

Chapter 14

The Stork Club was one of the most glamorous venues in New York City, an elegant destination known for its star-studded clientele and high-society appeal. The exterior of the club had a simple, sleek look with a large canopy marking the entrance, often crowded with sleek cars pulling up to the curb. A doorman stood by the entrance, ushering guests into the exclusive world within.

As Frances and Yaz arrived, they stepped out of the car, drawing a few curious glances. Frances was instantly recognizable, though she managed to keep relatively low profile in a chic black cocktail dress, cinched at the waist with a subtle sparkle at the neckline. The dress hugged her figure perfectly, the fabric moving smoothly with her every step. She paired it with a fur stole draped elegantly around her shoulders. A pair of delicate pearl earrings completed the look, and her red lips stood out, adding to her undeniable allure.

Yaz, though less accustomed to the glitz, looked equally stunning beside her. She wore a simple yet sophisticated gown in royal blue, which complimented her skin tone and brought out the soft waves of her dark hair. The dress had a slight shimmer under the club lights, and its elegant draping gave her a timeless look. Victor followed, equally elegant in his suit with a bow tie.

The interior of the Stork Club was all glamour and luxury. The entrance led into a dimly lit room filled with plush booths, polished wood, and sleek art deco accents. Waiters in tuxedos moved swiftly between tables, serving up high-end cocktails and gourmet meals. The atmosphere buzzed with a mixture of soft jazz music and murmured conversations. Chandeliers glittered overhead, casting a soft glow over the tables where celebrities and elite New Yorkers enjoyed their evenings.

They were shown to a corner booth, offering a little more privacy but still a perfect vantage point to take in the elegance of the room. As they settled into the plush velvet seats, Frances reached for Yaz's hand under the table, giving it a light squeeze as they exchanged a knowing smile.

"This place is incredible," Yaz said, her voice soft as she took in the ambiance, still feeling a little dazzled by it all. The heaviness of the day slowly leaving her.

Frances leaned in closer, her tone playful. "Only the best for our last night darling. You deserve it after today."

Yaz smiled, her eyes wandering around the room before landing back on Frances. "You look breathtaking tonight, you know that?" she whispered.

Frances grinned. "I could say the same about you. That dress was a good call, wasn't it?"

"I wasn't sure about it," Yaz said, a hint of a laugh in her voice. "But yeah, you were right."

They both laughed, the tension of the day starting to melt away, replaced by the warmth of their final evening together, existing in that moment, and for the night, they could just be themselves, enjoying each other's company in one of the most exclusive clubs in the city.

As the evening unfolded, the atmosphere buzzed with excitement and laughter. Victor leaned back in his seat, a playful grin on his face as he waved over the waiter to order another round of cocktails. The club was a lively hub, filled with the clinking of glasses and the soft hum of chatter that enveloped them like a warm embrace. Just as Frances and Yaz were lost in conversation, Robert approached, adding to the vibrant energy of the night.

“Robert! Good to see you!” Frances greeted him with a warm smile, her eyes sparkling. He had that effortless charm that made him a fixture in social circles like this one.

“Yaz, my gorgeous exotic princess! How nice to see you again,” he said, his tone smooth as he flashed a charming smile.

Victor rolled his eyes at Robert's advances, clearly unaware of the deep connection between Yaz and Frances.

“Nice to see you too,” Yaz replied, chuckling at the compliment.

“So, how’s New York treating you so far?” Robert asked, sliding into the seat beside them.

“Amazingly well!” Yaz giggled. “Frances has taken me everywhere. It’s gorgeous, though I must say, the weather leaves a bit to be desired.”

“You can always visit when the weather is nicer. I promise to be your personal tour guide,” Robert suggested, his gaze intent on her.

“I’ll keep that in mind,” Yaz smiled, sharing a glance with Frances, who exchanged knowing looks with Victor.

“Fran, darling, leaving us already?” Robert turned his attention to Frances. “You’re just flying by these days.”

