

## Chapter 20

The soft pitter-patter of evening rain tapped against the windows of their Brighton rental, the sea a dark ribbon beyond the glass. Theta was curled up on the sofa in Yaz's hoodie, her hands resting over the gentle swell of her belly, idly watching some cooking show that neither of them had the attention span to follow.

Yaz was in the kitchenette, making them mugs of tea, humming along to a song on the radio when she heard Theta gasp softly.

"You alright, love?"

Theta nodded but her brow was furrowed. "I think... I don't know, that one felt stronger than the others. Like... oof."

Yaz knelt beside her, instantly alert. "A proper contraction? Like the real deal?"

"I don't know babe...not like it comes with a manual." Theta winced slightly. "It's just...it sort of... grabbed me."

Yaz's eyes widened, tea entirely forgotten. "Right, okay, okay. Where's your hospital bag? I'll get it. We'll call the midwife. Shit...do we need a taxi? Should I...hang on, should I boil water?"

Theta blinked. "For what?"

"I don't know! Towels? Steam? Emotional support?!" Yaz was already halfway to the bedroom before Theta called her back with a laugh and a grimace.

"Yaz. Babe. I think it's just Braxton Hicks."

Yaz paused in the hallway, her hair messy and her eyes wide. "You sure? It sounded serious."

Theta rubbed her bump. "They're not regular. Just... annoying. Don't seem like proper."

Yaz walked back slowly, crouched beside her again and took her hand. "Still gonna call the hospital, yeah? Just in case. I'm not taking any chances, missus."

Theta nodded. "Okay. Yeah, fair enough."

She placed the call while Yaz hovered anxiously, looking like she was ready to deliver the baby herself if necessary. The midwife on the phone was calm and kind, asking a string of

questions, and eventually recommended they come in just to be safe.

Later, at the Royal Sussex County Hospital Theta lay on the bed in the triage room, monitors gently beeping around her. Yaz was sitting awkwardly in a chair by her side, trying not to look as rattled as she felt.

"Wel love" the midwife smiled kindly after examining her, "he's just having a wriggle, and you're having some Braxton Hicks. It's all normal for where you are. Not labor, not yet."

Yaz let out a long breath, leaning back in her chair like someone had just let the air out of her. "Bloody hell."

Theta chuckled. "Sorry, love."

"Nah, don't be. I'd rather panic ten times for no reason than miss the real one. Though if it's all the same to you, next time maybe give me a bit more warning before you nearly give birth in your pajamas."

The midwife laughed politely and left them alone for a moment while she fetched some paperwork.

Yaz leaned over and kissed Theta's temple. "You okay? Not in pain?"

"Bit achey. But more embarrassed than anything."

"Don't be daft," Yaz whispered, brushing her hand along Theta's bump. "I'd rather bring you in for a false alarm than have you give birth in the middle of the Sea Life Centre next to the jellyfish tank."

Theta snorted. "Can you imagine? I'd have to name him Nemo."

"Oh god, or Sharky Khan."

"Flipper..."

They burst into quiet giggles, the tension breaking.

Yaz squeezed her hand. "You know, when it is time...I think we've got this...At least I hope so"

Theta looked over at her, her heart full to the brim. "I know you do love. You make me feel safe no matter what's happening."

Yaz smiled. "And you make me feel like I've actually got a clue what I'm doing. Even when I clearly don't."

They sat like that for a little while longer, hands entwined, the soft whir of machines around them. Eventually, they were discharged and stepped out into the cool Brighton night,

walking slowly along the damp pavement.

“Think we’ve earned a cheeky dessert?” Yaz asked, nudging her gently.

“Only if I can have two.”

Yaz grinned. “One for you, one for Sharky Khan.”

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The handshake was firm, professional, and final.

“Again, congratulations,” Mr. Langford said, his deep voice warm with approval. “You’ve handled this merger brilliantly. And please don’t worry about your... condition. It’s clear everything is in very good hands.”

Theta gave a calm smile, the same one she’d perfected years ago. “Thank you. I’ve already briefed my mother on all contingencies. She’s happy to step in if need be, but I have no plans of vanishing just yet.”

“Good to hear,” he nodded, buttoning his coat. “You’re a sharp mind, Miss. We’re lucky to have you at the table.”

With that, he turned and left, the sound of the door clicking shut behind him seeming louder than it should have. The silence that followed was thick and absolute.

