

Chapter 18

The gentle drizzle outside created a soft mist over the Brighton Pier, the view from the apartment partially obscured by the light rain. The chill had settled in, and the temperatures hovered just above 17°C, a stark contrast to the heatwave they'd experienced just a week ago. The clouds cast a muted, gray light over the sea, making the waves seem distant and calm, the occasional seagull flying low across the water. It was a peaceful, cozy scene, perfect for a lazy day inside.

Inside the apartment, Yaz was in the shower, her hair lathered in shampoo, while Theta, dressed in an elegant powder pink blouse and white trousers, sat at the kitchen table with her headphones on. Her laptop was open, and she was speaking with a potential client over a Teams call, her notes in front of her as she meticulously explained the process for handling the company merger.

"... So as I mentioned, once we finalize the agreements, we'll begin the valuation process," Theta said, her voice calm yet confident. "It's important to ensure that both sides understand the impact of the merger on their financials before we move to the next step, which is the integration phase."

She paused, listening to the response from the client on the other end.

"Yes, exactly. We'll work together to create a transition plan that minimizes disruption while maximizing synergy. I believe the market potential is strong, especially given the recent performance of both companies. Once we have the internal assessments completed, we can get a more accurate picture of the forecast for the next quarter."

She shifted her position slightly, writing down some additional notes as the conversation continued. Outside, the rain seemed to pick up a bit, the droplets trickling down the window, adding a soft pattering sound to the quiet atmosphere inside.

"Of course, we'll handle all the legal requirements and make sure everything is in compliance with the latest regulations. We're aiming for a smooth transition, and with the right strategy, I'm confident we can get this right. I'll send over a draft of the proposal by the end of the day, so we can review everything before we move ahead." Theta's tone was steady, reassuring, as she kept her focus on the screen.

The client on the other end responded with a few questions, and Theta nodded, answering with precision and clarity. "Yes, I understand the importance of keeping communication open between the teams. Once we finalize everything on our end, I'll schedule a follow-up meeting to go over the progress and any adjustments that might be necessary."

She could feel the weight of the conversation as it progressed. This was a big opportunity, the kind that would bring in the £9,000 fee she was hoping for. It wasn't just about the money, though, this deal was a step forward for her career, a sign of how far she'd come and knew how proud her mother would be. The client seemed satisfied with her approach, and Theta couldn't help but feel a quiet sense of pride as they wrapped up the call.

"Thank you. I'll be in touch soon," Theta said, offering a final note of reassurance before clicking the "End Call" button. She sat back, exhaling deeply, feeling the tension ease out of her shoulders.

Looking out the window, she noticed how the rain had picked up, blurring the view of the pier, adding a touch of melancholy to the otherwise tranquil scene. The call had gone well, better than she'd hoped. She'd done it. Now, all that was left was to wait for the confirmation.

As she pushed her laptop aside, her thoughts turned to Yaz, who was still in the shower. Theta smiled, her heart warm at the thought of the day ahead and the quiet comfort of being in Brighton with Yaz by her side. She quickly stood up and moved toward the kitchen, making herself a cup of tea.

Yaz stepped out of the bathroom, steam gently wafting from the door behind her. The scent of her freshly washed hair filled the air, a sweet floral fragrance that wrapped around Theta like a warm embrace. She walked barefoot across the floor, the soft sound of her footsteps nearly lost in the quiet hum of the apartment.

Theta sat at the kitchen table, her laptop pushed aside, now replaced with a steaming cup of tea. She had her eyes closed, savoring the calming quiet of the morning, but when Yaz came in, she couldn't help but smile to herself.

Yaz's hand reached out, her fingers lightly grazing Theta's neck from behind. Theta let out a soft breath, the warmth of her touch sending a shiver down her spine. She tilted her head back slightly, closing her eyes again as Yaz's presence surrounded her.

Yaz leaned down, her lips softly brushing against Theta's. The kiss was gentle, unhurried, the kind of kiss that spoke of deep affection, a quiet connection that they didn't need to explain.

As they pulled apart, Theta smiled, her eyes opening slowly to meet Yaz's gaze. There was something peaceful about the moment, about the way they fit together so effortlessly in this space. The tension from the meeting and the nerves about the future seemed to dissolve every time Yaz was close.

"Morning," Yaz said softly, her voice laced with affection, her fingers still tracing light circles along Theta's neck.

“Morning love,” Theta replied, her voice just as tender. She reached up and brushed a strand of hair from Yaz’s face, letting her fingers linger along the curve of her jaw. “You smell amazing.”

