

Chapter 7

Yaz sat near the window on the bus, her fingers playing with the strap of her handbag as the early morning light filtered through the smoggy Los Angeles sky. The city was still waking up, the streets dotted with only a few cars and the occasional pedestrian. The bus rattled along its route, taking her toward the studio, and despite the routine of it all, Yaz couldn't help but feel a little out of place in this sprawling city so far from home.

She gazed out at the city passing by, her thoughts drifting back to her family. It had been months since she had seen them, and the distance between them weighed on her. She missed the warmth of her mother's embrace, the sound of her father's laughter, and the familiar chaos of home. Back in UK she would often go back and visit them but now even the simple things, like sharing a cup of tea seemed so far away. Life in Los Angeles was exciting, full of opportunities she never would have had back home, but it also came with its own set of challenges and a loneliness that crept in during quiet moments like this.

But then she thought of Frances, and a soft smile played on her lips. Meeting her had been unexpected and falling in love with her even more so. Their relationship was new, and Yaz was still navigating the complexities of being with someone. Frances was strong and confident, someone who seemed to take on the world without hesitation. Being with her made Yaz feel safe and cherished, like she was exactly where she was supposed to be.

The bus came to a stop, and Yaz gathered her things, stepping out into the brisk morning air. She took a deep breath, feeling the familiar flutter of anticipation in her chest as she walked toward the studio.

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On the other side of the country Frances was packing. The room was dim, illuminated only by the pale morning light filtering through the window. She glanced outside, where the snow-covered streets of Jackson Hole lay silent and serene under a heavy blanket of white. The sight was picturesque, but to Frances, it felt distant and cold.

She folded the last shirt and placed it carefully into the suitcase, her thoughts drifting. Her fingers lingered on the soft fabric, and she sighed, thinking about her house back home. The warm, familiar embrace of her living room, scent of her own bed and Yaz's beautiful smile. All those small comforts felt miles away, yet so close in her mind.

The memory of that night, the unsettling encounter with the drunken director, still stirred uneasily in her thoughts. Her stomach tightened at the recollection. The awkwardness,

the fear, it was a stark contrast to the warmth she sought at home. Leaving Jackson Hole, with its small-town charm now overshadowed by that dark memory, felt like a necessary escape.

She zipped up her suitcase and glanced around the room one last time. The snow outside continued to fall gently, but it no longer held the same allure. Frances was ready to leave it behind, eager to find solace in her own space, to be greeted by Yaz's embrace and the comfort of her own bed.

"Morning Miss Frances" the driver greeted her with a warm smile

"Morning" she forced a smile and sat in the car

With one final look at the snowy streets, she took a deep breath, feeling a sense of relief wash over her. It was time to go home.

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Later on that day Yaz stood in the dressing room with Anna Bell, her hands busy pinning the fabric at her waist. The actress, dressed in a lovely pastel dress that Yaz had been working on, was chattering away with her usual Southern charm, making Yaz laugh as she worked.

"Oh, Yaz, I swear I musta put on at least ten pounds while I was visitin' my family," Anna Bell complained, her voice full of exasperation, but her eyes sparkling with humor.

Yaz grinned, shaking her head. "You look amazing. If you've put on weight, it's only in all the right places."

"You're sweet, but I ain't lyin'. My mama kept feedin' me like I was still a baby. And don't even get me started on Aunt Mabel's biscuits and gravy. That woman's cookin' is a sin, I tell ya! A sin!"

Yaz laughed, adjusting the pin slightly as she stepped back to admire her work. "Sounds like you had a good time though."

"Oh, I did! But, Lordy, Yaz, you won't believe what my brother got himself into," she said, rolling her eyes dramatically.

"What now?" she chuckled.

"Well, that fool went and got himself a girl pregnant! And now, he's gonna have to marry her, or her daddy's gonna shoot him. I swear, I thought that kinda stuff only happened in the movies!"

Yaz couldn't help but laugh, picturing the chaotic scenario. "Sounds like quite the situation."

"You don't even know the half of it," she continued, shaking her head. "My mama was fumin'. Said she's gonna tan his hide herself if he don't do right by that girl. But honestly, I think she's just excited to be gettin' another grandbaby."

Yaz chuckled, stepping back to check the fit of the dress again. "Well, it looks like your brother's got his hands full."

"That's puttin' it mildly. I told him, 'You better pray that girl's daddy's got bad aim!'"

Yaz doubled over with laughter, trying to keep her hands steady as she finished pinning the last of the dress. Just as she was about to respond, there was a knock at the dressing room door.

"It's alright, I'm decent...Come on in" Anna Bell said

Charlie poked his head in, a sheepish smile on his face. "Sorry to interrupt ladies, Yaz you've got a phone call."

Yaz looked up, surprised. "Oh, thanks, Charlie. I'll be right there."

