathy. "I am so sorry you're going through this. What the hell is wrong with him."

"The man is not all there I swear. Every time I thought we were done, he'd shout 'cut' and we'd have to reset. By the end, I was so cold I could barely speak my lines. And when we finally wrapped, he had the nerve to tell the makeup artist to get me ready in half an hour because he was losing light. Didn't give a damn were all frozen solid."

"What a tosser"

"He is," Frances said, feeling the tears prick at the corners of her eyes. "I'm just so tired, Yaz. And I miss you. I miss home. I don't know how much longer I can take this."

"Heeeeey," Yaz said, her voice gentle. "It's gonna be over soon. You're gonna get through this, I promise. And when you do, I'm gonna make it all up to you. We'll go out, have a nice dinner, do whatever you want. Just the two of us."

Frances smiled through her exhaustion, the thought of seeing Yaz again filling her with a warmth she hadn't felt all day. "That sounds perfect darling. I miss you so much. You have no idea."

"I miss you too. Every single day," Yaz said softly. "But you're strong, and you're gonna make it through this and it'll all be worth it in the end. I believe in you."

"Thank you darling," Frances whispered, her voice thick with emotion. "I don't know what I'd do without you."

"Well....You'll never have to find out....I love you...very much. You're gonna be okay honey. Just hang in there a little bit longer."

"I love you too darling, so much" Frances said, feeling the tension start to ease from her body. "I can't wait to be home."

"And I can't wait to have you back," Yaz said warmly. "Tomorrow will be better. I just know it."

"Sorry...didn't mean to off load on you"

"Don't be silly..."

"And how are you doing darling? You alright?"

"Tiered....Were working overtime every day. But I suppose it keeps me busy"

"I'm so sorry...You deserve better"

"We both do...Oh, you know the garden shed....is getting along. We're painting it this weekend"

"That's nice. I'm glad you're having some fun"

"Also...Susan asked me to invite you for a lunch when you come back. She wants to thank you for that autograph...Im sure she's just using the opportunity to meet you" she giggled "I said I'll ask. But don't feel obligated."

"Nooo...I'd love to"

"Really?"

"Yes, really...It would be nice...Tell her I'll gladly accept the invitation."

"Oh my god...She's gonna end up in emergency from excitement. " she chuckled  
"Now....get some rest hun, okay? Drink a hot cocoa and snuggle up with a book or something...just relax."

"Okay," Frances agreed, the comfort of Yaz's words wrapping around her like the dressing gown she wore. "Thank you"

"Don't be silly little nugget..." she said lovingly making Frances chuckle "I love you" she hummed gently

"Love you too...Nighty night darling"

"Nighty night hun.... Sweet dreams"

Yaz hung up the phone with a worried sigh, wishing she could be there to hug her tight. What she didn't know was that Susan had at some point got up and walked down the hallway toward the kitchen. She stopped in her tracks just outside door, her hand hovering over the doorknob as she overheard a grait deal of their conversation.

Standing in the dark, Susan's heart clenched with a mixture of shock and worry. She remained still, not wanting to reveal her presence, as she tried to process what she had just heard then quickly turned around and rushed back to her room.

As the line went dead, Frances sat for a moment longer, gazing out at the snow-covered world outside her window. The dread of tomorrow still lingered, but it was

softened by the warmth of Yaz's words and the promise of home waiting for her on the other side of this ordeal. With a deep sigh, she stood, pulling the dressing gown tighter around her, and made her way to bed, feeling just a little bit stronger than before.

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The late Saturday afternoon sun cast a warm, golden light over the back garden as Yaz and Susan put the finishing touches on the shed. The crisp, fresh scent of paint lingered in the air, mingling with the sweet fragrance of the nearby rose bushes. Yaz stood back to admire their work, wiping a streak of white paint from her cheek as she looked over at Susan.

"I think we've done a pretty good job," Yaz said with a satisfied smile, setting down her brush.

"I'd say so," Susan agreed, nodding as she surveyed the newly painted shed. "It's amazing what little bit of fresh paint can do. It looks as good as new. And when we pot flowers around it's gonna look a right candy"

They shared a smile before Susan glanced over towards the porch "I tell you what...Shall we sit down for some lemonade? I think we've earned it."