Yaz chuckled lightly. “Well, that’s what happens when you take a shower,” she teased, her grin wide and playful as she went to get herself some tea.

Theta laughed, her smile widening.

As Yaz came back at the table she leaned in for another kiss, this time a little longer, a little deeper. When they finally pulled apart, Theta rested her forehead against Yaz’s for a moment, breathing in the feeling of being close, of being right here together.

“You’re in a good mood this morning,” Yaz remarked, noticing the calmness that radiated from Theta “I assume the meeting went well?”

Theta nodded, her smile never leaving her face. “I think I might have just secured that merger,” she said with a hint of pride in her voice. “The call went really well.”

Yaz raised an eyebrow, her lips curling into a grin as she sat down “That’s amazing, babe.... I knew you’d crush it.”

“We’ll see if they confirm it,” she said, though she couldn’t help but feel hopeful. “But... it feels good.”

“Well, regardless of the outcome, you’re still brilliant.”

"Charmer" Theta chuckled "The weather's awful" she pouted, her eyes glancing through the window "Don't feel tropical anymore"

Yaz burst out laughing "Since when did Brighton feel tropical? Tell you what...since weather's shit, how about we get ready and go grab some breakfast? I'm starving."

Theta laughed, her eyes sparkling. “Sounds like a plan.”

"We might as well make the best of it. We can grab some food, coffee and I thought we could go to Pavilion...I always wanted to see it."

"Yeah alright then...I like that plan."

"Look...they have a caff" Yaz turned her phone showing the googled photos "We can have breakfast there" she chuckled

"Good cause I definitely need a refill" Theta laughed

....

Yaz stood in the bathroom, deftly braiding her hair while the faint hum of rain against the window created a soothing backdrop. She was already dressed and ready for the day, choosing a simple but comfortable outfit, a pair of jeans paired with a shirt and her trusty leather jacket. As she tied off the end of her braid, she gave herself a quick once-over in the mirror and nodded, satisfied.

In the bedroom, Theta stood in her underwear, staring intently at the wardrobe. Her clothes were scattered across the bed, a cardigan, a jumper, and a couple of tops, all of which she had rejected. She sighed, her shoulders slumping as she picked up a jumper and tossed it back onto the bed in frustration.

“What’s up, snuggle bug?” Yaz asked as she strolled past, dropping a quick kiss to Theta’s cheek.

Theta huffed, glancing at Yaz. “I don’t know what to wear...Nothing fits right anymore.”

Yaz leaned against the doorframe, arms crossed and gave her a sympathetic smile. “Just go for leggings and a top,” she suggested casually. “We’re gonna do a lot of walking anyway.”

Theta considered this for a moment before sighing again. “I suppose so...” She huffed picking up a pair of leggings.

"I suggest you get our ass into gear babe, cab's gonna be here any minute."

"I'll be done in a sec...Oh, Mum called...Count on having lunch at theirs when we come back."

“Don’t wanna think about coming back yet,” Yaz said with a grin, adjusting her jacket.

Theta chuckled softly and grabbed a warm cardigan to go with her leggings. “Don’t forget your wallet,” she teased, throwing Yaz a knowing look.

Yaz groaned rolling her eyes, the memory of her fiasco from the other day still fresh in her mind. “Very funny.”

Theta sat down on the edge of the bed, holding her trainers in her hands and pouting. “Mmm... mmm,” she mumbled, holding the shoes out toward Yaz expectantly.

“Spoily” Yaz teased, taking the trainers from her. She knelt down, shaking her head with a laugh.

Theta grinned and happily sat back, scrolling through her phone while Yaz tied her shoes. “Hey, look what I found,” she said suddenly, holding her phone out toward Yaz.

“What did you find?” Yaz asked, tapping Theta’s other leg to signal she was done with the first shoe.

Theta turned the screen toward Yaz, showing an overly adorable winter coat for Lola. It was sugary sweet, with a pastel rainbow on the back adorned with beads, ribbons, and small buttons. Yaz stared at it for a moment, a mix of amusement and horror flashing across her face.

“It’s... unique,” Yaz said carefully.

Theta burst out laughing. “You hate it.”

“I didn’t say that!” Yaz protested, though her face gave her away. “It’s just... not my cup of tea. But if you like it, go for it.”

Theta was still laughing as she saved the coat to her favorites. “I love it. It’ll take time to arrive since it’s handmade, so I thought I’d order it now.”

“Order it then,” Yaz said with a shrug, standing up and offering Theta her hand. “But you’re the one walking her in that.”

Theta giggled, letting Yaz pull her to her feet. “Come on, chubby bum,” Yaz teased, pressing a quick kiss to Theta’s lips before tugging her toward the door.

