

6.5 - I NEED YOU

The bliss of acceptance wore off swiftly. After the two first-timers of Corner Link separated their hands again, Charna's intoxicated brain caught up with the present.

'Oh— oh my God. His hand was so rough, b-but still soft?'

Fortunately, her cheeks were already rosy enough to cover up her blush. Another attribute of alcohol was the destruction of social barriers. Without it, it was uncertain whether she could have furthered the conversation.

"Mmm... so, uh, Shimon? You from, like, a different place?" she hiccuped into words.

'You-from-diff-rant-playze. That's tough...'

"... yes!" the marine one correctly guessed. "Other... playze!"

"Oooo," Charna singsonged. "So I, umm, guess you dunno Pangaeian that well, right?"

'Dun-no-pan-gee-ann...'

Shimon became a full-time code decipherer in the one place people were supposed to relax in.

"... No! No. Pan-gae-an... hard."

"Aha!" the young blonde now said with confidence. "Where'd you come from, then?"

He talked himself into a corner.

'Where— oh. Think. Any place other than Cherize...'

"... Ash-lowe?"

Coincidentally the last city that Shimon visited before he vanished for nine years.

"Oooo, from Ireland? You're Irish? That's so coooool!" the young woman chanted. She neglected the fact that Pangaeian was still considered second language for Ashlowe. Her vodka shots worked out in Shimon's favor.

When the intoxicated girl seemed satisfied with the given answer, Shimon attempted something that many would've considered too eager. He felt validated that this was the person he'd been hoping to meet. But continuing to talk with her like this would be taxing to no end, not to mention probably leading nowhere, he pondered.

When he then spoke the words "Can show you some-thing?" and took her by the hand once more, he had a clear objective in mind. But the more-than-tipsy Charna was struck by this idea.

'Show me something?!'

"Uhm... uhm, I... what do you mean?"

Her social anxiety returned with a vengeance. She was utterly unprepared for a situation like this - so, she turned to stone. Her hand went limp and could easily be held by Shimon - who lacked the social understanding to feel awkward.

'Perfect! Now let's hope this works out...'

The marine enigma pondered long and hard over how to introduce his language to someone else. Events of yesterday complicated the task, but at least made it feasible. Apparently Humans *could* talk with him, but they had to possess some sort of power as well. The solution was clear. It was only a matter of how.

Charna's long odyssey would commence the moment she perceived a thorny prickling on her limp hand. A feeling that resembled trying to move your arm after it's fallen asleep - just a thousand times more vibrant; almost colorful. As if the arm itself had a groundbreaking

epiphany.

'—nh?'

Unfortunately, a lot more painful as well. And every additional second that the boy kept holding her hand, the severity increased.

'It's really hard to concentrate it all on my palm, even just controlling the amount is difficult...' Shimon pondered, still directing his aura toward the girl. Until, like a farmer's scythe, Charna snatched her arm away. The irritation beneath her skin didn't let up though, even as the startled Shimon flung back.

She was terrified. Her first idea was that of a heart attack, though her drunkenness prevented her from realizing the chances of this.

"What— what did you do?"

It seemed like everyone wanted to shout into Shimon's face shortly after introducing himself. Almost a running joke, he thought. But no time to reply remained. Charna clenched her face from the sheer ache she suffered from. Her facial pores leaked sweat so violently that she felt they streamed upwards. In her anguish, she tried applying pressure with her other hand on any possible spot, and yet it made no difference.

It was then that her fear transformed into horror. She felt the ache wandering toward her shoulder, spreading steadily, felling her off her bar chair. The looks of nearly all customers followed. The oblivious Shimon would follow as well.

'Oh... No... Uhm— what— what did I do? Wasn't this how I got the powers?'

—

The chances aren't small that, among forty people, there's at least one with some sort of medical background. And thus, when Charna Chierke's vibrating body landed on the dark wooden planks of Corner Link's floor, first aid didn't take long to react.

"Let me through," one man in particular called through the gawking crowd that started to form. He rolled up his bordeaux shirt's sleeves in professional manner, cold and analytical like a proper surgeon. Morbid curiosity now dominated the lighthearted bar's atmosphere. Reminiscent of a car accident; every pair of eyes fixated on the young woman's suffering. The exact scenario that Charna was so afraid of.

"Goddammit!" the medic shouted as he squished himself through the masses. The least favorite part of his job, in the one place he found relaxation in. When he finally arrived above the trembling girl, the pain had already spread across her entire body. Charna wasn't even aware of it anymore; her consciousness drifting between the is, was and will be.

Before the light-haired man begun his routine, something else caught his attention for a split second. The glance of Shimon's eyes. They lacked his trademark, enthusiastic jade. Instead, when their gazes met, he swore that they whispered to him, in this impossibly small moment.

'Please help her,' they begged in despair.

'This is nice... I'm alone, but... I'm not lonely. It's like it doesn't matter anymore. It's a good feeling...' Charna thought as she faded somewhere unknown to the living.

The situation turned even more critical when the medic found himself struggling to approach the affected girl. Literally. His legs fought to move, but something hindered him. Something tangible, yet almost clouded in mystery.

'What is happening? Why can't I move further? Is this her aura?' he thought, grinding his

teeth in frustration but unsure where to direct it. Every second that his body prevented him from taking action, the girl's periwinkle pupils faded a shade further away.

'I could imagine just staying here... maybe forever...'

Had she been more conscious, Charna would've had a pleased look. Much better than the pulsating vessel she was trapped in.

