

Chapter 21

The morning light filtered softly through the curtains as Yaz stirred, snug in Frances's arms. The other woman let out a contented sigh, holding her closer and nuzzling her neck.

"Stay here," Frances murmured sleepily, her voice thick with the remnants of dreams.

Yaz chuckled, planting a kiss on Frances's forehead. "I need the bathroom."

Frances groaned dramatically, tightening her hold. "Nooo. You're warm."

"I'll be right back," Yaz giggled, wiggling free from Frances's grasp.

Frances sighed in mock defeat, watching Yaz as she padded across the room. The sight of her bare silhouette moving gracefully against the light brought a mischievous grin to Frances's face.

She let out a soft sigh and rolled across the bed, the cool air grazing her bare skin. She reached lazily for the edge of the sheet but stopped as her gaze fell on the window. The morning sun streamed in, casting golden patterns that danced across the old brick wall of the loft. The light felt alive, warm, and unbothered by the weight of the world, much like Frances wished she could always feel.

She propped herself up on one elbow, her lips curling into a faint smile. Every morning spent waking up beside Yaz felt like a small miracle, a quiet rebellion against a world that would never understand. Her fingers traced idle patterns on the rumpled sheets as her mind wandered.

What would they say? If the world saw her like this, stripped of her glamour, tangled in a love so pure and unconventional? The thought was terrifying. But in some mischievous way, it also amused her. The audacity of their love in a world determined to deny it, there was something deliciously rebellious in that.

She let out a contented sigh, her body stretching luxuriously against the sheets. A yawn escaped her lips as she settled onto her back, staring up at the ceiling with a lazy grin.

When she heard the soft patter of Yaz's steps returning, Frances turned her head, her eyes lighting up at the sight of her. Yaz walked back into the room, her hair draping down her shoulders in beautiful waves shining blue in a sun, the morning light painting her silhouette in gold. Frances's smile deepened, her gaze lingering.

Yaz arched a brow, her lips quirking into a curious smile. "What?"

Frances grinned, rolling onto her side to watch her approach. "Just appreciating the view."

Yaz rolled her eyes, though a blush warmed her cheeks. "Stop it."

Frances watching her intently, her hazel eyes sparkling with playful mischief. She smirked, propping herself up on one elbow. "You're so pretty, you know that? Absolutely stunning." her voice dropped, low and teasing, as she let her gaze roam shamelessly.

Yaz laughed, shaking her head. She grabbed the camera sitting on the dresser and turned it toward Frances, snapping a picture.

Frances squealed with laughter, yanking the sheet up to cover herself. "Are you taking dirty photos of me now?"

"Absolutely," Yaz teased, clicking another shot with a wicked grin. "If you can enjoy the view, so can I."

Frances giggled, narrowing her eyes in mock suspicion. "And where, exactly, do you plan on getting those developed?"

Yaz's grin turned devilish. "Oh, I could always send them to Victor. He's seen you naked anyway."

Frances's jaw dropped, and she gasped in feigned outrage, springing from the bed. "What?!"

Yaz erupted into laughter, dodging as Frances lunged for her. She held the camera high above her head, grinning ear to ear. "You know! He's the one who did your nudes!"

"Yaz!" Frances shouted through her own laughter, tackling her onto the bed. They collapsed in a heap, both breathless and giggling uncontrollably. Frances scrambled to wrestle the camera from Yaz's grasp.

"I never said that!" Frances exclaimed as she finally pried it free.

Yaz smirked up at her, completely unbothered. "You didn't have to. It's obvious."

Frances groaned, shaking her head in disbelief. "You're impossible!"

"And you're sexy," Yaz quipped, her voice bubbling with laughter "Can I take a few more? Victor said I need to practice." She fluttered her lashes dramatically, her cheeky grin widening.

"Nooooo!" Frances laughed, dropping the camera onto the bed and collapsing onto Yaz, both of them a tangle of limbs and uncontrollable giggles.

"Oh come ooon" Yaz giggled, her hand gliding the curve of Frances's waist dropping down her sides.

Frances leaned down, her smile softening. Her lips found Yaz's in a slow, lingering kiss, the playful chaos of moments before melting into a tender warmth

"Just few" Yaz murmured between the kisses

"We'll see" Frances grinned lacing their hands on the pillow kissing her deep and consuming

Her lips trailed the length of Yaz's body, leaving a heated path in their wake. Her soft, deliberate kisses passed over the curve of her breast, drawing a shuddering breath from the other woman. Yaz's fingers tangled in her lover's hair, pulling her closer, urging her on.

Frances responded with a teasing smile against her skin, her lips continuing their slow exploration. Her hands following the path of her lips, every touch igniting a fire beneath Yaz's skin. No inch of her was left untouched, Her movements worshipful, deliberate, as if committing every curve, every line, to memory.

Yaz's heart raced, the rhythmic thrum echoing in her ears as tingles spread like electricity through her body. Her nails grazed gently over Frances's shoulders, leaving faint trails of heat in their wake. One hand slipped lower, finding Frances's, her fingers clasping over it firmly.

With a soft, breathless sigh, Yaz guided her hand, placing it exactly where she wanted it. Her gaze locked with Frances's, dark and pleading, her lips parted as she whispered, "Here."

Frances paused for a moment, her eyes searching Yaz's, her own filled with adoration and desire. Then, without breaking that connection, she obeyed, her hand moving with a firm yet gentle touch, drawing a soft gasp from Yaz.

The world around them stilled, bathed in the soft morning light filtering through the loft. Every touch, every kiss, spoke of a deep, unspoken bond, a love that neither words nor time could ever fully capture.

Yaz's body arched, curving to meet every touch, every kiss, as Frances adored her with an intensity that left no doubt of her claim. Her toes curled against Frances's shoulders, her mind slipping somewhere between dream and reality, where time felt endless and only the two of them existed.

Her fingers gripped the edge of the pillow, quiet moans filling the warm air around them, mingling with the sound of their breaths. Frances's blonde curls slipped through Yaz's fingers, soft and familiar, as she clung to her like an anchor, floating to the very edge of herself.