Theta stopped in her tracks, turning to glance at herself in the mirror. “Is my bum getting bigger?”

Yaz couldn’t help but laugh even harder. “Nooo...it’s just nice and squidgy...”

“Whaaa?”

“It’s cute, that’s all...God, I wish I never said anything now.”

“You just said it was squidgy!” Theta pointed out, her hands on her hips.

Yaz sighed, laughing as she gently pulled Theta toward the door. “If we stand here debating the state of your bum any longer, we’ll never leave.”

Theta dug her heels into the floor dramatically, glancing over her shoulder at the mirror one last time. “But Yaz...”

“Nope,” Yaz interrupted, spinning around to face her, hands on Theta’s hips. “You’re gorgeous. You’re glowing. And your bum’s perfect, okay? Now, move.”

“You’re just dodging an answer.” Theta let out a little huff “I still think it’s getting bigger”

"Good," Yaz teased, leaning in close with a playful grin. "More for me to enjoy."

Theta rolled her eyes but couldn't hide the smile creeping across her face. "You're impossible."

"And you love it," Yaz quipped, popping a quick kiss to Theta's nose before grabbing her hand and finally leading her out of the bedroom. "Come ooon...cab's here"

....

As the Uber rolled away from their apartment, rain tapped softly against the windows as the car glided along the wet streets of Brighton. Outside, the summer rain painted a shimmering sheen over the city, making the colorful facades of shops and cafés appear brighter even under the overcast sky. Yaz sat comfortably, her hand resting casually on Theta's thigh as they rode in silence, both lost in the rhythmic hum of the car and the gentle pitter-patter of the rain.

Theta's gaze wandered out the window, following the drops streaking diagonally down the glass. The streets were bustling despite the weather, people weaving between puddles with umbrellas in hand. Brighton's vibrant life didn't falter even on a rainy day.

As the car turned onto a narrower road, Theta's eyes caught a glimpse of a vintage bookshop with a bold, navy-blue sign. In front of the store, a young couple stood huddled together, shaking out their umbrellas before stepping inside. The man chuckled at something the woman said, his hand brushing a strand of damp hair from her face leaning in and placing a soft kiss to her lips. Theta smiled at the scene.

"Looks like someone's having a good day," Yaz chuckled, nodding toward the couple.

"It's so...quaint," Theta murmured, her voice warm with appreciation.

"Quaint, but damp," Yaz teased, nudging her gently with a grin.

"Oh come ooon...It's romantic" she objected "They're so adorable"

"It is actually...They're cute" glanced over and grinned. "You're such a romantic." Yaz teased, squeezing her hand lightly.

"Like you're not..." Theta smiled softly, leaning into her

"Maybe little.." she giggled pressing her lips to Theta's temple

"Course you are babe" Theta leaned into the warmth of Yaz's touch, her own lips curling into a soft smile. "I'm hungry"

“See we’d be running into the bookstore to buy snacks, not novels,” Yaz joked, earning a soft laugh from Theta.

The Uber slowed as it reached a red light, giving them a moment to take in more of Brighton’s rainy charm. A street musician huddled under the awning of a coffee shop strummed a cheerful tune on a guitar, unfazed by the weather. A group of teenagers dashed across the road, laughing and splashing through puddles.

Theta sighed, her head leaning back against Yaz’s shoulder. “Rain always makes the city look kind of magical, doesn’t it?”

“It does, especially summer rain” She tilted her head to glance at Theta. “But I still prefer it when it’s dry enough to walk around.”

“You and me both,” Theta said with a chuckle. She rubbed her belly absently. “But I’m not complaining about the ride today. My feet will thank me later.”

Yaz grinned, taking her hand, lacing their fingers together. “Don’t worry, we’ll just just have loads of stop gaps.”

"Mmmm" Theta murmured against her shoulder

As they approached the Pavilion, the grandeur of its domes emerged through the rain-speckled windows. The building’s exotic silhouette stood out against the gloom, its intricate details a promise of the elegance within.

Theta leaned forward, peering closer. “It looks like something out of a fairytale.”

Yaz smiled, her hand finding Theta’s on the seat. “Wait until you see the inside. It’ll blow your mind.”

Theta turned to Yaz, her excitement bubbling over despite the rain. “I can’t wait.”

The Uber pulled up and the driver turned to them with a smile. “Here we are, ladies.”

"Thank you, have a nice day" Yaz said paying the fair

"Enjoy your day."

"You too, thank you" Theta smiled

Yaz slipped out first, holding the door open for Theta. She offered her hand as Theta carefully stepped onto the wet pavement, her cardigan pulled close against the drizzle. Together, they turned to face the grand, exotic silhouette of the Pavilion rising before them, its domes gleaming under the soft summer rain.