Anna Bell gave Yaz a playful nudge as she straightened up. "Better go see who's callin' ya," she winked cheekily

Yaz grinned, leaving a few pins on the table, and hurried down the corridor toward Charlie's office, her mind racing with curiosity.

Reaching the office, she picked up the receiver, slightly out of breath. "Hello, Yasmin Khan speaking."

"Yaz, darling! It's Lillian Hartley"

"Oh, Hello Lillian!" Yaz replied, her voice brightening. "It's lovely to hear from you again."

"I wanted to remind you about the brunch next week. I'm gonna call Frances and let her know exact time, but I think it will be around two o'clock on Saturday. I do hope you can make it. We're all very excited to have you join us," the woman said, her tone brimming with enthusiasm.

Yaz felt a flutter of nerves mixed with excitement. "Of course, I'm looking forward to it."

"And there's something else," the woman continued. "I have an event coming up...an opening at the gallery in a month's time. I'd love for you to design a dress for me, something unique. It's an important night, and I want to make a statement."

Yaz's heart skipped a beat. "I'd be honored!" she replied, trying to keep her voice steady.

"Wonderful! I can come to the studio on Monday, and we can discuss the design in person. I trust you'll create something extraordinary."

"Thank you," Yaz said, a bit breathless from the opportunity suddenly presented to her. "I won't let you down."

After a few more pleasantries, the call ended, and Yaz placed the receiver back on the cradle, her mind swirling with possibilities. Excitement coursed through her. This was the kind of opportunity she had dreamed of. But alongside the excitement was a knot of anxiety. Without a proper workshop, how could she possibly take on such an important commission?

As she made her way back to the dressing room, she tried to push the worry aside. She needed to focus on her work. But the excitement lingered, fueling her determination to make it work, no matter what challenges lay ahead.

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It was close to the end of another long working day. Yaz sat at her desk, surrounded by fabric swatches, her pencil gliding across the paper as she made notes. The mellow tunes playing softly from the radio created a calming background that helped her focus on her work. She was deep in thought, lost in the patterns and textures before her, when a knock at the door broke her concentration.

"Come in," she called out, not bothering to lift her head from the task at hand.

The door creaked shut, but Yaz didn't look up, still engrossed in pinning a note to the board behind her desk.

"Hello, darling," a familiar voice chimed, instantly breaking through her focus like a bolt of lightning. Yaz's head snapped up, her eyes wide with shock and delight.

"Franny!" she exclaimed, her voice bubbling over with surprise and joy.

There stood Frances, a warm smile on her face, her arms open wide. Yaz didn't hesitate for a second. She practically leaped from her chair, rushing across the room and throwing herself into Frances's embrace. She wrapped her arms around her, squeezing her tightly as if she might disappear.

"What are you doing here?" She asked, her voice muffled against Frances's shoulder.

"I couldn't stay away," Frances whispered, her voice filled with the exhaustion of her journey but also a deep, heartfelt relief. "They predicted a storm, so we flew out a day earlier. I missed you too much." She closed her eyes and squeezed her so hard Yaz could barely breathe.

Yaz pulled back just enough to look into her eyes, her hands still gripping Frances's arms as if to make sure she was really there. "I can't believe ... you're really here."

Frances nodded, her eyes softening as she reached up to gently cup Yaz's face. "I'm here, and I'm not going anywhere."

The distance and the longing they had both felt over the past weeks melted away in that moment. Frances leaned in, her lips finding Yaz's in a kiss that was as tender as it was desperate, a sweet reunion after too long apart. Yaz's hands slid up to the back of her neck, pulling her closer, deepening the kiss as she poured all of her emotions into it, relief, love, and pure happiness.

When they broke apart, both of them were breathless, but neither could stop smiling.

"You have no idea how much I missed you," Yaz murmured, resting her forehead against hers.

"I think I do," she replied softly, her thumb brushing over Yaz's cheek. "But I'm here now, and I don't plan on leaving your side for a long time."

"You better" she smiled

Frances chuckled softly, her breath warm against Yaz's skin. "Can you leave?"

Yaz hesitated for only a moment before nodding. "Yes! Give me a second. And I need to call Susan, don't want her getting worried"

"You can tell her yourself...You need to pack for the weekend" she smiled cheeky

"Whaaaaa?"

"Just don't ask any questions"

"Alright" she giggled and quickly turned to her desk tidying up the scattered swatches and papers. She didn't want to waste a single minute now that Frances was back.

"God, it's nice to be back," Frances murmured, watching Yaz with soft eyes.

Yaz felt a rush of excitement. She grabbed her bag and cardigan from the back of her chair, turning back to Frances with a grin. "There, done. Let's go."

Frances led the way to her car, and as they drove away from the studio, the sun setting behind them, they kept exchanging soft, lingering looks. Every few minutes, Frances's hand would stray from the wheel to squeeze Yaz's, the brief contact sending a thrill through both of them before she returned it to the wheel.