Her body trembled, surrendering completely, every nerve alight under Frances's touch. With a final, shuddering gasp, Yaz collapsed into the mattress, her chest rising and falling as the tension melted away, leaving her blissfully spent.

A dazed smile tugged at her lips, her eyes half-closed in dreamy

contentment. Without hesitation, she reached for Frances, tugging her up and capturing her lips in a deep, lazy kiss, hurried and tender.

“I adore you,” she whispered into Frances’s lips, her voice soft but resolute, the weight of her words carrying all the love and devotion she felt.

Frances’s smile softened, words melting within her. She rested her forehead against Yaz’s, their breaths mingling in the quiet aftermath. Her fingers tracing gentle patterns over Yaz’s bare shoulder, soothing and intimate. She kissed Yaz again, this time slower, more tenderly, as if pouring every ounce of her feelings into that single moment.

They shifted together on the bed, Frances pulling the sheets up around them as Yaz snuggled into her chest, her head resting just below Frances’s chin. Frances wrapped her arms securely around her, holding her close as if she never wanted to let go.

Yaz let out a soft sigh, her fingers idly playing with the edge of the sheet as she spoke, “You make me feel like I’m the only person in the world.”

Frances tilted her head, pressing a kiss to the crown of Yaz’s head. “Because you are...To me, anyway. You and Lily...you’re my everything.”

Yaz smiled softly, her hand drifting to rest over Frances’s heart.

They fell into a comfortable silence, their bodies entwined as the golden morning light filtered through the loft’s window. Frances’s hand wandered lazily along Yaz’s back, soothing and rhythmic, while Yaz’s fingers absently traced shapes against Frances’s collarbone.

“Do you think we’ll have mornings like this every day?” Yaz asked softly, her voice carrying a hint of vulnerability.

“I don’t know” Frances tightened her embrace, her voice firm but gentle. “I just know I’ll fight for it, every single day. Whatever it takes.”

Yaz smiled against Frances’s skin, her worries eased by the sincerity in her lover’s tone. She shifted slightly, looking up at Frances with a mixture of playfulness and affection. “Good. Cause I’m not going anywhere either.”

Frances chuckled, leaning down to kiss the tip of Yaz's nose. "Then we're stuck with each other."

"Sounds pretty good to me," Yaz whispered, resting her head back on Frances's chest as they settled into the kind of peace that only came from being completely and utterly in love.

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The loft studio buzzed with energy, a flurry of movement as workers carried out tables, sewing machines, and other equipment to clear space for the catering setup. The once calm, creative haven was now alive with the sound of footsteps and the occasional clink of tools.

"Careful with that!" Yaz called out, her voice tinged with worry as two workers maneuvered her heaviest sewing machine toward the elevator. She darted over to drape a thick black cloth over another table, tucking the corners with care flapping around nervously following every worker few steps behind.

"Please make sure that's stable before you move it!" Frances chimed in from the other side of the loft, her voice cutting through the noise. She walked briskly between groups, gesturing animatedly as she gave instructions. "No, all of this needs to be cleared out, the catering tables go over there, by the window."

Yaz paused to glance at Frances, a smile creeping across her face despite the chaos. "You're enjoying this way too much," she teased, smoothing out the cloth.

Frances smirked, turning to Yaz. "Someone has to keep order around here. You're too busy running around like a headless chicken."

Yaz laughed, brushing a stray lock of hair from her face. "I can't help it! I've never done anything like this before. I feel like I'm forgetting something every two minutes." She crouched to check the drawers of a desk, then popped back up, scanning the room.

"You're fine, darling. Breathe," Frances said, walking over to place a calming hand on Yaz's shoulder. She squeezed gently. "You've planned

this down to the last detail. It's going to be perfect."

Yaz exhaled, her nerves settling slightly as Frances's words sank in. "You're right," she admitted. "But can you remind me again, did we confirm the florist?"

Frances rolled her eyes with an affectionate laugh. "Yes, twice. They'll be here tomorrow morning."

Yaz groaned, covering her face with her hands. "See? Forgetful!"

Frances leaned in, her voice playful. "You're not forgetful. You're just excited. And that's a good thing."

Before Yaz could respond, a loud clang echoed through the studio as someone accidentally dropped a metal stool. Yaz whipped around, her heart racing.

"Don't worry!" Frances shouted, her hands on her hips as she marched toward the commotion. "No one is allowed to break anything until after the opening!" she laughed

Yaz chuckled, shaking her head as she went back to her tasks. She covered the last table and surveyed the room, her gaze lingering on the racks of finished garments glinting in the sunlight.

"It's really happening," she murmured, half to herself.

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As the last piece of her equipment was carefully carried out of the loft, Yaz stood in the middle of the now-cleared loft, her arms crossed tightly over her chest.

Frances approached from behind, gently resting a hand on Yaz's back. "They've got it under control, love," she reassured softly.

Yaz sighed, her brows furrowed. "I know, but this is everything.... My whole world. If anything gets damaged..." She trailed off, shaking her head.

"The storage company is the best...Come on...they store stuff for the studio all the time," Frances reminded her. "Don't worry about it"

Yaz nodded, though her lips pressed into a thin line. "It's just hard to let it all go, even for a few days."

Frances turned her so they were face to face. "It's just temporary. By next week, it'll all be back in its place, safe and sound."

Yaz took a deep breath, letting Frances's words sink in. "You're right," she said, finally her voice steadier. "It'll be worth it."

"Damn right, it will...Come on. Let's make sure they handle it like the crown jewels."

Yaz laughed, some of the tension easing from her shoulders.

Together, they walked outside to speak with the storage company's driver, Yaz double-checked every strap and latch securing her precious cargo.

She exhaled deeply, watching the truck disappear down the street. "It feels strange... I'll survive.... I guess."

Frances grinned, giving her a playful nudge "It's good you got insurance policy"

"Franny!" Yaz jumped frowning

Frances giggled cheekily darting back into the building.

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Frances stood by the window with a cup of coffee in one hand and a cigarette in the other, gazing out at the street below. She exhaled a thin plume of smoke, watching as people went about their day.