'Dammit! This girl can't possibly be this strong? Keep going!' the man shouted to himself. Far from the only shout, as a couple of vocal onlookers urged him to 'just sit down and help the girl'. But as if he was facing an invisible barrier, he failed to continue. Like the girl triggered some sort of physical repulsion. This wasn't far from the truth.

Then, the medic slowly folded his hands to a prayer.

'—sorry, Alberc, there's no way around this time. She'll die if I don't use—'

'Hey! Charna! Don't give in that easily!'

The tides would finally turn when the marine-haired perpetrator squatted down to his accidental victim. Once more, he grasped her palm - but with only the utmost gentility.

'Come on! I couldn't have been that wrong about you! You're stronger than that!' he shouted in encouragement. Nobody else heard - not even he himself, as his lips remained shut - but Charna received his message clearer than anything else in her life. As if the Creator itself spoke to her while she was leaving this world.

'I'm strong?' she replied.

'You are! Absolutely! I knew the moment I laid eyes on you! You're the reason I came here!'

To the bystanders, not even a moment passed. Their private conversation was imperceptible and unconceivable, located in the void between life and death - even Shimon struggled to understand how he was talking to her, but he tried his absolute best nonetheless.

'Hmm...'

'Charna! Please! I beg you! Don't go! I need you!'

The warmth of Shimon's hands rose into her declining heart.

'... you need me?'

As if the otherworldly boy had revived her, Charna's lavender eyes shot up again, staring straight at the glass ceiling. A world of sorrows fell from the boy's chest. Shimon couldn't help but lip a soundless *'thank you'* to her. The glances of all other guests alleviated, especially the medic's.

"Ah... aaaah... aaaaaah..."

But when the sweat-drenched girl started raising her voice again, fate reminded everyone that it wasn't over just yet. Charna's eyes wandered around the room, catching worried glances from every direction. Her anxiety spiked. It merged with whatever had occupied her body in the first place; a violent mass that wanted, needed to break out.

Instinctively, she swung her arms upward, like Shimon had done so often to force his pulses out.

"AAAAAAH—"

And indeed, next followed a giant mass of force, pulsating upward. Her surroundings were the smallest obstacle. The round of gawkers was jointly pushed away from the brunt, some even somersaulting backwards. Most flasks of liquor behind the bar's counter crashed against walls or fell down, culminating to waves of glass shards sweeping the floor. The wooden stools flew to the back of the bar, the counter itself suffered chunks of wood breaking off. But the largest

problem came in form of the flat glass roof - and the pulse's point-blank impact.

In this moment, if time stood still, one couldn't have found a more beautiful sight in Cherize City.

Thousands, maybe even tens of thousands of bits of fractured glass soared through the moonlit night, reflecting its bleached light, pure as snow. Following the upstream of Charna's pulse, they were now forever separated from Corner Link's roof, which suffered a humongous hole in its lower right corner. It was a miracle it didn't break entirely.

However, soon, the shards would come to a standstill. And then, they'd commence their way downward. No weather report had predicted a shower of glass on the 31st of January, and yet, the visitors of Corner Link would experience one soon. Every glistening piece was out for blood.

Shimon was the only person able to hold his ground when Charna exploded. His hand was thrown off - a feat that was substantial in itself - but he remained at her side, as if he'd sworn himself to her. He recognized the impending threat first.

'Oh— oh no. Focus, focus, focus...'

And he tried his best to avert the danger. Right as the shards entered the bar again through the same hole they'd exited,

'Push!'

they flew out once more, this time following Shimon's own upstream. Or rather, the majority.

While a couple thousand shards fell on the remains of the glass roof, or the bar's closed backyard, with their second wind, Shimon couldn't replicate the width of Charna's pulse in time. There was a significant number of remnants that entered Corner Link. And so, blood was shed on the night of the 31st of January.

Five seconds later, the damage cleared up. Twelve onlookers - the ones lacking decency to give Charna appropriate space - suffered dozens of deep cuts in their backs, some even piercing into their ribcages. Another seven, those more concerned than curious, accumulated a variety of splinters across their bodies, though not nearly as deep as the badly wounded twelve. The remaining customers, around twenty, were shielded by their fellow visitors enough to suffer minimal cuts at best, if at all.

'But none are dead. That boy... just saved everyone,' the medic realized. Shimon, Charna and him sustained no injuries whatsoever. Instead, the shards seemed to land exactly around them; like magic.

The blonde girl herself wouldn't learn about it anymore. She passed out immediately after her involuntary blast, sending her into a profound sleep. Absolute exhaustion riddled her body - but her aches had subsided. Shimon and a traumatized mass of forty people remained.

'What now? What do I do now? There are injured people, but I can't heal them, I can't help them... Charna is out, but I feel her energy... It's calm, soothing... so she'll live, I think...'

He remembered Sennin.

'—The Sentinels. If he found me before, they can easily find me right now... and then Zeke could get targeted again...'

Shimon panicked.

'Ah... Aaaah... What do I do?'

He faced a decision that he would've avoided at any cost.

'Nrggh... Sennin, you said you were part of Cherize's defenders... I don't have any other choice, so please...'

Shimon considered it nothing short of cowardly - but right now, necessary. For Zeke's sake,

for Charna's sake, for his sake.

The next moment, he leapt through the glass roof's hole with an athletic jump, landing on the brick wall. In his head, he prayed.

'... please, just take care of her... I really shouldn't, but I have to...'

One last time, Shimon glanced down the young woman's unconscious body, feeling a mixture of guilt and hopelessness. In contrast, the medic checking her pulse looked up, and his stare met Shimon's. Instead of hatred or intimidation however, he gave him a look of trust. A sign to rely on him.

'... thank you.'

Skipping across Cherize's rooftops, Shimon Astrai escaped the scene.