"That's so fucking gorgeous" Yaz smiled

....

As Theta and Yaz walked through the grand entrance of the Royal Pavilion, they were immediately greeted by the intricate and opulent surroundings that seemed to blur the lines between East and West. The entrance hall was filled with rich colors, the vibrant reds, greens, and golds of the walls reflecting the grandeur of the building. Intricate chandeliers hung from the high ceiling, their glass reflecting the soft, filtered light from the cloudy sky outside.

They approached the ticket counter, where the attendant greeted them with a friendly smile. Theta pulled out her purse, quickly paying for their tickets, and the attendant handed them their passes, which allowed them access to the Pavilion's many rooms and exhibitions.

"Thank you," Yaz said, smiling at the attendant before taking the tickets. "Let's go to caff first, I'm dying for a coffee."

Theta nodded, tucking the tickets into her bag, and the two women followed the signs toward the Pavilion's café. As they walked down the corridor, they passed rooms adorned with rich tapestries and beautiful furniture, all in the distinctive Indo-Saracenic style that gave the Pavilion its exotic charm. The walls were decorated with intricate floral patterns and gold accents, while towering columns added to the air of regality. The scent of old wood and history filled the air.

Yaz's eyes opened wide as scanned every detail. "Look" she tugged Theta's hand pointing at the ceiling

"Stunning...could you imagine how long it took them to build this"

"It says 17 years" Yaz waived a booklet

"Crazy...I swear if they had to do this today, I'd take them 50."

"I don't know if they'd know how to...They just know how to put blocks together now..."

After a short walk, they arrived at the café, which was nestled in a beautiful, airy space near the back of the Pavilion. The café was located within a large, light-filled room that overlooked the Pavilion's beautiful gardens. The rain outside created a soft, steady rhythm against the windows, but inside, the atmosphere was warm and inviting.

The café itself had a cozy, relaxed vibe, with wooden tables and chairs placed near the windows, offering a lovely view of the Pavilion's grounds. The décor was simple yet elegant, with touches of floral patterns and soft hues that echoed the Pavilion's opulence but in a more understated way. A few other visitors sat at tables, enjoying hot drinks and light bites.

They approached the counter, where a friendly barista greeted them. Theta quickly scanned the menu, her eyes landing on the selection of teas and cakes.

"Do you want tea or coffee darling?" Theta asked Yaz, her voice soft, the sound of the rain outside almost drowning her out.

"I'm leaning toward tea to be honest," Yaz replied, scanning the options. "I'll go for Earl Grey."

Theta smiled and nodded. "I need coffee...even if it is decaff...Right...food" her eyes sparkled at the selection

They placed their order and as they waited Theta started to squirm uncomfortably.

"You alright?" Yaz asked worried

"I need to pee" she leaned in whispering "Wonder where's the loo?" She looked around scanning the room.

"Not sure...Excuse me...Where's the loo?" Yaz turned to barista who politely explained

"Could you take this...Don't think I can wait"

"Sure...go."

"Find a table near the window"

"Alright" Yaz chuckled as Theta disappeared quickly.

She carried their order to one of the tables, choosing a spot where they could look out at the drizzly day while still feeling cozy inside.

The atmosphere in the café was peaceful, with soft conversation around her and the clink of cups and plates. As she settled into the chair, Yaz looked out at the garden, the rain adding a serene touch to the view.

As she waited for a while for Theta to return, she was starting to get worried. She was about to take her phone out to call her when Theta chimed above her.

"I could spend all day in here," she said, taking a seat "It's so peaceful."

"I agree," Yaz smiled, her eyes sparkling. "It's like we've stepped into another world. Away from everything. You took a long time, everything okay?"

"Yeah, just loads of people"

"I think everyone had the same idea"

"Must be...I mean, what do you do on a day like this...Good thinking Batman

.....

As they stepped into the Pavilion, Yaz's eyes lit up, her gaze wandering over the ornate architecture, the exotic decor, and the lush greenery that seemed to be growing in every direction. The ornate design, with its oriental touches and intricate detail, left her momentarily speechless. She slowly turned, her face a mixture of awe and fascination, as she took it all in.

Theta walked beside her, smiling quietly as she watched Yaz's expressions shift. She had seen Yaz's sharp focus on work, the quiet, grounded side of her, but this...this was something different. There was a sparkle in her eyes, an almost childlike wonder, that Theta hadn't expected. She felt a warmth in her chest, delighted by this side of Yaz that she hadn't known existed.