Meanwhile, Yaz was pacing back and forth near the center of the room, phone in one hand and a receiver cradled against her ear as she spoke with Susan. The long, wire stretched across the floor with each step she took, dragging behind her like a snake.

"You sound stressed honey, is everything alright?" Susan asked worried

"No, no, everything's fine, really," Yaz reassured her, her tone a bit too high-pitched to sound completely convincing. "The catering company's on the way, and we're just getting everything set up. It's a bit chaotic, but it'll all come together...Hopefully"

"Of course it will... It's gonna be like a movie premiere and you're gonna be a main star"

Yaz burst out laughing, her nerves slowly settling

Susan's voice crackled through the line. "I know you've got a lot on your plate, so if you need anything, food, drinks, anything, just say the word. I can bring you some lunch, it's all done I just pack it all up and drive over."

"Actually, that might be a good idea" Yaz paused, glancing over at France..."Franny, Susan's asking if we want her to bring us some food. I don't know how much longer we will wait for the catering. You hungry?"

"Starving actually" she admitted

"Yap, bring it over" Yaz chuckled going back to Susan

"Alright honey, I'm on my way"

"Thaaaaank yooooou" Yaz smiled

"Don't mention it. See you soon"

"See ya...love ya"

After hanging up, Yaz leaned against the kitchen, hands in the pockets of her trousers giving the overall look around the empty space. It reminded her of the day she moved in. Memories flashing before her eyes.

"They're here" Frances announced, quickly stabbing out her cigarette

"They are?"

"Yap, stay here...I'll go downstairs, make sure they know which floor"

"Alright hun" Yaz rushed to the window and glanced outside to see a massive truck pulling up in front of the building.

Frances was already halfway down the stairs, her effortless grace somehow still commanding attention despite her casual outfit.

"Morning!" Frances called out brightly as she stepped into the bustling street. The catering crew turned to greet her, and a man with a clipboard stepped forward.

"Good morning, ma'am," he said, extending his hand. "We're here with the tables for the event."

Frances shook his hand firmly. "Perfect timing. Top floor on the left. Let me know if you need any help."

"We've got it covered, but thank you. We'll get these unloaded and set up in no time."

Satisfied, Frances smiled warmly. "Perfect I appreciate it. And thank you for being prompt, it means a lot."

Back inside, Yaz stood by the elevator, her fingers fidgeting with the collar of her blouse.

The soft chime of the elevator broke her thoughts, and as the doors slid open, Frances stepped out. Behind her, two men followed, carrying folded tables.

"Morning, ma'am," one of the men said with a polite smile as they passed by.

The other gave a quick nod in acknowledgment.

"Morning," Yaz replied softly, offering a small smile.

Frances caught sight of her and shot her a reassuring look before turning

back to the catering team.

As the workers began arranging the tables, one of the men directed them with quiet confidence.

“That one over there, near the brick wall. We’ll use it as the centerpiece for the food display. The rest can go in a semicircle around it, plenty of room for guests to move around. The cocktail station is over there and I’m thinking those high tables can go in each corner.”

The team nodded, following his instructions with precision. Frances occasionally glanced at Yaz, who was now fussing over a tablecloth in the opposite corner.

When the crew finished unloading, the man with the clipboard approached Frances again. “We’ll bring the decorations and serving equipment tomorrow, as planned. Is there anything else you’d like adjusted today?”

"I think that's about it to be honest...What do you think?" She turned to Yaz

"I agree" she nodded

"Thank you for your help."

The man tipped his hat. “Our pleasure. We’ll see you tomorrow....”

"Thank you so much" Yaz smiled

As the crew filed out, Frances walked over to Yaz, sliding an arm around her waist. “See? Everything’s falling into place. Stop worrying so much.”

Yaz sighed, leaning into her. “I know. It’s just... a lot. Frances kissed her temple, her voice soft. “It will be.”

Yaz smiled, "I don't know what I'd do without you."

Frances grinned, giving her a playful squeeze. “Probably lose your mind.”

They both laughed, the sound filling the loft.

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The knock at the door interrupted their wait, and Yaz rushed to answer it, her steps light with anticipation.

"Hey... perfect timing!" she giggled, her face lighting up as she saw Susan standing there, hands full, with a bright, mischievous grin.

She looked every bit the picture of subtle elegance. A fitted light-blue dress that hugged her figure modestly but beautifully, the hem falling just below her knees. A small, angled hat perched stylishly atop her neatly styled hair. Cream gloves, slightly wrinkled from carrying the bags, covered her hands, adding a touch of refinement.

"Any hungry lovebirds here?" Susan chimed, her teasing tone warm as ever.

"Oi!" Yaz laughed, leaning in to kiss Susan's cheek before grabbing one of the bags from her hands and ushering her inside.

"Hello, dear," Frances greeted warmly as she crossed the room, quickly grabbing another bag to free Susan's hands.

Susan didn't waste a second, stepping forward and pulling Frances into a warm hug. "Don't you look lovely, like a proper movie star," she said, her palm gently cupping Frances's cheek in a motherly gesture that melted her heart.

Frances chuckled, brushing at her trousers. "Dusty and dirty, more like it. You on the other hand, look like from the cover of a magazine"

"Why thank you darling" she smiled

Yaz's laugh bubbled up from across the room as she unpacked one of the bags. "Oh my god... Susan, you brought the whole chicken?"

"Yup! And mashed potatoes... and there's some peas in that little container, and some cakes in this one" Susan declared proudly, pointing to one of the neatly packed containers. "I just got myself some Tupperware. Have you heard about it?"

Frances raised an intrigued eyebrow, a soft laugh escaping her. "No, I haven't."

"Oh, it's fantastic," Susan enthused as they all started unpacking the array of food. "Plastic storage containers, baking stuff, it's a game-changer!"

"She's mad about it," Yaz teased, shaking her head as she set the chicken on the counter. "She had a home party just last week, you should've seen the shopping haul."