They soon pulled up in front of Yaz's house. Frances parked the car, glancing over at Yaz.

"Wanna come in?" Yaz asked.

"If it's alright?"

"Of course it's alright," Yaz reassured her with a laugh. "Just be prepared that Susan's gonna have a meltdown when she sees you."

Frances laughed "I think I can handle that."

They got out of the car and made their way up to the front door. Yaz opened it, calling out as she entered, "Susan! I'm home, and I've brought someone with me!"

Susan appeared in the hallway, her expression one of casual curiosity until her eyes landed on Frances. Her jaw dropped, her hand flying to her mouth in a mixture of shock and awe. "Frances? Frances Lewis?"

Frances smiled warmly, feeling slightly embarrassed by the star-struck look on Susan's face. "That's me."

"Frances, my substitute mom Susan"

"Very pleased to meet you Susan" she extended her hand with a inviting smile

"Oh, my goodness, I didn't expect... I mean, Yaz, you didn't tell me... but... wow..." Susan stammered, clearly trying to compose herself but failing spectacularly.

Yaz couldn't help but laugh at Susan's reaction of stepping closer to Frances and taking her hand nervously shaking it.

"I told you she'd have a meltdown," Yaz teased lightly.

Susan blinked, finally managing to find her voice. "It's... it's such an honor to have you here, Miss Louise. Please, come in, make yourself at home!"

Frances smiled gently. "Thank you, Susan. And please, call me Frances."

Susan nodded, still looking slightly dazed as she stepped aside to let them in. "Frances... right, of course. Can I get you anything? Tea? Coffee?"

Frances shook her head, amused by Susan's flustered state. "No, thank you. I'm fine. I wanted to thank you for the lunch invitation. That's very kind of you. I'll be happy to accept"

"Oh...Thank you. It would be my pleasure."

"Pleasure is all mine." Frances smiled

Yaz grinned at the exchange, then turned to Susan. "Frances is taking me away for the weekend. I just need to grab a few things."

Susan's eyes widened even further, if that was possible. "Oh, how wonderful! I'll just... I'll just leave you two to it, then. Yaz honey take a jumper. It can be cold at night." she said, backing away with an awkward smile, clearly still trying to process the surprise guest.

"I will"

As Susan disappeared into the kitchen, Yaz leaned closer to Frances and whispered, "Come on, let's get my stuff, and then we can get out of here,"

She kept smiling, leading Frances toward her room, where she began to quickly gather her things for their mysterious weekend getaway.

Frances closed the door and leaned against the frame, watching Yaz with a fond smile, feeling grateful to be back with her, to be able to surprise her like this. "You really have no idea how much I missed you," she whispered.

Yaz paused, looking back at Frances with a smile that made her heart skip a beat. "I think I do," she replied, and in that moment, Frances knew she was exactly where she was meant to be.

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Halfway into the drive Yaz finally broke the silence, her curiosity getting the best of her. "Where are we going?"

Frances glanced at her with a playful smile, her eyes twinkling. "You'll see. It's a surprise."

The drive wasn't long, but it took them away from the busy streets of Los Angeles and towards the coast. Yaz watched as the city lights faded behind them, replaced by the vast, dark expanse of the ocean. The sound of the waves became clearer as Frances turned off the main road and onto a narrower path lined with trees.

A few minutes later, they pulled up in front of a charming beach house nestled between dunes. The soft sound of the ocean and the faint rustling of palm trees created a serene atmosphere. Frances parked the car and turned to Yaz, her expression soft.

"Franny, what is this place?" Yaz asked

"I rented it for the weekend, I thought... we could use some time alone. Just the two of us"

Yaz's heart swelled with emotion. "Really?...Oh my god..."

"You'll see, it's absolutely beautiful. Sometimes I come here when I need to clear my head. The owner is very discreet." Frances explained.

"This is perfect," Yaz's eyes glistened with excitement

They stepped out of the car and Frances led her to the front door. The house she rented was a hidden gem, tucked away along a secluded stretch of coastline. Cozy yet elegant, designed with a mix of rustic and modern touches that made it feel both timeless and inviting.

From the outside, the house was clad in weathered, grayish wood, blending seamlessly with the natural surroundings. Large windows framed by soft white trim offered breathtaking views of the ocean and a small porch wrapped around the front of the house.

As Yaz followed Frances up the porch steps, she couldn't help but admire the charm of the place. The rocking chairs on the porch invited lazy mornings with coffee in hand, and the soft creaking of the wood under their feet added to the sense of tranquility. She felt an immediate connection to this place, as though it was meant for moments just like this.