Theta let out a long breath as she lowered herself slowly into the chair behind her desk, her hand briefly resting on her belly. Her fingers moved in a small circle, as if checking in, as if reassuring herself that the baby was still nestled in there just as he had been all along.

The office was quiet now, lit by the soft Sheffield grey spilling in from the tall windows. Her calendar was full. Her inbox was worse. But for the first time all week, Theta allowed herself to pause. The chaos of the past month, the travel, the pitches, the Brighton holiday, the laughter and stolen kisses, the jellyfish plushies swam through her thoughts like a dreamy montage.

Her eyes drifted to a photo frame on her desk. It was a picture of her and Yaz, taken by a kind tourist they’d flagged down on the beach. Yaz had one arm slung around her shoulders, pulling her in close, while Theta was laughing so hard her eyes were half-closed. They looked windswept and carefree, with the ocean sprawling behind them in endless blue. The photo was slightly crooked, the frame cheap and a bit too sparkly for office decor, but she’d kept it there anyway. Because it reminded her of warmth. Of Yaz.

She looked at her watch. Still an hour until she was done. But already, her heart was pulling towards home.

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Theta barely had time to lift her hand to the doorbell before it swung open.

"Come in, come in!" Najia beamed, wiping her hands on the kitchen cloth slung over her shoulder. The scent of herbs, spices, and something deliciously stewing in a pot wafted out of the apartment in a wave of warmth.

"Hi gran," Yaz grinned, stepping in and dropping a kiss to her mum's cheek.

Theta followed, laughing as Najia's eyes widened dramatically. "Blimey, love, that bump's proper grown, hasn't it?"

Theta snorted, patting her bump proudly. "Tell me about it! I feel like I need me own postcode!"

Yaz laughed, helping Theta out of her coat. Hakim waved from the kitchen, a big wooden spoon in one hand and a satisfied look on his face. "You timed it perfect. I've just taken the lamb off the stove!"

The flat felt like a big warm hug, simmering pots bubbling on the hob, the clink of dishes being set on the table, and the low hum of the radio playing in the background. Home.

They settled around the table, the plates already piled high with food. Theta didn't even bother pretending to be polite, digging in with an eager smile.

Halfway through passing the naan basket to Yaz, Najia cocked her head and said, "So... have you two finally picked a name for this poor child?"

Yaz groaned dramatically, rolling her eyes. "He's not poor, Mum."

"He is if he doesn't have a name!" Najia shot back, laughing as she scooped more rice onto Theta's plate.

Theta wiped her mouth, grinning. "Well, I keep trying to convince Yaz that 'Edward' is a nice name."

There was a strange noise from Hakim, half choke, half laugh as he quickly covered it with a cough. Najia pressed her lips together in a tight line to stop herself giggling, but the twinkle in her eyes betrayed her.

Theta blinked at them, confused. "What? It's a good name! Sturdy. Proper dependable."

Yaz leaned in, smirking. "Mum, tell her."

Najia burst out laughing properly now. "Theta, darling... Edward's a lovely name... if you want him to sound like he's been retired since birth!"

Hakim chuckled tossing in, "Might come out wearing a flat cap and asking for a pint!"

Theta gasped, "Oi! I'll have you know Edward was on the top ten list of popular British names!"

"Yeah, about a hundred years ago!" Yaz teased, nudging her playfully.

Theta laughed so hard she had to put her fork down. "Right, that's it. New rule, no making fun of names till you come up with one yourselves!"

"Alright, alright," Hakim said, holding up his hands with a grin. "But when little Edward pops out asking for the morning paper and moaning about the petrol prices, don't say we didn't warn you!"

The table erupted into laughter, the kind that left cheeks sore and eyes crinkled with joy. Theta looked around at all of them, feeling a deep, contented warmth settle in her chest. This. This was the life she had always hoped for and somehow, against all odds, it was hers now.

Najia leaned forward eagerly, tapping her finger against the table. "Alright then, what about something strong, like Yusuf? Good, solid name, that."

Yaz nearly snorted her drink up her nose.

"What's up with Yusuf?" Najia demanded, feigning offence.

"Everything," Yaz spluttered, laughing.

Theta smirked, exchanging a knowing look with her.

Hakim chuckled from the kitchen, wiping his hands on a tea towel. "Better than Edward the pensioner!"