"Absolutely," Yaz replied, feeling a pleasant tiredness settle into her muscles as she followed Susan.

They settled into the chairs, and Susan poured them each a tall glass of cold drink. The ice clinked gently as Yaz took a long sip, savoring the refreshing taste.

For a moment, they sat in comfortable silence, watching the sunlight dance through the leaves above them. Then, Susan cleared her throat softly, her gaze thoughtful as she looked at Yaz.

"You know, I've been thinking...." she began, her tone casual but with a hint of something deeper, "it's really nice that you've got Frances to talk to so often. I've noticed you two seem to be in touch quite a lot these days."

Yaz felt a slight flutter in her chest but kept her expression neutral. "Yeah, she's not having a best time of her life in Wyoming...I guess it's nice for her to have someone to talk to."

Susan nodded, stirring her lemonade with a slow, deliberate motion. "It's important to have people we can rely on, especially when we're far from home or dealing with difficult situations. She seems like a very special person to you."

"She is," Yaz said, a soft smile tugging at her lips. "She understands me in a way not many people do. We just... click, I guess."

"That's nice..." Susan replied, her voice warm but with an underlying tone that Yaz couldn't quite place. "It's nice you care for each other."

Yaz hesitated, sensing there was more to Susan's words. "We do. She's been wonderful."

Susan took another sip of her lemonade, her gaze drifting out over the garden as if she were carefully choosing her next words. "You know, Yaz, I was raised with certain beliefs, certain... expectations about life and relationships. And I've always tried to live according to those values."

Yaz tensed, her heart beginning to race as she wondered where this was going. "I understand," she said carefully.

Susan nodded, a soft, almost wistful smile on her lips. "But I've also come to realize that happiness and love... they don't always come in the forms we expect. Sometimes, they surprise us, don't they?"

Yaz felt her breath catch as she met Susan's eyes, which were filled with a gentle, probing kindness. "Yeah, they do."

Susan reached out and placed a hand on Yaz's, her touch light but reassuring. "I may not fully understand everything about... you know... certain things, but what I do understand is that you're happy. And that's what matters most to me. You deserve to be happy."

Yaz swallowed hard, her eyes stinging with unexpected emotion. "Thank you," she said softly, her voice thick with gratitude. "That means a lot to me."

Susan gave her hand a gentle squeeze before letting go. "I just want you to know I'm here for you, whatever you need. You've been like a daughter to me recently, and that's never gonna change no matter what."

Yaz smiled, blinking back tears as she nodded. "I know...and you've been like mother to me. I'm really happy to have you."

They sat in silence for a moment, the weight of the conversation settling around them like a warm blanket. Then, Susan picked up her glass again, raising it slightly.

"To new beginnings, and to finding happiness in unexpected places," she said with a small, knowing smile.



Yaz clinked her glass against Susan's with a bright smile across her face. "To happiness," she echoed, feeling a deep sense of relief and acceptance wash over her.

As they sipped their lemonade, the sun began to dip lower in the sky, casting long shadows across the garden. The shed now freshly painted and gleaming in the fading light and Yaz suddenly felt light as a breeze.

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Frances woke up with a sharp pain twisting in her stomach. It was that time of the month and she had known it was coming, she could feel it creeping up on her for days, but she had hoped, perhaps foolishly, that by the time it arrived, the shooting would have eased up a little. Instead, things only seemed to get worse by the day. Groaning, she dragged herself out of bed and hurried to the bathroom, desperate to find some relief.

Standing in the shower with hot water aimed at her stomach, she tried to ease the cramps that gripped her. The pain was relentless, making her stomach churn with every wave. After what felt like an eternity, she reluctantly turned off the water, got dressed, and reached for a painkiller, tucking the bottle into her bag just in case she needed more during the day. The thought of spending the day on set, with its lack of proper sanitation and endless takes, made her stomach twist even more.

A knock on the door startled her. Room service had brought breakfast, but the sight of food only made her feel worse. She pushed the tray aside, packed a few essentials, and headed down to the lobby to meet the rest of the cast and crew.

"Morning," Jack Hollister, her on-screen partner, greeted her with a kind smile as she stepped into the lobby.

"Morning," Frances replied, forcing a smile in return.