Inside, the house was even more enchanting. The cozy living room greeted them first, with its stone fireplace and plush sofas that seemed to beckon them to sink in and relax next to the crackling fire. The open space was illuminated by soft light. Yaz's gaze drifted over the simple yet elegant decor in neutral tones, the wooden accents, and the small touches that gave the room its coastal cottage feel.

The sliding glass door caught her eye, and she walked over to it, pushing it open to reveal the deck outside. The view was spectacular, the beach stretched out before her, empty and peaceful, with the ocean glistening under the setting sun. This house, this

moment, it was all more than she could have ever asked for. It was perfect in every way.

"Like it?" Frances asked, her voice gentle as she draped her cardigan over the chair, the silky fabric of her dress making a soft sound in the quiet room.

"It's just stunning," Yaz replied, her voice filled with awe and warmth. She stepped closer to her, unable to resist the pull she felt towards her, and gently wrapped her arms around her waist.

Frances draped her arms over Yaz's shoulders, her touch light but full of meaning. She leaned in, and their lips met in a gentle kiss, soft and lingering

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After settling in, Yaz found herself standing on the back porch, the ocean stretching out before her, illuminated by the last rays of sun. The place was perfectly secluded, away from the bustling city and unwanted eyes. Frances came up behind her and brushed her fingers gently down Yaz's arms.

"Hey" Yaz whispered, she turned her head just a bit, warm smile playing on her lips

Frances pulled her close, her arms wrapped around her waist as they gazed out at the sea.

"I can't believe you did all this," Yaz hummed, resting her head against Frances's shoulder.

"I wanted us to be somewhere where we could just be ourselves," Frances replied, her voice soft. Her palms slowly gliding over Yaz's waist and stomach "No interruptions, no worries... just us."

Yaz turned her head, her eyes shining. "It's perfect. You're perfect."

Frances leaned down, capturing Yaz's lips in a gentle kiss. The world around them seemed to fade away, leaving only the warmth of each other's embrace and the soothing sound of the waves.

"I love you" Frances whispered against her lips.

"Love you too,"

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Frances stood by the stove, stirring the simmering pot of sauce as the rich aroma of tomatoes, garlic, and herbs filled the cozy kitchen. Yaz watched her with a smile, the domestic scene filling her with warmth.

"I didn't know you could cook," Yaz said, leaning in to plant a gentle kiss on Frances's cheek before handing her the salt.

Frances chuckled softly, her eyes twinkling with amusement. "I like to think I'm pretty good at it. At least, I hope I am."

"I'm pretty useless in the kitchen," Yaz confessed with a playful grin, leaning against the counter as she bit into an olive. "My dad loves cooking."

Frances paused, her eyebrows arching in surprise. "Your dad?"

"Yeah," Yaz nodded, her voice touched with nostalgia. "He loves it."

"Oh my god... That's amazing," Frances laughed. "I've never seen men cook unless they're chefs."

"He likes to think he is," she giggled. "Oh... Lillian called me."

"Oh, did she?" Frances asked, her curiosity piqued.

"Yeah... about that brunch... But also... I've got a problem."

"What problem?"

"She wants me to make her a dress," Yaz said, the excitement in her voice tempered by worry.

"Really! Oh my god, darling, that's fantastic!" Frances exclaimed, her excitement infectious.

"It is... but how am I gonna do that, darling?" she sighed as her concern resurfaced. "I've got nowhere to work from. Not like I can use studios facilities."

"Oh, don't worry about it. We'll think of something," Frances said reassuringly

"Yeah... like what exactly?"

"Give me some time... I'll have a plan,"

"Oh, yeah... Like a magic wand... fairy powder," Yaz teased, giggling as she leaned in to kiss Frances's shoulder, making her laugh.

"I have something on my mind. Just give me a few days,"

"Uuuu... mysterious," she giggled, leaning on the kitchen top. "What are you cooking?"

"Pasta Bolognese," she giggled

"Oi... tinker," Yaz playfully poked her in the ribs, causing her to jump and giggle, clearly ticklish. "I meant what plan are you cooking?"

"You'll see... give me few days," she laughed, dodging another playful poke.

"Oh, come ooon...tell meeee," she insisted, her fingers launching another ticklish attack on Frances's side.

Frances squealed, trying to evade tickling fingers, her laughter filling the kitchen.

"You're not getting it out of me!"

Yaz grinned mischievously, her hands quick and merciless. "Oh, we'll see about that!"

Frances darted towards the living room. She laughed trying to get away, but Yaz was faster, catching her around the waist and pulling her onto the sofa. They tumbled down together, laughing uncontrollably as they landed in a tangle of limbs.

"You're impossible!" Frances managed to shout between breaths as Yaz tickled her.

"And you're stubborn," Yaz teased back, her voice softening as she held Frances close.

For a moment, they just lay there, their laughter fading into the quiet sounds of their breathing. Yaz's hand tracing down Frances's hip.