Yaz grinned. "Yeah, imagine... first day at school, little Edward turns up in a flat cap, asking when's dinner cause his back's givin' him grief!"

They all laughed, the room full of warmth and noise.

"Fine," Najia said, sitting back, pretending to sulk. "If you don't fancy Yusuf, what about Amir? Or Haroon? Both nice names."

"What, you want him growing up knocking folk out for a living?" Yaz cackled, nearly choking on her food.

"Oi!" Theta said, laughing too. "Amir's nice! Sounds dead wise... a bit mystical."

Yaz nudged her playfully. "Yeah, until he's ending up in detention every week."

Even Najia had to bite back a smile, hiding it behind her hand.

Theta rested her hand protectively on her bump, chuckling. "This poor lad's got no chance, has he?"

Hakim gave a big laugh. "He'll need skin like rhino's growing up around you lot."

"Right," Yaz said, wiping tears of laughter from her face. "New rule, no more name suggestions before dinner."

"Agreed," Theta giggled. "Before you lot end up calling him Big Dave"

"Or little Edward," Najia chipped in, deadpan.

Yaz and Theta caught each other's eye, and in a heartbeat, they were both howling again,

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The microwave beeped loudly as Yaz shoved another bag of popcorn inside, jabbing the buttons like it had personally offended her. Across the kitchen, Theta tipped a massive bag of nachos into a bowl, bits flying everywhere, not that she seemed to care.

They were both still in fits, their faces sore from grinning all afternoon.

"I swear down," Yaz said, chuckling as she leaned back against the counter, "we seriously need to step up and pick a name. Otherwise my family'll beat us to it and God help him if they do."

Theta snorted, nearly dropping the bowl. "You think that's bad? My dad suggested Bob."

There was a beat of silence and then Yaz, mid-sip of her Coke, absolutely lost it. She spluttered so hard she nearly sprayed it across the kitchen, grabbing at the counter for support.

"Bob?!" she gasped out, wheezing.

Theta howled, setting the bowl down before she dropped it. "Bob! Like, just Bob. No fancy version. No Robert. Straight up Bob!"

Yaz wiped her mouth, still laughing. "Might as well call him Bob the Builder and be done with it!"

Theta was doubled over now, clutching her bump. "Or Thomas the Tank Engine!"

That absolutely finished Yaz off. She slid down onto the floor, howling, tears leaking from her eyes.

"Oi, stop!" Theta gasped, leaning on the counter for dear life. "I'll go into labour right here if you keep on!"

"Can't help it," Yaz managed between laughs. "What next? Postman Pat?"

Theta wheezed, trying and failing to catch her breath. "Fireman Sam!"  
"Tinky Winky" Yaz said breathless

They collapsed into another round of helpless laughter, the microwave beeping forgotten.

Finally, Yaz flopped back against the cabinets, "Right. We need rules. No Bob. No names out of a kids' telly show. No pensioner's names either."

Theta nodded seriously, though her shoulders were still shaking. "Agreed. No Bob. No Nigel. No Gary. No Clive."

"No bloody Gavin," Yaz added, smirking. "Poor kid'll come out asking for a pint and a bacon sarnie."

Theta grinned, waddling over to Yaz. "We'll find something. Something cool. Something proper."

Yaz pulled her in gently, planting a kiss on Theta's forehead. "Yeah. Something that's him. Not Bob the flippin Builder."

Theta giggled again, leaning into Yaz's arms as the smell of popcorn filled the kitchen.

"Love you," Theta mumbled into her hoodie.

Yaz smiled against her hair. "Love you more snuggle bug. Even if you are about to give birth to Bob the Fourth."

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They finally crashed onto the sofa in a tangle of limbs, laughter still trailing off their lips. Yaz flopped backwards, chucking the popcorn bowl onto the coffee table, nearly missing. Theta eased herself down beside her with a soft huff, settling in the big bowl of nachos balanced on top of her bump like a makeshift tray.

Lola immediately claimed her spot, curling up by Theta's feet, her tail thumping lazily against the cushion every so often.

Yaz slung an arm around Theta's shoulders, pulling her close, pressing a kiss against her temple. "Right. What we watching?"

Theta lazily shifted and reached for the remote.

Yaz stretched like a cat, cracking her knuckles dramatically. "Something with a bit of action. Guns, explosions... proper good stuff."