Jack looked at her with concern. "You look pale. Are you alright?"

"Yeah, I'm fine, thanks. Just tired I guess" she lied, hoping to brush off his worry.

"I got you coffee. We still have ten minutes," he said, handing her a cup.

"Thank you, that's sweet of you," she replied, grateful for the gesture, though the thought of drinking it turned her stomach even further.

"Are you sure you're okay?" He pressed, his brow furrowing. "You really don't look well. Maybe you're coming down with something? You were frozen solid yesterday."

"It could be," she said taking a small sip of the coffee just to be polite. "I hope we're gonna have a shorter day today."

Jack sighed, shaking his head. "The guy's a nut job. I heard he's difficult to work with, but I never expected him to be mental."

Frances let out a small chuckle, despite the pain. "Me neither. I don't understand what the hell is his problem. And the way he's treating the crew is disgusting."

"Did you hear how he spoke to the camera guy yesterday?" Jack asked, his voice lowering.

"I knooooow," Frances groaned, rolling her eyes. "I was in shock."

Their conversation paused as other members of the cast and crew started to filter into the lobby, their faces etched with exhaustion and frustration. The atmosphere was heavy, everyone worn down by the grueling days and the director's impossible demands.

Jack leaned in slightly, his voice softer. "Hey, wanna grab a drink later on? Maybe after we wrap?"

She hesitated, her body aching and her mind weary, but the thought of unwinding with a drink was tempting. "Sure, why not," she agreed, then added with a weak smile, "If I feel better."

"Of course," he replied honestly concerned. "No pressure. Just let me know."

As they stood there, surrounded by their colleagues, Frances couldn't shake the dread gnawing at her. Another day on this set felt like a mountain to climb, but at least she wasn't alone in feeling that way. Misery, after all, loved company.

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The day dragged on endlessly for Frances. Take after take, the snow finally stopped, but it only gave way to a cold, biting wind that swept down from the mountains. As if the conditions weren't brutal enough, her scenes today involved riding a horse, something she dreaded with the stomach pains wracking her body. Every muscle ached as she gripped the reins, trying desperately not to pass out. Though she had no lines to deliver, the horse was restless, its discomfort mirroring her own, leading to repeated takes of the same scene.

"Cut!" the director shouted, and the entire crew held their breath, waiting anxiously. Then came the sigh of relief that rippled through everyone when, at last, he approved the take.

"Here, Miss Frances, let me help you," said a kind man handling the horses, extending his hands to support her waist as she dismounted.

"Thank you... that's very kind of you," she replied, her voice weary but grateful.

"My pleasure, Miss," he said, tipping his hat politely before leading the horse away.

Frances straightened her dress and began to head towards the trailer, eager to escape the cold and find some relief from the relentless pain. But before she could get far, she heard the director call out to her.

"Oh, Frances... come over for a second."

She reluctantly walked over, each step feeling like a chore. "Yes?" she asked, forcing herself to maintain a professional tone.

"You did a good job today. Just wanted you to see how it turned out. Tomorrow, we can try from a different angle. I'd like to get some headshots."

Frances leaned over to look at the shot on the screen. "Perhaps from the east, where you can see the lakes?" she suggested boldly. "It could make a nice backdrop."

"My thoughts exactly," the director agreed, smiling. Frances returned a polite smile, satisfied that her suggestion was taken into consideration. But just as she was about to step back, she felt his hand wander around her waist. She tensed and quickly moved it away with as much grace as she could muster.

"Well, that's it, kids... let's go home," he announced, getting up and leaving the set.

Frances hurried to the trailer, her pain now unbearable. The tight corset she was wearing only added to her agony, constricting her already cramping abdomen. Practically stumbling inside, she was met with the concerned gaze of the costume assistant.

"Oh, dear... you don't look good at all, honey," the assistant said, rushing over.

"Just please help me get the corset off," Frances pleaded, her voice strained.

"Sure... are you okay?"

"Nooo," Frances groaned, leaning her hand on the wall and closing her eyes against the pain. "It's... the women's thing."

"Oh my god... you poor thing," the assistant gasped. "Come on... let's get this off you. Lie down for a bit. We've got time until they pack up everything."