Frances's laughter joined Yaz's, the warm, cozy atmosphere wrapping around her like a favorite blanket. She watched Susan bustling about, her energy filling the studio with a comforting sense of home. It sparked something deep within Frances, a faint memory of her own mother. She couldn't quite recall her mother's voice anymore, but the warmth Susan radiated felt familiar, stirring something tender inside her.

"I can organize a home party for you if you'd like," Susan offered, breaking Frances's reverie with a cheerful smile.

"Oh my god, Susan," Yaz groaned playfully, rolling her eyes.

But Frances smiled, her tone genuinely intrigued. "I'd like that. I could call a few friends."

"Alright, deal!" Susan said happily, clapping her hands together.

The three women shared a laugh, the studio suddenly feeling more like a home. As the scent of roasted chicken filled the air, Frances couldn't help but feel deeply grateful for the warmth and joy that moments like these brought into her life.

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As the meal wound down, Susan leaned back in her chair, patting her stomach. "That was delicious. I don't think I can move for the next hour," she said with a contented sigh.

Yaz wiped her hands with a napkin, a mischievous glint in her eyes. "Well,

you might need to move a little," she teased, standing up suddenly.

Susan tilted her head curiously. "What are you up to?"

Yaz grinned. "Since you're here, I might as well show you the surprise I've been working on."

Susan's eyes widened. "A surprise?"

"The dress" Yaz grinned

"Oooh...It's finished?"

"Of course it's finished" Yaz chuckled practically bouncing with excitement as she crossed the room to a garment rack, where a neatly covered dress hung in a protective sleeve. She carefully unzipped it, revealing an elegant evening gown that shimmered subtly in the soft light. It was a deep emerald green, with intricate beading along the neckline and a flowing skirt that seemed to cascade like water.

Susan's hand flew to her mouth, her eyes brimming with tears. "Oh, Yaz," she whispered, her voice trembling. "It's...Oh my god Yaz... it's stunning. I've never seen anything like it. Let alone had the chance to wear something so beautiful."

"Don't cry" Yaz smiled warmly, stepping closer to hug her. "Wanna to try it on?"

Susan nodded eagerly, her excitement replacing the initial shock. "Yes...Yes...I'd love to."

Yaz guided her behind the dressing screen, where she helped Susan into the gown. As Yaz adjusted the fit and smoothed the fabric, she couldn't help but beam with pride. "Alright," she said, stepping back, "you're ready."

Susan emerged from behind the screen, shyly smiling, her hands nervously smoothing the fabric.

Frances, who had been sipping her wine, froze mid-sip, her eyes widening. "Susan..." she said, her voice filled with awe. "You look amazing."

Susan laughed softly, her cheeks flushed. "You think so?"

"Think so?" Frances repeated, standing up to get a better look. "You look like you're about to walk the red carpet."

Yaz grinned, "You look gorgeous. "

Susan glanced down at the dress, then back at the two women, her smile growing as tears welled up again. "I don't know how to thank you, honey. This... this means so much to me."

"Just seeing you happy is enough," Yaz said, giving her a warm hug.

Frances stepped closer, gently touching Susan's shoulder. "Who looks like a movie star now..Huh?"

The three women shared a moment of quiet admiration, the room filled with warmth and gratitude. The gown, once just an idea in Yaz's mind, had transformed into a moment Susan would never forget.

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On a day of the opening the loft buzzed with activity, the air thick with anticipation. The staff of the catering company dressed in crisp white uniforms moved efficiently, setting up elegant spreads of food and sparkling drinks. The florist added the final touches, a cascade of delicate white orchids and soft pink roses was draped from the gallery banister, their sweet scent mingling with the faint aroma of coffee lingering from earlier. The little kitchen transformed into a sophisticated bar for the guests offering variety of drinks. With every detail coming together, the space transformed into a vision of understated glamour, the perfect backdrop for Yaz's grand opening.

Yaz sat in the corner by the sofa, her back straight but her hands trembling in her lap. A makeup artist dabbed at Frances's lips with precision, while behind Yaz, her hairdresser secured the final pin in her styled waves, which fell just shy of her shoulders in soft, glamorous cascades. Yaz's makeup was already flawless, her eyes accentuated with a subtle smoky effect, her lips painted in a bold red. Despite her polished exterior, her excitement

bubbled over into nervous fidgeting.

“Hold still, Yaz,” her hairdresser scolded gently, smoothing an errant strand.

“I’m trying,” Yaz murmured, her voice tinged with nervous energy. She glanced across the room at the mannequins lining the far wall underneath the gallery. Each one showcased a piece of her collection, illuminated by professional studio lights borrowed for the occasion. The garments glowed under the beams, every stitch and detail standing out in perfect clarity.

Frances, perched calmly in her chair, looked over at Yaz with an encouraging smile. “It’s perfect, darling. Look at it, it’s everything you’ve worked so hard for.”

Yaz sighed, her eyes darting back to Frances. “I know, but... this isn’t one of those fancy venues. It’s just my little attic studio. What if...”

“No ‘what ifs,’” Frances interrupted firmly, holding Yaz’s gaze. “Everyone who steps through that door is here for *you* and your talent. The rest doesn’t matter.”

"She's right, you know" Rose, the make-up artist added "Everyone knows you're just starting, they don't expect Press Week."

"Exactly" Frances confirmed

Yaz nodded, but doubt still gnawed at her. The Hollywood elite would soon be walking through her door, surrounded by the glamour Frances and her brunch club friends had orchestrated. Frances had rallied her connections, calling in favors to ensure Yaz’s collection would be seen in the best possible light. Yet, the thought of her attic studio being compared to the grand ballrooms and galleries of Los Angeles made Yaz’s stomach twist with uncertainty.

The makeup artist stepped back from Frances, satisfied. Frances rose gracefully, crossing to Yaz and kneeling in front of her. She took Yaz’s trembling hands in her own, her hazel eyes soft yet unwavering.

“You’re nervous, and that’s okay,” Frances said quietly. “But remember

this, you belong here. You've earned this. And by the end of the night, everyone else will know it too."

Yaz swallowed hard, her throat tight with emotion. She nodded, managing a small smile. "Thank you," she whispered.