Theta wrinkled her nose. "Ugh. Nooo. I prefer a rom-com. Something with a meet-cute and loads of kissing. Preferably in Paris."

Yaz gave her a sideways look, deadpan. "Babe, you're basically living a rom-com. You need explosions in your life. Bit of excitement."

Theta grinned wickedly. "I've got enough excitement with you, thanks very much. Don't need to watch someone else getting shot at while I'm trying to digest nachos."

Yaz flopped her head dramatically back against the sofa. "You're spoiled..."

"And you love me," Theta said, batting her lashes at her.

"Unfortunately." Yaz smirked and nudged her knee with hers. "Fine. Rom-com. But none of that tragic stuff or I'll chuck popcorn at the telly."

Theta laughed. "Deal. I'll find something where at least one person isn't dying of heartbreak in a rainstorm."

Scrolling through the menu, she landed on a cheesy-looking film with a pink poster and sparkles everywhere. Yaz groaned loudly.

"For the love of God, that looks like diabetes."

"Perfect," Theta said sweetly, clicking play before Yaz could protest any further.

Yaz resigned herself to it, grabbing the popcorn and settling in. "If it gets too soppy, I'm putting on Die Hard."

Theta smiled smugly, leaning back into Yaz, tugging a blanket over them both. "We'll see, tough girl. Bet you'll be crying before the end."

"In your dreams," Yaz muttered, but as Theta snuggled closer, her hand resting instinctively on her bump, Yaz found she didn't really care what was on.

All she needed was right here, a sofa full of snacks, her girl in her arms, and a future just about ready to make its entrance.

The movie played on, full of awkward flirting and silly misunderstandings, but Theta was too busy feeling Yaz's arm draped around her shoulders, steady and warm, fingers absentmindedly stroking her upper arm in little circles. The nacho bowl had been abandoned on the coffee table, Lola dozing by their feet.

About halfway through, Theta felt Yaz shift beside her. She turned her head slightly and caught her wife staring intently at the screen, eyes a little too wide to be casual.

Theta blinked, and that's when she saw a tiny glimmer at the corner of Yaz's eye.

"Are you..." Theta's voice was barely a whisper, a teasing smile playing on her lips.

"I'm not," Yaz said instantly, a bit too defensively, wiping at her eye with the sleeve of her hoodie like a stubborn teenager. "I just... had something in me eye."

Theta bit down on her lip to keep from laughing, her heart swelling with love. "Sure you do, love."

Yaz grumbled under her breath, pulling the blanket higher like she could hide under it.

Theta leaned up and kissed her cheek, slow and lingering. "You're all soft underneath, Yazzy."

"Don't tell," Yaz muttered, cheeks going pink. "Got a reputation to protect."

Theta grinned and rested her head against Yaz's shoulder again, feeling Yaz squeeze her gently, tucking her in closer like she never wanted to let her go.

"I won't tell anyone," Theta promised, her voice low and full of affection. "It'll be our secret."

They stayed like that, tangled together under the blanket, as soft music filled the room. Theta's hand found Yaz's, lacing their fingers together over the curve of her belly. Yaz's thumb brushed over Theta's knuckles, slow and steady.

Theta shifted slightly, trying to ease her back and Yaz was there instantly, adjusting the blanket around her and sliding a cushion behind her lower back without a word.

"You alright, love?" Yaz asked quietly, her hand still cradling Theta's.

"Mhm," Theta hummed, her heart so full she thought it might burst. "Just comfy."

They sat in silence for a moment, the flickering light from the TV painting lazy patterns across the walls. Theta turned her head slightly, catching Yaz watching her, that soft, adoring look she only ever wore when she thought no one was looking.

"What?" Theta asked, smiling.

Yaz squeezed her fingers gently. "Just thinking'."

"About what?"

Yaz shrugged, but there was a shy, boyish grin tugging at her mouth. "About him. What he'll be like...It's coming so soon now."

Theta's chest tightened in that lovely, aching way. She shifted their joined hands to rest over her bump, feeling a faint little kick underneath.

"Reckon he'll have your stubborn streak," Yaz teased, her voice warm.

Theta laughed softly. "Only if he's lucky."

Yaz chuckled, then leaned down to press a kiss to Theta's temple, lingering there for a moment. "Hope he's got your laugh," she murmured. "Brightens up a room, that does."

Theta blinked, touched beyond words. She turned a little, pressing her forehead to Yaz's.