"You okay there, love?" Theta asked, nudging Yaz gently.

Yaz turned to her, her smile wide. "This place is amazing. It's like stepping into another world."

Theta's heart fluttered slightly. "I know, right? It's like stepping into a dream. A little bit whimsical, and so grand." She took a step closer, offering her hand, and Yaz took it instantly, squeezing it gently as they wandered deeper into the Pavilion.

They passed through into a gardens, filled with delicate plants and trees, each turn revealing new corners of the space. The air smelled fresh, mixed with hints of flowers and earth, a contrast to the rain that still pattered softly outside but it didn't ruin their walk.

Yaz took a deep breath, almost like she was absorbing everything, the colors, the textures, the feeling of stepping into something so grand yet so peaceful. Her eyes wandered to a set of ornate sculptures in the garden, intricate and grand, as they whispered the stories of another time.

Theta noticed the way Yaz's focus shifted between every little detail, how she absorbed everything with an almost childlike enthusiasm. Watching her fall in love with the Pavilion, made her heart swell in unexpected ways.

"Can't believe we haven't done this sooner," Yaz murmured, turning to her.

"You were right. This is exactly what we needed today"

Theta pulled her in a little closer, wrapping an arm around her waist as they continued their walk.

Yaz draped her arm over Theta's shoulder dropping a gentle kiss to her temple.

"I'm glad you like it. And I'm glad to see you like it like this," Theta murmured, gently nudging Yaz's side.

Yaz laughed softly, her cheeks flushed, but there was something in the way she held Theta little tighter. "I didn't think I'd be the one to get all lost in a place like this. I was always more practical."

"I think you've got a soft spot for a little whimsy." She said, a playful smirk on her lips.

Yaz chuckled, shrugging. "Maybe... maybe just for today."

Theta smiled, leaning in as they continued to walk.

She felt a deep sense of peace, content simply in this quiet moment, sharing the joy of discovering something beautiful with Yaz.

....

As they strolled into the Pavilion store, the vibrant displays instantly caught Theta's attention. Her steps faltered for a moment, her eyes widening as she took in the explosion of colors and intricate designs around her. Shelves were lined with ornate teapots, silk scarves printed with swirling patterns, and delicate jewelry that sparkled under the soft lights. Every corner seemed to offer something new, something dazzling, something utterly enchanting.

"Oh my God..." Theta whispered, her voice almost reverent. She stepped forward, her hands brushing over a display of intricately painted mugs. "Yaz, look at this." She turned, holding one up, the delicate gold trim catching the light.

Yaz smirked, watching her partner's uncontrollable excitement with fond amusement. "You've already found something you want, haven't you?"

Theta's eyes flicked back to Yaz, her expression a mixture of mock offense and pure delight. "Want? I *need* this. Look at it"

"Breathe" Yaz chuckled whispering in her ear. She folded her arms, leaning against the edge of a nearby shelf. "You just walked in and you're already planning on buying the whole store."

Theta ignored her, moving from one display to the next with the energy of a child in a toy store. She gasped audibly as she spotted a set of journals with embossed covers, running

her fingers over the intricate patterns. “Oh, these are beautiful! I could use one, I don’t know what though, but I’ll figure it out.”

“Right, cause you don’t already have a stack of blank journals at home,” Yaz teased, her tone affectionate.

Theta gasped dramatically, clutching the journal to her chest. “You’re just jealous because I have impeccable taste.”

Yaz rolled her eyes, laughing softly as Theta moved on.

As they wandered deeper into the store, Yaz found herself enjoying the moment more than she expected. Watching Theta’s pure joy was infectious, and she couldn’t help but feel a swell of affection as Theta darted from one display to the next, her enthusiasm unrelenting.

By the time they reached the jewelry section, Theta was holding an armful of items, a journal, the scarf, and two mugs. She turned to Yaz with a sheepish grin. “Okay, I might need to edit this pile.”

Yaz laughed, shaking her head. “Or we’ll need another suitcase just for your Pavilion haul.”

Theta grinned, stepping closer and wrapping her arm around Yaz’s waist. “You don’t mind, do you?”

Yaz sighed dramatically, leaning in to press a kiss to her forehead. “Don’t be daft... Watching you lose your shit over teapots and scarves is gold.”

Theta beamed, her eyes sparkling. “Best girlfriend ever.”

“Don’t you forget it,” Yaz replied, giving her a gentle squeeze.

They walked to the till together, Theta already chattering excitedly about how she’d use everything she’d picked out. Yaz just smiled, content to let her partner bask in her delight. In the end of a day, that’s what the holiday is all about.

....