Frances gazed into her eyes, her expression tender, before leaning in to capture her lips in a gentle kiss. Yaz responded with equal softness, their earlier playfulness giving way to something deeper, something that spoke of the joy and freedom they felt around each other.

"Mmmm...pasta!" Frances suddenly broke a kiss, quickly trying to untangle herself and ran into the kitchen leaving Yaz laughing.

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The full moon was casting a silver glow across the ocean's surface, with gentle waves lapping at the shore. The rented house by the ocean felt like a secluded haven, just for the two of them. After a leisurely dinner, the two women settled into a large sun lounger, the perfect spot to enjoy the night sky.

Frances leaned back against Yaz, her body fitting comfortably against hers, a sense of peace washing over her as she let out a contented sigh. Yaz's hands rested lightly on Frances's stomach, her fingers tracing small circles on her skin. The evening breeze carried the faint scent of salt and jasmine, mingling with the warmth of their shared presence.

Yaz turned her head slightly, her lips finding Frances's temple in a gentle kiss. "This is perfect," she whispered, her breath soft against her skin.

Frances smiled, closing her eyes as she savored the moment. "It really is," she murmured, feeling the love and calmness that Yaz brought into her life finally leaving behind the stress she went through.

After a few moments of comfortable silence, Yaz shifted slightly, her heart fluttering with the thought that had been on her mind for some time. "Franny," she began softly, her voice hesitant but warm.

"Mmm?" Frances responded, her hand finding Yaz's and squeezing it gently.

Yaz took a deep breath, summoning the courage to voice her thoughts. "I was thinking...I know we haven't spoken about this...But I was wondering if maybe... we could share a bed tonight?"

A tender smile spread across Frances's face as she absorbed Yaz's words. She tilted her head slightly to look at her. "I'd love that?"

"You would?" She bit her lip, her eyes searching Frances's for any sign of discomfort.

"Yeah," she nodded, her heart beating a little faster. "I want to be close to you, to feel you next to me. But only if you're comfortable with it."

Yaz's smile grew wider, her heart swelling with affection. "There's nowhere in a world I'd rather be" she replied, her relief was palpable

She leaned in to press a soft kiss to Frances's lips, her hand cupping her cheek as she did. Frances responded immediately, the kiss gentle and full of promise. When they finally pulled back, Yaz rested her head against hers.

Frances squeezed her hand gently, her heart brimming with love. "I could stay here forever," she whispered, "share this with you."

"Me too" her lips pressed a gentle kiss to her temple.

The two women sat there, entwined, the ocean's steady rhythm matching the calm beat of their hearts, knowing that tonight they would fall asleep in each other's arms, feeling closer than ever before.

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As the night deepened, the two women found themselves lying side by side, the gentle rhythm of the ocean waves in the background creating a peaceful ambiance. The moonlight filtering through the sheer curtains painted a soft, silvery glow over the bed.

Frances turned to Yaz, her hand slowly reaching out to caress her cheek, fingers tracing the delicate lines of her face.

"You're so beautiful," she whispered, her voice filled with love. Her thumb brushed lightly over Yaz's lower lip, lingering there as if savoring the moment.

"So are you...Stunning" she smiled, her hand reaching for the little blonde curl moving it from her forehead. She was shivering under Frances's touch, feeling a warmth spread through her that was both thrilling and comforting.

"I never felt so connected to anyone before. It's like every moment with you is just....so special." Frances whispered, her thumb tracing the curve of Yaz's jaw

Yaz smiled, her heart swelling with warmth as she leaned into Frances's touch. "I feel the same way darling. Being here with you... I never thought I could have this..." she said softly, her thumb brushing gently over her cheek "I am so, so happy" she smiled, her voice trembling with emotion.

Frances shifted closer, their bodies now pressed together, the warmth between them creating a comforting cocoon.

"Me too my love. I spend so much time trying to be someone else in front of the world, someone I'm expected to be..." Frances confessed, her voice tinged with vulnerability. "But with you..." she paused, her fingers tracing lines down Yaz's waist "...I feel like I can just be me. No pretenses...no masks...just letting myself exist. Does that make any sense?"

Yaz nodded "Well, it's their loss." She chuckled "Cause I loove who you really are, and I have it all to myself" she leaned in for a tender kiss.

Frances smiled against Yaz's lips, her heart pounding with the weight of those words. She deepened the kiss, her hand traced the curve of Yaz's waist, she could feel her body responding beneath her touch, every breath, every gentle tremor, an unspoken invitation to draw even closer.

Yaz's hands, too, grew bolder, sliding across Frances's back, down her sides. There was something deeply comforting about the way their bodies fit together, their movements tender yet filled with the intensity of newfound intimacy.