“Well, some of us have to work,” she teased, her cheeky grin playful.

“Some of us like to have fun too! You’re going to work yourself to death, girl. Is this your fifth movie this year?”

“Fourth, actually,” Frances corrected him, her eyes twinkling.

“Give yourself a break!” Robert urged.

“I am! I’m here, aren’t I?” she countered with a laugh.

“I agree with Robert,” Yaz chimed in. “You work way too hard.”

“Thank you, darling,” Robert smiled, clearly pleased with her support.

“Says a woman who works two jobs,” Frances shot Yaz a loving smile.

"I'm just starting! I can hardly call it a proper job at this stage..." Yaz replied, a touch of humility in her tone.

"You're way too humble, darling," Frances said, her voice warm and encouraging.

"You work your butt off, and they hardly give you the recognition you deserve," Victor added, "I know you can go all the way to the top."

"Awww..." Frances palmed Victor's cheek affectionately. "You always believed in me. I'm not giving up. I will get my way in the end... I refuse to give in to those dirty old sleazeballs at the top!"

"Here's to that!" Victor raised his glass in a toast.

"Seriously, Fran, you should just open your own production company," Robert suggested, leaning forward.

"He's right," Victor agreed. "It would give you a lot more freedom. Others have done it...Lucille Ball, for instance..."

Frances laughed lightly. "With her husband," she emphasized, shaking her head. "That's a whole different ball game, Victor."

Victor rolled his eyes, unimpressed. "Honestly, I'll never understand that."

"I don't understand?" Robert asked, genuinely confused.

"She can't open it without a man," Yaz explained, a note of seriousness creeping into her voice.

"You're pulling my leg?" Robert replied, astonished.

"No, not at all! I couldn't even open my bank account without Victor," Frances admitted.

"True, I'm still being paid by paycheck from the studio," Yaz said, shrugging. "I only got my bank account a month ago, and that was only because Frances and her financial advisor helped me out. Back home, I needed my dad to open one."

"That's insane," Robert said, his surprise evident.

"You're living under a rock, darling," Frances giggled. "You men have no idea what it's really like for us. Everything you take for granted, we have to fight for tooth and nail."

"You look like you dropped from Mars," Victor laughed at Robert's shocked expression.

"Anyway, I'd rather wait a bit longer until I'm more established before I make that move," Frances concluded, "I wouldn't want to scare off the old boys' club. They find too much brainpower far too intimidating."

"I think you underestimate how established you already are," Victor said, his tone earnest. "You're

popping out of all the magazines.”

“Am I?” Frances giggled. “I haven’t really been looking at them. I find it better for my mental health.”

“Seriously, darling, you should start thinking about that. I’ll help you...” Victor pressed his sincerity evident. “Now, should we order some food? I’m positively starving.”

“Me too!” Frances said “All this business talk is melting my brain. Besides, it’s our last night here, and I don’t wanna waste it talking about men...no offense,” she laughed, lightening the mood.

"None taken" Robert said

As the night wore on, Robert and Yaz found themselves standing off to the side, casually chatting near the bar after a brief dance. Robert’s usual charisma shone as he turned his full attention to Yaz. Initially, their conversation remained light, but Yaz soon began to notice Robert's compliments becoming a little too personal for comfort.

“It was wonderful to see you again. I was hoping I’d get a chance,” he said.

"It was nice to see you again too"

“I really do enjoy your company...” he said leaning in closer, his fingertips grazing the length of her arm gently. "You're very interesting young lady, Yaz and I'd love to get to know you better.”

Yaz, though polite, subtly shifted her body away. “Oh, thank you, Robert,” she replied, attempting to keep the tone friendly.

“I was also hoping we could stay in touch,” he continued, leaning in even closer.

“Um, I’m sure we’ll see each other again...” she said, her tone nervous "I should probably go...Frances will be wondering where I am,” she said with a smile, trying to deflect the growing tension.