The hairdresser stepped back, admiring her work. "All done," she announced. "You look gorgeous"

"Thank you so much" Yaz smiled with gratitude

As Frances rose to her feet, she gently tugged Yaz toward the full-length mirror in the corner. The space around them buzzed with last-minute preparations, but the moment felt private, as if they were in their own world.

"C'mere," Frances murmured, her voice soft and coaxing. She guided Yaz until they stood before the mirror, Frances stepping behind her. Their eyes met in the reflection, Frances's hazel ones radiating pride and warmth, while Yaz's dark eyes shimmered with a mix of nervousness and anticipation.

Yaz was a vision in the gown she had crafted for herself, a gentle pink masterpiece that hugged her figure in a graceful mermaid cut. The fabric shimmered under the soft lighting, the intricate beading cascading down from her waist like delicate drops of starlight. A sash draped elegantly over one shoulder, flowing down to the floor, a nod to her heritage and an homage to her mother's teachings. It was more than just a dress, it was a statement of who she was and where she came from.

Frances rested her hands lightly on Yaz's shoulders, her touch grounding and reassuring. "Look at you," Frances said, her voice a tender murmur. "You look like a movie star."

Yaz's breath hitched, her gaze fixed on their reflection. For a moment, she didn't recognize herself, this poised, radiant woman couldn't possibly be her. But Frances's steady presence behind her, her unwavering belief, made her start to see it.

"It's the dress," Yaz whispered, her voice tinged with disbelief.

Frances shook her head, her blonde curls brushing against Yaz's shoulder. "No, darling. It's you. The dress is beautiful because you made it, but *you* are what makes it shine."

Yaz's lips parted, a faint blush rising to her cheeks. She felt a lump in her throat as she glanced down at the gown, her fingers brushing the delicate beading.

"My mum would love this," Yaz said quietly, emotion thick in her voice.

"She'd be so proud of you," Frances said softly, her hands squeezing Yaz's shoulders. "And tonight, the whole room will see the brilliance I've known since the day we met."

Yaz let out a small, shaky laugh, her nerves slowly giving way to a swell of pride. She straightened her shoulders, her reflection taking on a confidence that had been buried under layers of doubt.

"Thank you," she said, her voice steady now.

Frances smiled, leaning down to press a gentle kiss to Yaz's cheek. "Anytime, darling. Now let's show them what you're made of."

The gentle knock on the studio door barely registered amidst the bustling activity, but Yaz's head turned instinctively. Susan came through the door smiling widely. Standing behind her were two familiar figures.

Yaz's expression froze, her breath catching in her chest.

Her mother, a tiny woman with a serene face framed by a dupatta draped elegantly over her head, wore a soft pastel salwar kameez adorned with delicate embroidery. Her eyes sparkled with warmth and just a hint of mischief as she stepped forward, her hands clasped in front of her. Beside her stood her father, a tall, broad-shouldered man with a neatly trimmed salt-and-pepper beard, dressed in a tailored gray suit that fit him perfectly. His posture was sturdy and confident, but his face softened as he smiled warmly at his daughter.

For a split second, Yaz couldn't process what she was seeing. And then, the realization hit her like a wave.

“Maa... Abba!” she screamed at the top of her lungs, her voice echoing through the studio.

Frances startled slightly behind her but quickly smiled as she watched Yaz race across the room, her gown trailing behind her.

Yaz practically threw herself into her mother’s arms, hugging her tightly before turning to grab her father’s hands. “What...how...what are you doing here?” she stammered, her words tumbling over one another in her shock. “You said you couldn't come.”

Her mother laughed, a soft, melodic sound, and cupped Yaz’s cheek with one hand. “Surprise, beta. Did you really think we wouldn’t come for something this important?”

Her father nodded, his deep voice steady and affectionate. “How can we not see this for ourselves. Susan called us weeks ago and arranged everything.”

Yaz’s eyes widened even further as her eyes met Susan’s who couldn't stop smiling.

“You did this?” Yaz asked, her voice trembling with emotion.

Susan shrugged nonchalantly but her eyes were filled with warmth. “Well, I figured you’d need your biggest cheerleaders here tonight.”

Yaz turned back to her parents, tears now pooling in her eyes. “I can’t believe you’re here,” she whispered. “This is... this is the best surprise of my life. When did you come?”

“Two days ago” her mother laughed cheeky kissing her forehead, her voice full of pride. “We wouldn’t have missed this for the world, meri jaan. Seeing your dreams come true is worth every mile.”

Her father gave her shoulder a firm but loving squeeze. “And you look... absolutely stunning. Like a true artist.”

Yaz laughed through her tears, her heart swelling with so much love she

thought it might burst. She hugged them both again, holding on tightly, before turning to Susan pulling her into a hug.

"I don't know what to say," Yaz said, her voice thick with gratitude. "Thank you so much."

"Oh honey" Susan squeezed her tighter

Yaz turned to her parents, taking a deep breath to steady herself before stepping back and looking up at them, her expression suddenly more serious.

"Maa, Abba... I want you to meet someone very special I told you about. This is Frances" she smiled a bit nervously as her gaze turned to the woman she loved. "Franny, my parents Raj and Maya."

Frances stepped forward with a smile. Yaz's Father extended his hand "Pleasure to finally meet you Miss Louise"

"Please, just Frances....and pleasure is all mine" Frances shook his hand

"I am so happy to finally meet you" Yaz's mother gave Frances a surprise hug "Thank you for everything you have done for our daughter"

"I just gave her a little push, everything else is her" Frances said with a pride in her voice, her gaze floating to Yaz

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As the final preparations were completed, Frances sipped her wine and chatted casually with Susan, keeping her voice light and easy, though her attention kept drifting across the room. She watched as Yaz laughed and gestured animatedly, showing her parents the intricate details of her collection. Her voice, lilting and warm, floated across the room in a language Frances didn't understand but found utterly captivating.

"Frances, are you all right?" Susan's voice cut through her thoughts, gentle but tinged with curiosity.