As their kisses grew more passionate, Frances's hand slipped underneath the fabric of Yaz's nightgown, her fingers brushing against the softness of her skin. She paused for a moment, her breath hitching as she looked into Yaz's eyes, searching for any sign of hesitation. But Yaz only smiled, her eyes bright with affection and desire.

"It's perfect," Yaz whispered, her voice filled with reassurance as she guided Frances's hand further, letting her know that she, too, wanted to explore this new level of closeness.

Frances allowed herself to be drawn into the moment, her fingers tracing the delicate lines of Yaz's body, savoring every curve, every shiver that her touch elicited.

"Please touch me..." Frances murmured against Yaz's lips "I want to feel you" her breath quickening as the desire between them grew. She slipped Yaz's hand underneath her nightie, soft smile playing on her lips as she guided it over the gentle rise and fall of her breast then leaned in pulling her for another kiss.

Yaz shivered under Frances's touch as they slowly undressed each other, her own hand sliding down Frances's back, feeling the smooth lines of her body as she was rolled on her back.

Frances kissed her neck, her lips trailing down to her collarbone making her eyes roll at the back of her head.

"God, I love you" she murmured against her skin then came back to her lips.

Yaz's hand found Frances's, guiding it to her chest, allowing Frances to feel the rapid beat of her heart. "This is what you do to me," Yaz whispered, her eyes locking with Frances's. "You make my heart race like this" she smiled

Frances smiled, overwhelmed. She moved back up to kiss her, this time with a slow, tender passion that spoke of all the love she had been holding back.

"I wanna show you how much you mean to me," Yaz murmured between kisses, rolling the other woman on her back, her breath hitching with the intensity of the moment.

Frances's fingers tangled in Yaz's hair, pulling her closer. "Then show me," she whispered back, her voice filled with a mix of desire and tenderness. "I want this... I want you." She closed her legs around her pulling her into a kiss.

Frances's head fell back into the pillow, the cool fabric pressing against her flushed cheeks. She clamped her hand over her mouth, trying to stifle the moan that threatened to escape. Her breathing quickened, each inhale a sharp gasp as she felt Yaz's touch with increasing intensity.

Her fingers tangled in Yaz's hair, the soft strands curling around her fingers as Yaz moved with deliberate, tantalizing precision, her lips trailing over her hip bones then lower.

Frances's grip tightened the sheets bunched up in her other hand as she twisted them in desperation. Her back arched instinctively, every muscle in her body tensing as Yaz found her rhythm between her legs, sending waves of pleasure through her.

Her head thrashed against the pillow, her muffled cries blending with the rustle of the sheets. The room seemed to close in around them, each sensation magnified as Yaz continued drawing out every trembling gasp and shudder from her.

The only sounds in the quiet of the night were the occasional creak of the bed and Frances's stifled moans, each one a testament to the overwhelming pleasure coursing through her. Her senses were overwhelmed, her body trembling, her toes curling with every motion, every brush of Yaz's lips and fingers.

Her breath grew ragged, and she couldn't hold back any longer. Moans, once muffled, became more urgent, her hips pressing up instinctively.

With a final, breathless gasp, Frances's body arched deeply, her grip on the sheets tightening almost painfully as the waves of pleasure rolled through her. Her vision blurred, the only clear focus being the warmth and presence of Yaz, her fingers, still tangled in Yaz's hair, tugged gently but firmly.

Yaz's head lifted, and Frances pulled her into a kiss, their lips meeting with a passion that spoke volumes. The kiss was deep and consuming, each touch of their mouths conveying the intimacy and connection they shared.

As they slowly pulled away, their breaths mingling, their foreheads rested together. Frances's eyes were soft, filled with a tenderness. "I needed you so much," she whispered, her voice barely more than a breath.

Yaz's smile was gentle, her eyes reflecting the same affection. She brushed a stray strand of hair from Frances's face. "I'm here," she replied softly.

Frances's hand slid to the back of Yaz's neck, pulling her in for another gentle kiss. "I want to spend every night like this," she murmured against Yaz's lips "Just holding you, feeling you against me."

Yaz's gaze was full of warmth. "There's nowhere else I'd rather be," she said, her voice a soothing caress. "You mean everything to me."

Frances sighed contentedly, her eyes closing as she leaned into Yaz's embrace. "I love you," she whispered.

"I love you too," Yaz responded, her voice firm and loving as her arms closed around her.

They lay together for a long time, their bodies entwined as they shared soft kisses and whispered words, making love again. The world outside ceased to exist.

As the night wore on, their touches grew softer, their kisses lazier, until finally, they drifted off to sleep, still wrapped in each other's arms, feeling as though they had found a home in each other.

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Frances woke in the middle of the night, the room bathed in a soft, silver light from the moon filtering through the curtains. She lay still for a moment, listening to the gentle rhythm of Yaz's breathing beside her, feeling the warmth of her body close by. But despite the comfort of her presence, a quiet ache had settled deep in her chest.