“Oh, she’s fine... Her and Victor never shut up.”

Back at the table, Victor leaned closer to Frances, sincerity and sheer love for the woman in front of him etched on his face. “I meant what I said earlier. If you ever decide to take that leap, I’d be more than happy to help you out. You know that, right?”

Frances smiled softly, her eyes glimmering with a mix of love and gratitude. “Thank you, Victor. That’s really sweet of you and I really appreciate the offer. But to be honest, right now, I'm afraid it would be a career suicide to make such a big move.”

“I just want you to feel free, darling. I know you...I can see it in your eyes...this is eating you up inside... You’re an incredible actress Frances, not just on screen, but off it as well,” he replied, his tone gentle. “But I know what’s going on in that beautiful mind of yours, can't hide it from me.”

She let out a light giggle, her mood lifting slightly. "I'll take that as a compliment," she said playfully. But then her laughter faded, "It is, and I'm finding it harder by the day. I'll get there in the end...I'm sure of it. It's just, too many things going on at the moment....Not just that."

"Alright darling...My offer is on a table whenever you're ready" he leaned in pressing a gentle kiss to her cheek

"Thank you" as she smiled

Just then, Frances caught sight of something, or someone, across the room that pulled her attention away from their conversation. Though outwardly calm, a surge of protectiveness mixed with possessiveness washed over her.

"Excuse me...I think I need to put a leash on Robert," she said, excusing herself from the table.

Victor glanced in their direction. "Go on...Wouldn't want him pissing on your territory," he chuckled, smirking as Frances made her way across the club, a gentle but determined smile on her face, leaving Victor amused by the unfolding situation.

"Oh, there you are, darling," Frances said smoothly as she reached them, slipping her arm around Yaz's waist with practiced ease. She smiled politely at Robert, but her presence was unmistakable. Without missing a beat, she added, "I was wondering where you'd disappeared to."

Robert, catching the shift in the dynamic, straightened up with an easy laugh. "Ah, I didn't mean to steal her away. Just having a little chat."

Frances's smile was all charm, but her eyes spoke volumes as she responded. "Of course. But I think it's time for us to head back to the table. Victor's probably wondering what happened to you...also, food will be on the table soon, you must be starving darling." she smiled at Yaz

"I'll be right there, I'll just finish my drink" Robert said, disappointment clear on his face as he took a sip of his drink.

With that, Frances gently guided Yaz away, her hand resting protectively at her back. As they walked away, Yaz let out a quiet breath of relief, leaning into Frances just slightly.

"Thank you," she murmured softly as they neared the table, the tension fading now that they were back in each other's company.

Frances smiled, leaning in to whisper, "Anytime, darling. He's harmless...but you're mine, after all." Her tone was playful, yet the intensity in her eyes conveyed a deeper message that Yaz instantly grasped.

Feeling relieved that she didn't have to navigate the awkward situation alone, Yaz smiled back, flattered by Frances's protectiveness. Robert, while polite, remained blissfully unaware of the complexity of the dynamics at play. He had no idea just how much was riding on these seemingly innocent moments.

The rest of the evening passed quickly. Frances never straying far from Yaz's side as they enjoyed their final night in New York.

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Frances lay quietly in bed, her body curved protectively around Yaz, as if shielding her from the world outside. She wasn't in any rush to get up, not today. The thought of leaving this bed, this moment, felt impossible. She listened to Yaz's soft, steady breathing, her heart aching with how much she loved her.

Yaz stirred, her sleepy eyes fluttering open. She smiled lazily, her hand reaching out to stroke Frances's cheek. "Morning," she whispered.

"Morning," Frances replied, her voice low and tender, as she leaned in to kiss her forehead. "How'd you sleep?"

"Perfect," Yaz murmured, her eyes closing again as she snuggled closer. "I never want to leave."

Frances chuckled softly, brushing a strand of hair from Yaz's face. "Then don't. Let's stay like this forever."