Frances blinked, caught off guard, and offered a small, apologetic smile. “Yes, I’m sorry,” she replied, her voice softer than usual. “I was just... thinking.”

Susan followed Frances’s gaze to where Yaz stood. She smirked knowingly. “I can see why you’d be lost.” Her tone was teasing, her smile mischievous.

Frances chuckled, a touch of shyness coloring her expression. “I just... I didn’t realize she speaks another language with her parents.”

Susan laughed softly, shaking her head. “It’s Punjabi. Her mother is thrilled Yaz has perfected her embroidery. Though...” Susan leaned closer, her voice dropping to a conspiratorial whisper, “she also mentioned Yaz still has a lot to learn when it comes to her beadwork.”

Frances’s brows lifted, her amusement mingled with surprise. “You can understand them?”

“A little,” Susan admitted, grinning. “Maya taught me some years ago. Yaz’s mother and I were inseparable in our student days, but I haven’t used it much since.”

“That’s... impressive, Susan.” Frances’s admiration was genuine, her tone thoughtful as she returned her gaze to Yaz.

Susan shrugged, her eyes twinkling. “Hardly. I’m rusty at best. But you should have heard Yaz when she was little, she’d switch effortlessly between English and Punjabi. It’s lovely to see her like this, isn’t it? Completely in her element.”

Frances nodded slowly, her heart swelling as she took in the scene again. Yaz’s laughter rang out, her confidence and joy radiating as she shared this moment with her parents. Frances felt a pang of something, longing, perhaps, or maybe just the realization that there was still so much of Yaz’s world she didn’t know.

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The gentle hum of voices swelled as guests started pouring in. Frances

and Yaz took turns welcoming each arrival, their smiles bright, their greetings effortless. A steady stream of Hollywood's elite glided through the space, their tailored suits and dazzling gowns a perfect complement to the glamour Yaz's creations exuded. Outside, sleek black cars pulled up one by one, delivering stars, studio executives with their wives, and socialites onto the temporary red carpet adorned with an elegant awning.

Frances couldn't help but notice how perfectly everything had come together. The brunch club women had gone above and beyond, organizing a professional doorman and even discreet security to manage the high-profile crowd. It was more polished and extravagant than anything Yaz could have imagined, yet it still managed to reflect her authentic vision.

As Yaz moved through the crowd, her energy infectious. Guests lingered by the displays, murmuring their admiration for the exquisite detailing of her embroidery, the vibrant hues of her fabrics, and the innovative blend of Eastern and Western influences. Frances caught snippets of conversations praising Yaz's bold vision and the remarkable storytelling in her work.

Yaz's eyes lit up as she spotted Lillian Hartley and Evelyn Chase stepping into the room, their presence immediately commanding attention. Evelyn, radiant in a sleek red gown that matched her fiery red curls, and Lillian, elegant in a midnight blue dress adorned with subtle sequins, exchanged quick glances before their faces broke into matching smiles. Yaz wasted no time, weaving through the crowd to meet them, her nerves momentarily forgotten.

"Finally!" Yaz exclaimed, her voice warm and full of excitement. "I couldn't wait for you to get here."

Lillian laughed, a rich, throaty sound that was as commanding as her presence. "Darling, I had the most boring meeting. I couldn't get out of it fast enough. I'm sorry we're late."

"I'm just glad you made it" she smiled

"You look absolutely stunning, honey," Evelyn added as she pulled Yaz into a tight hug.

"Not as amazing as you," Yaz replied, stepping back to admire Evelyn's

new hairstyle. "I love the new hair, it suits you perfectly!"

Evelyn touched her curls with mock modesty, her lips twitching into a grin. "Oh, stop it. You're the star tonight. Look at all of this, it's breathtaking!" She gestured around the room, taking in the soft lighting, the meticulous displays, and the palpable energy buzzing among the guests.

Lilian nodded, her eyes scanning the room with genuine admiration. "I can't believe how well it's all come together. It's... spectacular. And the collection, oh, I can't wait to see it!"

Yaz's cheeks flushed with gratitude, and she clasped Evelyn's hands. "I know...I can't quite believe it ...But it wouldn't have been possible without you both. The security, the organization...It's crazy...it's more than I ever dreamed of. Thank you, from the bottom of my heart."

Lillian waved her hand dismissively but smiled warmly. "Nonsense. You deserve this and more. We're just glad to help make it happen."

Evelyn leaned in conspiratorially, lowering her voice. "We've already overheard some very big names saying glowing things about your designs. You might have half of Hollywood knocking at your door by tomorrow morning."

Yaz laughed nervously, her heart fluttering. "Don't say that. I might faint."

"Don't you dare," Lillian teased. "You're the picture of composure tonight, absolutely glowing. We're so proud of you honey..."

Yaz felt a lump rise in her throat but pushed it down with a grateful smile. "Having you here means the world to me. Truly."

"Well, we're here now, darling," Lillian said, looping her arm through Yaz's. "And I'm dying to see your work. Show us everything! Oh, look...do you know who is that?" she pointed at a tall man in his mid forties standing by the bar

"No" Yaz giggled, finding Lillian's scanning of the crowd amusing

"Lillian leaned in slightly, "That's Alexandre Duval," she murmured, a hint of recognition in her voice. "He's the head of women's couture at Dior, one of the best in the business. You might not have heard of him yet, but he's a big deal. He's here tonight because Dior's looking for fresh talents, and I told him about your collection. He's got an eye for innovation, so if you impress him tonight, well, it could open some doors for you." Lillian's smile was knowing, her gaze shifting back to Yaz with a supportive glint. "Just don't let him scare you. He's got a sharp eye, but he's also a good judge of talent."

"I'll do my best not to embarrass myself," Yaz said with a laugh and a playful nod.

"We'll catch him later when he already had one or two" she winked wickedly making Yaz laugh

As she led Lillian and Evelyn toward the first display, Frances appeared at her side, her radiant smile calm and composed. The soft lighting danced against her lobster colour gown, giving her an almost ethereal glow.

"Frances!" Lillian exclaimed, extending her hand. "You look absolutely divine tonight, as always."