Carefully, she slipped out from under the covers reaching for Yaz's shirt, the one that had been tossed aside earlier, and pulled it over her bare body. The fabric was soft, infused with the scent of Yaz's perfume and the lingering warmth of her skin. Frances hugged it close as she padded silently through the house, her steps light on the wooden floors.

The porch door creaked softly as she opened it and stepped outside. The cool night air hit her skin, sending a slight shiver down her spine, but she welcomed it. She walked over to the porch railing and sat down, gazing out at the vast ocean stretched before her. The waves rolled in a steady, calming rhythm, glistening under the moonlight that painted the water with silver and blue hues.

Frances pulled her knees up to her chest, wrapping her arms around them and lit up a cigarette as she let her thoughts wander. The beauty of the night, the serenity of the scene, was almost overwhelming, yet it was tainted with the bittersweet feeling that this moment, this escape, was fleeting. They only had one more night together before reality would pull them back into the world they had to navigate with caution and secrecy.

Her heart ached with the thought of it, of having to part from Yaz, to return to a life where their love had to be hidden away, where stolen moments like these were all they could hope for. She longed to hold onto this feeling, to stay in this place where they could be free to love each other without fear.

She closed her eyes, taking a deep breath, letting the cool, salty air fill her lungs. A tear slipped down her cheek, and she wiped it away quickly, unwilling to let herself sink into the sadness that threatened to overtake her. She had to be strong, for both of them. But sitting there, wrapped in Yaz's shirt, with the ocean as her only witness, she allowed herself a moment to feel the full weight of her emotions.

As she sat in the stillness of the night, Frances knew she had to make the most of the time they had left. Tomorrow, they would wake up together, share their last day in this secluded paradise, and she would hold Yaz a little tighter, kiss her a little longer, savoring every precious moment.

But for now, she would sit here a while longer, alone with her thoughts and the ocean, before slipping back into bed beside the woman she loved, holding onto the hope that one day, things would be different.

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On a rainy Monday afternoon, Frances pulled up to the curb in front of a large, imposing building. The rain pattered steadily against the windshield, blurring the edges of the sign that read "St. Mary's Home for Children." She sat for a moment, gathering her thoughts, her hands gripping the steering wheel tightly as the wipers rhythmically cleared the glass.

The home was one of the few places that felt both familiar and distant to her, a place she visited with both anticipation and trepidation. As she stepped out of the car, the wind whipped her coat around her legs, and she hurried inside. The warmth of the lobby was a sharp contrast to the cold outside, and the smell of disinfectant lingered in the air.

A woman behind the front desk, whom Frances recognized as one of the longtime staff members, looked up and smiled kindly.

"Good afternoon, Miss Frances," she greeted warmly, her voice soft and familiar. "Here to see Lily, I presume?"

Frances nodded, her own smile faint but genuine. "Yes, how has she been?"

Mrs. Wilson paused for a moment, her expression gentle. "She's had a good day. A bit quiet, but she was coloring earlier and seemed to enjoy herself. She's been asking for you."

Frances's heart tightened. "I'm glad to hear that. It's been a few weeks... work has been..." She trailed off, the excuse feeling hollow even to her own ears.

Mrs. Wilson nodded understandingly. "She'll be happy to see you, Frances. You know how much she looks forward to your visits."

"Thank you," Frances replied, her voice thick with emotion. She took a deep breath and started down the familiar hallway, her footsteps echoing softly on the tiled floor.

The sound of children's laughter and soft murmurs drifted through the corridors, but Frances barely noticed as she made her way to a small room at the end of the hall. The door was slightly ajar, and she could see her, Lily, sitting on the floor, her back to the door. The little girl was hunched over a coloring book, completely absorbed in her work, her small hands moving slowly but deliberately.

Frances hesitated for a moment in the doorway, taking in the sight. Lily's hair, a shade darker than Frances's own, was pulled back into a messy ponytail. She was wearing a soft, pale pink sweater that Frances had brought her on her last visit.

"Hi, sweetheart," Frances finally said, her voice gentle as she stepped into the room.

Lily looked up, her eyes brightening when she saw her. A wide smile spread across her face, and she scrambled to her feet, abandoning the coloring book on the floor.

"Mommy!" Lily exclaimed, her voice full of joy as she rushed toward Frances.

Frances knelt down and opened her arms, wrapping them tightly around Lily when she reached her. "I missed you so much, baby," she whispered, kissing the top of Lily's head.

"I missed you too, Mommy," Lily replied, her voice muffled against Frances's shoulder.

They stayed like that for a moment, holding each other close, the world outside the room fading away. Finally, Frances pulled back slightly, brushing a strand of hair away from Lily's face.

"How have you been, my little artist?" Frances asked, nodding toward the coloring book.