Yaz grinned but sighed, her voice tinged with sadness. "I wish we could"

Frances tightened her hold on her, unwilling to let the conversation shift toward reality. "Just for today, let's pretend we can," she whispered, brushing her thumb over her cheek "Let's forget everything else."

Yaz's smile widened as Frances's lips found hers. They kissed slowly, tenderly, savoring the sweetness of each moment. Yaz's hand wandered up Frances's back, holding her even closer.

"I love you," Frances whispered between kisses, her voice raw with emotion. "I don't know how I'm supposed to go back and not have you next to me every night."

"Don't..." Yaz whispered covering her lips with her finger, trying to blink away tears collecting in the corners of her eyes "just tell me something nice"

Frances propped herself up on one elbow, gazing at Yaz with a soft smile. The early morning light filtered through the curtains, casting a golden hue on Yaz's face. Her finger traced a gentle line along Yaz's jaw, her touch featherlight as though memorizing every curve.

"I can tell you how you are so beautiful," Frances whispered, her voice full of admiration.

Yaz, still sleepy, smiled but rolled her eyes playfully. "Oh, please."

"No, I mean it." Frances cupped Yaz's face, her thumb brushing across her cheek. "You don't see it, but I do. Every part of you is perfect."

"Perfect? I think you need glasses girl!" Yaz chuckled softly, her hand slipping under Frances's arm

to pull her closer. "You're so biased."

Frances shook her head, her eyes never leaving Yaz's. "I could stare at you forever. Your eyes, your smile... even when you think you're just lounging here, not even trying, you take my breath away."

Yaz's cheeks flushed under Frances's gaze, a shy smile breaking through. "You're a charmer Frances Louise, you know that."

Frances shifted closer, her lips brushing against Yaz's, her voice a tender whisper. "I'm only telling you the truth." She smiled planting a small kiss to her lips "Those little dimples when you smile, they are so cute, your big, soulful eyes and the way your lashes flutter when you look at me..." Her voice softened as she traced her fingertips down the length of her arm. "And your skin," she added, her touch lingering, "so soft, like velvet."

Yaz's heart swelled at Frances's words, her fingers finding their way into Frances's hair, softly playing with the strands. "You know," she said after a pause, her voice thick with affection, "there are so many things I love about you too."

Frances's eyebrow arched with interest, and she smiled teasingly. "Oh yeah? Tell me."

Yaz bit her bottom lip, her fingers gently trailed over Frances's cheek, her touch light as she gazed into her eyes. "Your hazel eyes..." she whispered "they remind me of autumn leaves, so warm and full of life." Her thumb brushed over Frances's brow, tracing the curve of her face. "And in the mornings, without makeup, your face is so soft... so real. I love seeing you like that."

Frances smiled, her eyes half-closed as Yaz's fingers danced down her neck. "Your smile... it lights up the room," Yaz continued, "and your voice... it's like music. I could listen to you talk all day."

Her fingers moved lower, trailing down Frances's arm, grazing her skin. "And your skin... it feels like silk under my fingers, and it smells like flowers" her eyes filled with affection. "And the little Venus dimples on your back...I love kissing them" her hand roamed lightly over Frances's back, tracing the outline of her spine, her touch delicate but full of intent. "Every part of you darling...it's just so beautiful...but most of all your big, beautiful heart."

Frances sighed. A tear trickled down her cheek, her emotions swirling inside her, her heart melting as she never felt more loved by anyone

"You make me feel like the luckiest person alive," she whispered and lowered her head to kiss Yaz's lips. Their kisses slow and soft, filled with all the words they hadn't yet said.

Frances's lips brushed Yaz's almost teasing in their sweetness. Her hand cupped her face gently, fingertips grazing her jawline as if savoring every moment. She kissed her again, a little firmer this time, still slow, lingering on the moment.