"And your heart," she whispered back. "Big and messy and beautiful."

Yaz huffed out a soft laugh, but her voice cracked a little when she said, "He already has so many people loving him...Lucky little sod."

They sat like that, forehead to forehead, breathing the same slow, steady breaths, feeling the tiny life growing between them.

Theta smiled, imagining messy mornings with toys scattered everywhere, little feet thundering down the hall, sleepy cuddles between them on Sunday mornings. She imagined Yaz, bleary-eyed, trying to make breakfast one-handed while their boy clung to her leg. She imagined laughter, endless, easy laughter filling every corner of their home.

"What if he's a handful?" Theta teased, voice soft.

"Then we'll love him harder," Yaz said simply, without hesitation.

Theta laughed, blinking back the sudden burn behind her eyes. She reached up, cupping Yaz's cheek, and Yaz leaned into the touch like she couldn't help herself.

"We're gonna be alright, aren't we?" Theta asked quietly.

Yaz caught her hand and kissed the palm. "We're gonna be brilliant."

For a second, they just looked at each other, everything they felt, everything they promised, floating between them, so thick and certain it was almost a living thing.

Then Yaz leaned in, slow and sure and Theta tilted her chin up, meeting her halfway.

Their lips touched in a kiss so soft, so achingly sweet Theta's heart folded in half. Yaz kissed her like she was something precious, something to be cherished, her hand cradling the back of Theta's head with infinite care. Theta melted into it, her fingers slipping into Yaz's hair, anchoring herself to the warmth, the certainty, the love.

When they finally broke apart, Yaz rested her forehead against Theta's again, their noses brushing.

"I love you so much, you know that?" Yaz whispered again, like a promise stitched right into her heart.

Theta smiled, her voice a breath against Yaz's "Love you too...you're everything to me" she smiled and kissed her again.

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Later that night, the flat was quiet except for the soft hum of the TV left on in the background. Yaz had dozed off, one arm still thrown protectively around Theta, who was tucked into her side beneath a thick blanket.

Theta shifted slightly, trying to get more comfortable, when she felt a strange sensation low in her belly, followed by something wet.

Her heart skipped a beat. Carefully, she peeled back the blanket and stood up, wincing a little at the heaviness she felt. She made her way to the bathroom, flicked on the light... and froze.

There, stark against the fabric of her pajama shorts, was a small patch of blood.

Panic flared in her chest. "Yaz?" she called, her voice shaking before she could stop it.

Yaz jerked awake instantly, alert in a second. "Theta...What's wrong"

Theta was trying to stay calm, but her hands were trembling. "I'm bleeding."

Yaz was up in a flash, crossing the room in two strides. She caught Theta by the shoulders, steadying her. "Fuck...Alright, love, alright. It's gonna be okay. Let's get you seen to, yeah?"

Theta nodded, trying to breathe through the rising fear. Yaz was already grabbing her jacket, her phone, her keys, her movements quick but not frantic as she helped Theta to sling on a fresh pair of underwear and a dress. She was holding it together for both of them.

They were out the door in minutes, Yaz helping her down the stairs carefully, her hand warm and steady on the small of Theta's back.

As she drove, Yaz held Theta's hand tightly, murmuring soft reassurances the whole way to the hospital.

"It's probably nothing serious, love. Happens all the time, yeah? Just making sure you're alright."

Theta nodded, clutching Yaz's fingers so tightly it hurt.

At the hospital, they were ushered through to maternity triage quickly. Theta was checked over, monitors strapped to her belly, the soft, rapid heartbeat of their baby filling the room like the most beautiful music.

"It's a small bleed," the midwife explained kindly. "Could be from your cervix changing, it's

very common at this stage. Baby's heartbeat is strong. No contractions, no signs of labour."

Theta let out a shuddering breath she hadn't even realised she was holding. Yaz kissed the top of her head, whispering something soft and soothing against her hair.

"Still," the midwife continued gently, "we'd like to keep you in overnight. Just to keep an eye, make sure everything stays nice and settled."

Theta nodded, feeling exhaustion crash over her now that the worst of the fear had passed. She wasn't going to argue. Not with Yaz sitting there, still holding her hand like she'd never let go.

Once they were settled in a quiet side room, the monitors ticking gently around them, Yaz pulled a hard plastic chair up beside the bed. Theta watched her for a moment, her chest aching, not from fear anymore, but from the sheer love she felt for this woman.