Lily's eyes sparkled as she led her mother over to the book, showing off the picture she had been working on. It was a simple drawing, full of bright colors, and Frances felt a swell of pride as she looked at it.

"Oh waaaw...It's beautiful darling," she said softly, running her fingers over the page.

Lily beamed at the praise, her small hand slipping into her mother's. Frances held it tightly, her heart aching with a mix of love and sadness. As much as she cherished these visits, they were always bittersweet, a reminder of the life they could never fully share.

Frances reached into her bag, her heart heavy as she pulled out a small, carefully wrapped package. The rain continued to patter softly against the windows as she turned to Lily with a warm smile, hoping the gift would bring a bit of joy to her daughter's day.

"I brought you something, sweetheart," Frances said, holding out the package to Lily.

Lily's eyes widened with excitement as she took the gift, her small fingers eagerly tearing away the wrapping paper to reveal a beautiful doll in a pink dress.

Lily's face lit up with pure delight. "Oh, she's so beautiful!" she exclaimed, immediately hugging the toy close to her chest.

"I'm glad you like her," Frances whispered, a bittersweet smile tugging at her lips as she watched Lily cradle the doll. "I thought you might need a new friend to keep you company when I'm not here."

Lily nodded enthusiastically, already absorbed in her new toy, her fingers gently stroking the fabric of a dress. "I'll name her Daisy," she declared, glancing up at Frances with a proud smile.

Frances laughed softly, her heart aching with both love and the inevitable goodbye she knew was coming. "Daisy is a perfect name," she agreed, brushing a gentle hand over Lily's hair.

For the rest of the visit, they stayed close, talking, playing and laughing softly as they colored together, Frances savoring every precious moment she had with her daughter, knowing all too well how quickly the time would pass before she had to leave again.

The time passed too quickly, as it always did. Before long, the moment Frances dreaded arrived. She could feel the weight of it pressing down on her as she knelt in front of Lily, gently taking her daughter's hands in her own.

"Sweetheart, I have to go now," Frances said softly, her voice thick with emotion. "But I'll be back soon, I promise."

Lily's smile faltered, and she clutched Daisy a little tighter. "Do you have to, Mommy?" she asked, her voice small and filled with that familiar sadness that never failed to break Frances's heart.

"I do," Frances whispered, fighting back the tears that threatened to spill over. "But you're going to be so brave, and Daisy will keep you company until I'm back."

Lily nodded slowly, though her lower lip trembled. Frances leaned in, kissing her daughter's forehead tenderly before pulling her into a final, tight hug.

"I love you, baby," Frances whispered into her daughter's hair, holding on just a moment longer before finally forcing herself to let go.

"I love you too, Mommy," Lily replied, her voice muffled against Frances's shoulder.

Frances stood up slowly, her hand lingering on Lily's cheek for a moment before she turned and walked to the door, each step feeling heavier than the last. As she reached the doorway, she glanced back one last time to see Lily waving at her, Daisy clutched tightly in her arms.

With a heavy heart, Frances forced herself to smile and wave back, then stepped out of the room, gently closing the door behind her. She paused for a moment in the hallway, taking a deep breath to steady herself before heading back to the front desk.

Mrs. Wilson was waiting for her, her expression kind but concerned as Frances approached.

"I received a letter," Frances began, her voice low and controlled, though she could feel the tension building in her chest. "It mentioned an increase in the monthly cost. I'm willing to pay whatever it is, but I need to understand why."

Mrs. Wilson nodded, gesturing for Frances to follow her into the small office off the lobby. Once inside, she closed the door and offered Frances a seat, her demeanor calm and professional.

"The increase is due to a few factors," Mrs. Wilson explained gently. "Lily's medical needs have become more complex over the past few months, and we've had to bring in additional specialists to ensure she's getting the best care possible. The therapies and treatments she requires are more intensive, and unfortunately, that means higher costs."

Frances nodded slowly, her heart aching at the thought of Lily's struggles. "I understand," she said quietly. "I'll pay whatever it takes to make sure she's getting what she needs. I just... I wish she was with me."

Mrs. Wilson reached out, placing a reassuring hand on Frances's arm. "She's in good hands here, Frances," she said softly. "We're doing everything we can to help her. But I know it's hard. You're doing the best you can for her, and that's all anyone can ask."

Frances nodded again, swallowing the lump in her throat as she forced herself to stay composed. "Thank you," she whispered, her voice barely audible. "Thank you for everything you're doing for her."

With that, Frances took the cheque out of her bag and filled it in, then stood up, feeling the weight of the conversation pressing down on her as she made her way back to the lobby. The rain was still falling as she stepped outside, the cold, wet air hitting her like a wall as she walked to her car. She paused for a moment, closing her eyes and taking a deep breath before finally getting in and driving away, the image of Lily's smiling face still fresh in her mind, mingling with the ache in her heart.

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