Frances took her hand warmly. "And you look stunning, darling. I'm so glad you're both here."

Evelyn nodded with a knowing smile. "We wouldn't have missed it for the world. And you must be so proud of her, it's an incredible accomplishment."

"I am," Frances replied, her voice sincere. Her eyes flickered toward Yaz with an affection she couldn't entirely mask. "She's poured her heart and soul into this collection. She's been working so hard juggling studio and this at the same time. I'm surprised she's still standing."

Susan joined them just then. Yaz quickly stepped forward to make introductions.

"Lillian, Evelyn, this is Susan, my mum's friend I've been staying with." Yaz said with a bright smile. "She's been my rock through all of this."

Susan chuckled and shook hands with both women. "It's lovely to meet you. Yaz has spoken so highly of you both."

"So pleased to meet you," Lillian said with a grin

As the chatter rippled through the group, Yaz's gaze drifted to the other side of the room, where her parents were engaged in conversation with an elderly couple, admiring one of her displays. A wave of warmth swept over her as her heart swelled at the sight.

"Excuse me for a moment," she said quickly, darting off to retrieve them.

Moments later, she returned, gently pulling her parents along with her. "I wanted you to meet some very special people," Yaz said, her voice brimming with pride.

Her parents smiled warmly as Yaz began the introductions. "Mum, Dad, this is Lillian Hartley and Evelyn Chase, they've been incredible supporters of mine."

Lillian stepped forward, her charm on full display. "It's a pleasure to meet you both. Your daughter is an absolute star, and her talent is unmatched."

Evelyn nodded, her sincerity evident. "She's made a remarkable impression on all of us. You must be so proud."

Yaz's mother smiled graciously, her hands clasped in front of her. "Thank you. We are very proud of her. This is beyond anything we could have imagined."

Her father added with a nod, "She's worked so hard for this. It's a joy to see her dreams coming to life."

The group exchanged warm words as Yaz's nerves melted further, the room buzzing with energy. For the first time that night, Yaz allowed herself to exhale fully, feeling the love and support from every corner of her life.

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As Yaz mingled in conversation with guests, her eyes darted to the

entrance once more. A new wave of guests had arrived, and among them were Mildred, Shirley, and Barbara, her dedicated team. The three women, dressed modestly yet elegantly in evening dresses that complemented their individual styles, stood just inside the doorway, glancing around with a mixture of awe and anxiety.

Yaz's face lit up, and she excused herself from the group, her heels clicking against the polished floor as she hurried toward them.

"You made it!" Yaz exclaimed, her arms outstretched as if she wanted to hug all three at once.

Mildred, smiled warmly, her hair pinned back neatly adorned with a glittering hair piece. She looked radiant in a gorgeous turquoise dress "Of course we did. You look like a movie star"

"Don't let the looks deceive you, I'm in a right state"

Shirley, whose auburn curls framed her cheerful face, chuckled. "Yaz, you're glowing. This is absolutely spectacular."

"Thanks honey, you look adorable" Yaz hugged her warmly

Barbara, the youngest of the group, adjusted her pearl necklace nervously but smiled shyly. "It's all so... grand. I don't think I've ever been to anything like this."

"I know...nerve-wracking, isn't it? " Yaz took Barbara's hand gently. "But....None of this would have been possible without the three of you. I'm so glad you're here to celebrate all the hard work we've done together."

The girls exchanged pleased glances, their pride evident despite their modesty.

"You're the star girl" Mildred said, her voice steady and warm. "But we're proud to have played a part."

"Oi...More than a part I'll have you know. " Yaz corrected, her voice firm but kind. "You worked your butts off, staying late at night. I'll never forget that. Tonight is as much about you as it is about those clothes....Come on," Yaz

said, her excitement bubbling over. "I want to introduce you to some people."

"Are there any stars?" Barbara asked, her eyes flicking around

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As Yaz was in the middle of the conversation with one lady, Frances came up behind her gently tapping her back. Turning around, her jaw dropped. Standing just behind Frances was none other than Victor, mischievous grin spread across his face.

"Vicooooor!" Yaz practically yelled, her voice echoing with delight as she leaped into his open arms. "What the hell?"

He chuckled, holding her tightly for a moment before stepping back, his hands resting on her shoulders. "Seriously, kiddo, you thought I'd miss this? You need some photos, don't you?"

"I didn't think you even knew!" Yaz stammered, still in shock. Her eyes darted to Frances, who stood beside them, smiling smugly.

"I might have made a call." Frances shrugged grinning

Victor tipped an imaginary hat toward Frances. "What can I say? She's persuasive. And she wouldn't stop talking about how proud she is of you."

Yaz's cheeks flushed, a mixture of embarrassment and gratitude swelling in her chest. "This is crazy. I can't believe you're here. But wait...you're not missing anything important, are you?"

"Nothing more important than this," Victor said, his tone softening. "I've been dying to see what you've been working on. Now, where's that collection of yours?"

Yaz beamed, grabbing his arm and dragging him toward the display. "Come on! You have to see everything. But first, let me introduce you to everyone."

She turned back to Frances, a look of pure gratitude in her eyes. "Thank

you.”

Frances only nodded, her expression warm and knowing.

As Yaz introduced Victor to her parents, her team, and everyone else, his charm and enthusiasm quickly won everyone over.

Before long, Victor had his camera out, snapping candid shots of Yaz with her parents and standing proudly by her collection. The room seemed to come alive under his lens, every detail captured with an artist’s eye.

For Yaz, the night felt like a dream, it wasn’t just about the collection anymore, it was about the people who had come together to celebrate her journey, making the evening more magical than she ever could have imagined.

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The evening was beginning to wind down, but the atmosphere in the loft remained electric.

Yaz was in the middle of thanking a small group for attending when a subtle hush fell over the room, signaling the arrival of someone noteworthy.

She turned just in time to see Frances walking toward the entrance, a knowing smile on her lips as she greeted the guest. Yaz’s heart leapt with recognition, and before she could stop herself, she was weaving through the crowd.