Without breaking the rhythm, Frances's hand slid slowly down to Yaz's waist, pulling her closer as her lips pressed more urgently against hers, with a heat that spread between them. Frances's hand found the small of Yaz's back, fingers splaying there as she kissed her deeper, rolling her gently on top of herself. Yaz's hand tangled softly in Frances's hair, holding her close. Each touch was

deliberate, as if they both wanted to memorize the way they felt against each other as the morning slipped by unnoticed

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The morning felt heavy despite the bright light spilling through Victor's windows. Frances and Yaz were dressed, their bags neatly packed, standing in the middle of the living room, facing the inevitable goodbye. The lively energy of the past few days had quieted, settling into a more somber mood as they sat for one last breakfast in New York.

Victor glanced at both of them, his usual smile softer, tinged with the sadness of parting. "You know, I'm going to miss you both. The apartment won't feel the same without your laughter," he said, his voice steady but with a warmth that carried the weight of their bond.

Frances barely met his eyes, trying to hold back the tears she had been suppressing since the morning. "We'll miss you too... This trip has been...really special." she reached over, squeezing his hand hand, offering silent comfort. Her heart was full of the memories they had shared but heavy with the reality of their departure.

Before anyone could say more, the door creaked open, and a man stepped in, ready to take their luggage to the car. The time had come. They all stood by the elevator, lingering for a moment longer.

Victor moved to Frances first, pulling her into a tight embrace. "Promise me you'll come back soon, Fran. This place needs more of your light," he whispered, his voice faltering with emotion.

Frances clung to him, burying her face in his shoulder for a moment. "I promise, Vic. We'll come back. You know we will."

He pulled back just enough to look at her, then kissed her forehead softly. "Don't be a stranger, kid."

She smiled through the tears threatening to spill, nodding silently.

Victor turned to Yaz, offering her a warm, sincere hug. "It's been a pleasure, Yaz. I'm so glad I got to meet you," he said, his voice full of genuine affection.

Yaz smiled, touched by his kindness. "Thank you... for everything. You made this trip really unforgettable."

With one last shared glance, Frances and Yaz stepped out the door, leaving Victor standing in the now-quiet apartment. As the sound of their footsteps faded, he made his way to the bar in the corner of the room, pouring himself a drink. He swirled the glass in his hand, staring at it for a moment, the weight of their absence settling around him. With a sigh, he raised the glass and took a slow sip, already missing his dear friend.

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As the car moved through the familiar streets of New York, the city passed in a blur outside Frances's window. Her eyes caught glimpses of the people on the sidewalks, bustling with energy as

they headed to work or paused to sip their morning coffee. The towering buildings, the occasional taxi honk, it was all so typically New York, yet none of it felt grounding today.

Frances sighed, her heart heavy as they made their way along the familiar route to the airport. She stared at the skyline growing smaller in the distance, knowing that with each mile, they were not only leaving Victor behind but also slipping back into the reality they faced in Los Angeles. The separate lives she and Yaz have to live weighed on her more than she wanted to admit. For a moment, Frances felt an aching weight settle in her chest, realizing that the two most important people in her life, Lily and Yaz, were just out of reach in the ways that mattered most. Both so close, yet both held at arm's length by the world around her, unable to have them by her side in the way she truly desired.

Without a word, Frances reached for Yaz's hand, placing it gently in her lap. Her fingers felt warm and grounding against her skin, a silent reassurance. She clenched her hand, not wanting to let go.

Yaz, sitting quietly beside her, glanced over with a soft smile, her own heart just as heavy. But she stayed brave, for Frances's sake giving her hand a gentle squeeze, offering what little comfort she could. At least she had Susan waiting for her back in LA, and a warm meal at home to soften the return. But Frances was totally alone. Yaz's heart ached with the thought, but she kept it to herself.

Frances turned to her, her eyes tired but loving, and she laced her fingers with Yaz's, bringing her knuckles to her lips. She kissed them gently, not caring if the driver caught the intimate gesture. It didn't matter. Nothing did in that moment except the connection between them.