The assistant quickly helped her out the clothes, and to get changed and Frances immediately reached for her bag, frantically searching for the bottle of painkillers. Her hands shook as she finally found them and popped a few into her mouth, washing them down with the hot tea the assistant offered.

"Thank you," Frances whispered, her voice barely above a murmur.

"This is not humane," the assistant said, shaking her head as she watched Frances lie down, finally able to catch her breath as the painkillers slowly began to take effect.

Frances simply nodded, her eyes closing as she let herself drift off, the warmth of the tea and the blessed relief of being out of that corset lulling her into a much-needed rest.

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Back in a hotel, Frances laid down, trying to lose herself in the pages of a book. Another day of endless takes in a freezing cold, the heavy wet costume clinging to her skin, and the dizzying moment when she nearly passed out on set was all way too much for her. Now, as she nestled under the covers, she enjoyed the quiet solitude, hoping the words on the page would transport her somewhere far from the grueling reality of the shoot.

Her eyelids were growing heavy when a knock at the door startled her. She glanced at the clock, it was late. The knock came again, more insistent this time. With a sigh, she set her book aside and padded over to the door, assuming it was Jack checking in on her after she declined the drink explaining she didn't feel well.

But when she opened the door, it wasn't Jack standing there. It was the director, swaying slightly, his eyes glassy from alcohol.

"Frances!" he slurred, a crooked grin spreading across his face. "There you are. We're all down in the lobby having a drink. You should come."

Frances stiffened, her hand tightening on the door. "I appreciate the offer, but I'm really tired. I think I'll just stay in tonight."

His grin faltered, replaced by a pout as he leaned closer. "Oh, come on. Don't be such a bore. Just one drink. It'll be fun."

"I'm sorry," Frances said, her voice firm but polite. "If you'll excuse me I really need to rest it's been a long day. Good night"

She began to close the door, but before she could shut it, he wedged his foot in the gap. Frances's heart skipped a beat as she realized he wasn't going to take no for an answer.

"Don't be like that," he said, his voice growing darker as he pushed against the door. "We could have some fun, ha?"

"No, really...thank you...You really should go now." Frances tried to push the door shut, but he was stronger than she expected, and the door inched open despite her efforts. Panic surged through her as he forced his way into the room, his breath reeking of alcohol.

"Please sir, I need to ask you to leave! You shouldn't be here." she exclaimed, pushing against him with all her strength. But he was relentless, his hands grabbing at her arms, pulling her close.

"You can call me Hank," he murmured, his voice slurred and sickening "I saw how you looked at me today...Can't hide it Fran" he grinned, his hand sliding over her behind.

"Get off me!" She yelled no longer polite, trying to push him away, but his hands were groping at her like an octopus.

"You're hotter than a firecracker." He twisted her hand pulling her in. "And feisty...I like that" She let out a muffled scream as he leaned in and pressed his lips to hers in a forceful, unwanted kiss. Managing to release her hand, she was hysterically hitting and grabbing every part of him she could reach to get out of his grip.

Rage kicked in, deep seeded trauma from her past washing over her like a dark cloud, without thinking, she shoved him away and slapped him hard across the face. The sound of the slap echoed in the small room, and for a moment, everything went still. Frances stared at him, her heart pounding in her chest as she realized what she'd done. She had just struck her boss.

The director blinked, shock and confusion flickering across his face. He touched his cheek where she'd hit him, then looked at her with a strange mix of anger and shame as if the alcohol suddenly evaporated from him.

"I'm... I'm sorry," he mumbled, stumbling back toward the door. "I didn't mean..."

Frances didn't say a word, her entire body trembling as she watched him retreat. He fumbled with the door handle, finally managing to aim his way out, and then he was gone, leaving her alone in the dimly lit room.

She stood there for a long moment, frozen, her mind reeling from what had just happened. When she finally moved, it was to lock the door with shaking hands, her breath coming in short, sharp gasps as she leaned heavily against it and burst into tears. The book lay forgotten on the bed as she collapsed into a chair moments later, her body wracked with silent sobs. She wanted to pack and leave, and frustration of not being able to tear at her very being.

The room felt smaller, the walls closing in as the weight of what had just happened pressed down on her. She had fought him off, but the violation lingered, leaving her shaken to the core.

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