“Katherine!” Yaz called, her face lighting up as she reached the iconic figure.

Katherine turned with a warm, familiar smile, effortlessly chic in a tailored white jacket and matching trousers that exuded her signature confidence. “Yaz,” she greeted, her throaty voice filled with warmth as she extended her hands to clasp Yaz’s.

“I thought you wouldn’t be able to come.” Yaz said, her voice filled with genuine emotion

“You must be joking,” Katherine drawled with a mischievous glint in her

eyes, "I've been looking forward to tonight for weeks...Sorry to keep you waiting..."

Yaz laughed, a mix of relief and joy bubbling up. "It means so much to have you here. Truly."

"Now, are you going to show me the collection, or must I fight the crowd for a peek?"

Yaz grinned, "I'd be honored."

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The room quieted as Yaz stepped forward, a glass of champagne trembling slightly in her hand. The spotlight seemed to intensify the butterflies in her stomach, and for a brief moment, she questioned if she'd be able to get the words out. She glanced around the room, her eyes settling first on her parents, then Frances and Susan, and finally her team who stood near the back, all of them smiling encouragingly. Taking a deep breath, she began.

"Good evening, everyone," Yaz said, her voice wavering slightly before steadying. "First, I want to thank you all for being here tonight. Seeing this room full of so many amazing people who believed in me, supported me, and inspired me, it's overwhelming in the best possible way."

A ripple of warm smiles spread through the crowd, offering Yaz a silent but powerful encouragement.

"Hear, Hear!" Victor chimed from the back, his voice carrying over the the room, causing everyone to chuckle.

"This evening is more than just a showcase of my work, it's a celebration of the people who made this dream possible. First, Frances." Yaz's eyes sought Frances's across the room, her smile softening. "Without you, none of this would even exist. Your unwavering belief in me and my work, your support not just as a business partner but as a friend, has been my anchor. I just hope I don't make you bankrupt!"

The crowd chuckled, and Frances's smile softened into a laugh as she

raised her glass, then playfully motioned towards Yaz, sending her a kiss with a light gesture of her hand.

“To Lillian, Evelyn, and Katherine, special ladies in my life,” Yaz continued, nodding toward the women. “Your encouragement and advice have been invaluable. From organizing tonight to providing details that made me feel like royalty, I can’t thank you enough. Your support has meant the world to me.”

Her gaze shifted to her parents, and her voice softened. “To my parent, you were my first teachers, my first champions. Ammi, everything I know about embroidery and craftsmanship, I learned at your side. And Abba, thank you for always believing in my madness, for letting me follow my dreams even when they seemed unconventional.”

A wave of emotion swept over her, and she paused to collect herself. Her father gave her an encouraging nod, and her mother wiped a tear from her eye.

“To Susan,” Yaz said with a warm smile, “You’ve been a mother figure to me since the day I arrived here. You opened your home, your heart, and you’ve been my guide when I felt lost. I’m so grateful for you.”

She looked toward the back of the room, where her girls stood, their modest evening dresses glowing with understated elegance. “To Mildred, Shirley, and Barbara, my incredible team. You’ve worked tirelessly beside me, bringing these designs to life. This is our work, not just mine. Thank you for your dedication and passion.”

Finally, Yaz’s gaze swept over the entire room, her confidence growing as she addressed the crowd. “And to all of you, guests, friends, supporters...thank you for being here tonight, for celebrating this milestone with me. This isn’t just a culmination of hard work... it’s the beginning of a dream I’ve carried my whole life.”

She raised her glass, her smile radiant. “To dreams, to friendships, and to all of you...thank you from the bottom of my heart.”

The room erupted into applause as Yaz took a step back, her heart pounding but her smile unwavering. She’d done it. Her nervousness was gone, replaced by the warm glow of connection and gratitude. Frances

reached her hand out as Yaz stepped away. Her emotions overwhelming her as tears of joy rolled down her cheeks.

"I'm so proud of you" Frances murmured pulling her into embrace.

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As the last guests trickled out, Yaz stood by the door, exchanging heartfelt goodbyes with her parents. Her mother pulled her into a tight embrace, whispering words of pride and encouragement before stepping back with a knowing smile. Her father gave her a firm hug and a proud pat on the back.

"I'll stay the night at the studio," Yaz explained, "The catering company is coming early to pack everything up, so... "

Her mother nodded, smiling warmly. "I understand, beta. We'll see you tomorrow."

Susan, who was standing nearby, chimed in, "I'm making lunch for everyone tomorrow. Frances, you should join us!"

Frances raised an eyebrow, slightly surprised by the invitation, but then smiled, her heart softening at the thought. "I'd love to. Thank you for the invitation."

Yaz's mother beamed. "It'll be lovely to have you, Frances. I'm sure Yaz will be happy to have us all together."

With a final round of hugs and goodbyes, everyone left, and the door clicked shut behind them. The studio, now dimly lit, felt eerily quiet. The hum of excitement from the evening faded, leaving only the warmth of the soft lighting and the lingering scent of celebration.

Yaz stood still for a moment, a deep breath escaping her lips as the weight of the night hit her. The excitement, the anxiety, all of it melted away in that single exhale. She stepped forward, closing the distance between herself and Frances, burying her face in the crook of her neck.

Frances's fingers trailed soothing, rhythmic lines down her back, grounding her. Slowly, Yaz lifted her head, her lips curving into a soft smile. She met

Frances's gaze, eyes filled with affection, and Frances kissed the tip of her nose gently.

"I'm hungry," Yaz chuckled softly, her voice still tinged with the nerves of the night. "I was so nervous I couldn't eat anything."

Frances laughed, looking over Yaz's shoulder at the leftover food scattered on the tables. "There's plenty of food left," she teased, a mischievous glint in her eye. "Maybe I should get that Tupperware."

Yaz giggled, her face slumping into Frances's chest. "Maybe you should," she said, her voice muffled but filled with warmth and contentment.

Frances wrapped her arms around her, both of them taking a quiet moment to unwind, the world outside the studio slowly fading into the background as they enjoyed the peaceful intimacy of the night.

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