"You don't have to stay love," Theta whispered. "You could go home, get some proper sleep."

"Not a chance," Yaz said, kicking off her trainers and sitting back with a stubborn look that made Theta's heart squeeze. "Where you go, I go. That's the deal."

Theta reached out and Yaz immediately took her hand again, cradling it between both of hers.

"I was so scared," Theta admitted in a small voice, blinking up at the white hospital ceiling.

"Me too," Yaz murmured, bringing their joined hands to her lips. "But you're alright. Baby's alright. That's what matters."

Theta smiled weakly, her eyes closing. Safe. She was safe here, with Yaz beside her, the steady beep of the monitor singing the lullaby of their little boy's strong, stubborn heart.

Yaz leaned forward and pressed a featherlight kiss to her forehead.

"Get some kip, love. I'm not going' anywhere."

And she didn't. Not even for a second.

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Morning crept in slowly through the hospital blinds, painting the room in a pale, gentle light. Theta stirred first, blinking her eyes open to find Yaz still sitting in the same chair by her bed, arms folded, head tipped back against the wall, fast asleep.

Theta's heart squeezed at the sight. She didn't look comfortable at all, her neck at an awkward angle, her hands loosely curled in her lap, but she hadn't left. Not even for a minute.

Before Theta could move, the door clicked open and a cheerful midwife peeked in. "

"Morning, love," she said brightly to Theta. Her eyes twinkled when they landed on Yaz, still fast asleep in the chair, mouth slightly open. "Bless her... she's a keeper, that one. Not many would tough it out on a chair all night."

Theta stifled a giggle, not wanting to wake Yaz just yet. "She's adorably stubborn," she whispered fondly.

The midwife chuckled. "Good stubborn. That's the kind you want."

At the slight sound of voices, Yaz stirred, blinking groggily, her head snapping up with a confused little grunt. Her eyes immediately found Theta, scanning her face for any sign of trouble.

"You alright? What's happening?" she rasped, voice thick with sleep.

The midwife smiled warmly. "All good, pet. I'm just here to check your other half over, and if everything's looking right as rain, she can go home."

Yaz rubbed her face with both hands, trying to shake herself awake properly. "Right... brilliant. Yeah," she said, dragging the chair closer to the bed and reaching for Theta's hand.

"You alright love?" Theta asked concerned

"Yeah...Don't worry about me" she smiled kissing Theta's knuckles

The midwife moved about efficiently, checking Theta's blood pressure, her temperature, and the baby's heartbeat with a small Doppler monitor. The soft, rhythmic thud-thud-thud filled the room, and Yaz visibly relaxed, her shoulders dropping as she squeezed Theta's hand.

"Heartbeat sounds lovely," the midwife said, smiling. "And no more bleeding, you said?"

Theta shook her head. "Nothing since last night."

"Good, good...Everything's looking spot on." She scribbled something onto her clipboard. "We'll get your discharge papers sorted, then you can toddle off home and put your feet up, and maybe get your girl here a proper bed, eh?" she added with a wink at Yaz.

Yaz grinned sleepily. "Reckon we've both earned one."

"Too right you have," the midwife said, patting Theta's arm gently. "Back in a tick."

As she left the room, Yaz slumped onto the edge of the bed, letting out a groan as her back popped.

Theta tilted her head at her, amused. "You alright there, grandma?"

Yaz smirked. "Don't start. I think that chair's shaved about ten years off me life."

Theta laughed softly, brushing Yaz's messy hair back from her forehead. "I love you," she said, her voice thick with feeling.

Yaz leaned down, pressing a kiss to her knuckles. "I love you more. And you're not getting rid of me. Chair or no chair."

Theta's smile widened, her heart feeling full to bursting. She couldn't wait to go home.

By the time the midwife came back with a clipboard full of paperwork, Yaz was practically vibrating with impatience to get Theta home.

"Alright, loves," the midwife said, handing Theta a few sheets. "Sign these, and you're free to go. Just take it easy, yeah? No marathon running."

Theta laughed as she scribbled her name. "I'll do my best."

Yaz was already scooping up Theta's overnight bag before she could even think about reaching for it.

"I can carry that, you know," Theta said, raising an eyebrow.

"In your dreams," Yaz said firmly, slinging it over her shoulder. "You're not lifting a finger. Doctor's orders."