Then, Frances released a soft breath, letting her eyes drift back to the window, watching the city fade away as the car pushed on toward their next destination.

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As the plane hummed through the skies, Frances eyed the meal in front of her, lifting the foil cover with a mix of curiosity and dread. She wrinkled her nose at the sight.

"This is what they call food?" she said with mock offense. "I swear, the rubber chicken at those Hollywood parties has more personality."

Yaz grinned, poking her fork into her own tray. "You're such a snob.... It's not that bad."

Frances scoffed, picking at a soggy-looking piece of broccoli. "Not that bad? It looks like a roadkill"

Yaz laughed so much she could barely eat. "You don't have to kiss it, just close your eyes and take a bite. "Yaz popped a piece of the mystery meat into her mouth, chewing thoughtfully. "Well, it's not exactly gourmet, but at least it's edible."

"This is an insult to dining." she gestured to the food with exaggerated disdain,

"Excuse me Hollywood starlet palate," she chuckled "Well, it's definitely not caviar and champagne...Just stop winging and eat."

Frances pushed her tray over with a dramatic wave. "It's all yours, darling. I'd rather starve."

Yaz shook her head, chuckling. "Such a drama queen."

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The airport was buzzing with people moving in every direction, but to Frances and Yaz, the world felt smaller. Frances's staff circled nearby, handling their luggage and making final arrangements, a constant reminder that this was a goodbye they couldn't fully express.

Frances stood close to Yaz, their fingers brushing for a moment before Frances slipped her hand away, her expression carefully composed. "I'll call you later," she said quietly, her voice thick with the weight of all the things she couldn't say in public.

Yaz gave a soft nod, her eyes glistening. "I know."

They moved in for a hug, tight and lingering, but restrained. Frances could feel the familiar warmth of Yaz's body pressed against hers, the scent of her perfume clinging softly between them, and for a moment, she allowed herself to rest there. Just for a heartbeat longer than she should have.

"I'm going to miss you," Frances whispered, her lips barely brushing Yaz's ear, hoping no one could hear.

Yaz pulled back, forcing a brave smile despite the heavy ache in her chest. "Me too. But it won't be long."

Frances nodded, knowing it would feel like an eternity. She touched Yaz's arm briefly before stepping back, slipping into the role she had to play. Yaz gave her one last look before turning toward the car that waited, her heart heavy as the driver closed the door behind her, but hopeful for the call that would come later.

They parted without a real goodbye, surrounded by people who would never know how much it hurt.

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Frances stepped inside her home, the door closing behind her with a soft click. The driver had left her luggage in the hallway, and now she stood in the living room, gazing around at the stillness of the space. It felt eerily quiet, devoid of the warmth and laughter she had shared with Yaz over the past few days.

Her eyes moved over the familiar furnishings, the polished wood and soft cushions, but everything seemed strangely distant now. After spending three magical days in New York with Yaz by her side, the emptiness of her home pressed down on her in a way it hadn't before. It was only a few hours ago that they had been laughing, holding hands, talking about the future. Now, Yaz was back at her home, and Frances was here, alone.

The silence stretched out, and a deep ache filled her chest. She had never minded solitude, but after feeling her lover's presence so close, sharing every moment, waking up beside her, it was as though the house itself had grown colder.

She wandered into the living room, running her hand along the back of the sofa where Yaz had sat just a week ago. Frances inhaled, her breath shaky. The house, once a sanctuary, now felt too large, too empty. The loneliness cut deeper after knowing what it was like to have someone she loved so close. She sank onto the couch, staring at the space beside her.

Suddenly, the idea of spending the night alone in this place felt unbearable. She buried her face in her hands, allowing herself to feel the weight of the distance between them. And for the first time in a long while, Frances realized just how deeply she needed her, how much she longed to have her beside her not just for a few days but always.

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