"The midwife didn't say that," Theta teased, easing herself to the edge of the bed.

"Yeah, well, I'm saying it," Yaz grinned. "Police orders...I'm very official."

Theta rolled her eyes but couldn't hide her fond smile as Yaz bent down to help her slip on her trainers.

"You're being silly," Theta said as Yaz fussed around her feet like she was made of glass.

"Yep," Yaz said brightly, standing up and brushing off her hands. "And I don't care. Come on, my beach ball. Let's get you home before they find something else to poke you with."

Theta got to her feet slowly, and Yaz immediately slid an arm around her waist, steadying her.

"I can walk, you know," Theta laughed.

Yaz just kissed the side of her head and whispered, "Yeah, but this way I get to hold you and no one's allowed to tell us off."

Theta gave a soft, quiet laugh, leaning into her. "You're ridiculous," she murmured.

"And you love it," Yaz grinned.

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By the time they made it through the front door, Theta was knackered, and Yaz wasn't far behind.

"Right, shoes off," Yaz said briskly, helping Theta lower herself onto the sofa. "Feet up. Cup of tea coming your way."

"You're fussing," Theta teased, but her smile was tired and grateful.

"And you're letting me, so who's the fool here?" Yaz called back from the kitchen, already filling the kettle and making some toast.

Theta chuckled quietly, letting her head tip back against the cushions, a hand resting lightly over the bump. Lola, who had been sulking while they were gone, immediately leapt up and flopped next to her with a soft huff.

"Hey Bubsy" Theta stroke her gently "You got a scare too"

A few minutes later, Yaz came back carrying hot tea and the toast setting them carefully on the coffee table. She knelt in front of Theta, slipping off her trainers and gently massaging her ankles.

"You alright?" Yaz asked, voice low and soft now that they were home.

Theta looked down at her, brushing her fingers lightly through Yaz's dark hair. "I'm okay. A bit shook up still, I guess."

Yaz pressed a kiss to the inside of her ankle, then rested her cheek there for a moment. "I was scared too," she admitted quietly. "When I saw the blood...I didn't know what to do. I just kept thinking... I can't lose either of you."

Theta's chest tightened. She leaned forward, cupping Yaz's face in both hands. "You were bloody amazing," she whispered.

Yaz smiled, a little crookedly, and turned her face to kiss her palm.

"Right," she said after a beat, and stood up, forcing some lightness back into her voice. "You stay there, you've got your brekkie. I'm just gonna take Lola out for a quick walk before she starts eating the furniture."

Theta laughed, watching as Yaz grabbed the lead from the hook by the door. Lola's ears

immediately pricked up at the sound, tail thumping.

But just as Yaz strapped her into a harness and started to turn away, Theta reached out, catching her hand.

"Hey," she said softly.

Yaz turned back and Theta gave a gentle tug, pulling her down into a kiss. It was soft, lingering, full of warmth and a thousand unspoken thank yous. Yaz melted into it instantly, one hand cradling the back of Theta's head, the other bracing herself on the arm of the sofa.

When they finally pulled apart, Yaz rested her forehead against Theta's, eyes closed.

"You're beautiful," Theta whispered.

But before Yaz could answer, Lola gave an impatient little bark, making them both laugh.

"Alright, alright, madam," Yaz called to her, reluctantly straightening up. "Let me take her out before she bursts."

Theta leaned back again, watching them leave.

Even though she was exhausted and still a little shaken, Theta felt wrapped in something solid, steady and safe, the kind of love you could lean on, no matter what.

After a long sigh, she reached for her phone on the coffee table, tapping her thumb across the screen until her mum's name appeared. She hesitated for a second, she'd promised not to worry anyone, but now, with the events of the night settling in, it felt right to hear her mum's voice.

She pressed the dial button and waited, eyes drifting toward the window where Yaz had just disappeared out the door.

It rang twice, then three times before her mum picked up, her voice still thick with sleep.

"Theta? You alright, love?"

Theta's heart skipped a beat, feeling the weight of her mum's concern. She swallowed, pushing down the guilt bubbling up in her chest.

"I didn't want to worry you, mum," she said softly, her voice a little tight. "I've been at the hospital last night. But everything's okay now, not to worry!"

There was a sharp intake of breath on the other end of the line. "What?" Ashley sat up in her bed "A hospital? What the hell happened?"

"What happened?" her father snapped out of his sleep

"She's been at the hospital" Ashley quickly said to her father then put Theta on a

loudspeaker

"Are you alright? Is the baby alright?" he asked

Theta closed her eyes for a moment, resting her head back. "I'm fine, really. It's nothing too serious. Just some bleeding... but they kept me overnight for observation. I'm okay now, honest."

There was a pause. The sound of Ashley's worried sigh made Theta wince. "You should have told us, sweetheart. I know you're trying to protect us, but we're your parents. We'd rather be scared together than for you to be on your own."

"I didn't wanna freak you and dad out," Theta said, her voice softening. "I knew you'd be worried sick, and I thought it might be nothing. I didn't wanna add to your stress."

Her dad's voice softened, too, though he still sounded upset. "I know you're trying to protect us, love, but you've got to lean on us sometimes. We're here for you, always. Don't hide things like this from us again, okay? It's not about protecting us, it's about being there when you need us."

Theta squeezed her eyes shut. "I'm sorry."

There was a pause before Ashley sighed again. "Just don't cut us out like that again darling, alright?"

"I promise. Next time, I'll call," Theta said, smiling a little.

"Just take it easy, will you? Get some rest. And call us if you need anything, alright?"

"I will, I promise." Theta smiled to herself, her heart lightening with the connection. "Love you both."

"Love you too, sweetheart. Take care of yourself."

The call ended, and Theta set her phone down on the table with a quiet sigh, her heart still a little heavy but soothed by the warmth of her parents' words.

A wave of exhaustion settled over her as the stress and worry of the night finally began to lift. She stretched out on the sofa, pulling a blanket over herself, and let her hand drift to her bump, absently tracing gentle circles as she felt the soft flutter of the baby moving inside.

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Yaz stepped back into the flat, quietly closing the door behind her. The soft click of the lock barely stirred the peaceful stillness inside. She unhooked Lola's lead, crouching to unbuckle her little harness. Lola gave a gentle shake, her tail wagging lazily as Yaz wiped her paws with a damp cloth they'd kept by the door for exactly this purpose.

Kicking off her shoes and shrugging out of her jacket, Yaz let her eyes wander across the

room and her heart softened completely.

Theta was curled up on the sofa, fast asleep under the blanket, her face serene, one hand still resting over the curve of her belly. Lola padded over and hopped up onto the sofa, curling up against Theta's legs with a soft sigh, as if standing guard.

Yaz moved quietly across the room, careful not to wake her. She leaned down, pulling the blanket a little higher over Theta's shoulder, and pressed a feather-light kiss to her temple. The other woman stirred slightly at the touch, a soft murmur escaping her lips, but she didn't wake, just nuzzled deeper into the pillow, safe and warm.

Yaz smiled, her chest aching with love, before walking to the window. She tugged the blinds down, casting the living room into a cosy twilight.

Dragging a hand through her hair, Yaz realised just how much the night had taken out of her too. Her body felt leaden, heavy with exhaustion, and her mind wasn't far behind. She needed a shower and more than that, she needed fresh clothes and the feeling of hospital air off her skin.

She glanced back once more at the sofa then padded down the hallway towards the bathroom, already peeling off her hoodie as she went.

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The bathroom door clicked shut behind her, and Yaz leaned back against it for a moment, shutting her eyes. The flat was so quiet, nothing but the faint hum of the fridge and Lola's occasional sleepy sigh from the living room.

Safe.

They were safe.

Pushing herself upright, Yaz turned on the shower, letting the water run hot. Steam quickly began to curl up from the tiles, wrapping the small room in a misty warmth. She peeled off the rest of her clothes with slow, clumsy movements, her muscles aching in ways she hadn't even realised until now.

Stepping under the spray, Yaz tilted her head back, letting the water hit her face full force. It was supposed to be refreshing, grounding. Instead, the moment the warmth touched her skin, something inside her cracked open.

A broken sob escaped her before she could stop it. She clapped a hand over her mouth instinctively, muffling the sound, as though even now she didn't want to wake Theta, didn't want to worry her more. But the tears came anyway, heavy, silent, unstoppable. Fear she hadn't dared to voice poured out of her in waves.

Yaz pressed her forehead to the cool tiles, her shoulders shaking under the pounding water. She stayed like that for a long moment, letting herself cry properly, letting all of it go, here,

alone, where no one could see, where she didn't have to be brave.

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