

Chapter 9: A friend in need

Lily's POV

Everytime I ended up trusting somebody, they always hurt me.

Those were the words that were on the tip of my tongue when Ren invited me to spend the rest of this period and the next with him.

The periods were a total of forty minutes per class and we had at least six to seven periods in a day, with some classes having combined periods.

I had read everything about Shadow Cove academy down to the founders and even the possible rumours when I had received the scholarship, excited to resume here and never in my widest dreams did I anticipate that my problem would not be skipping class periods and having to show that I was smart enough to remain here. Never would I have thought that my biggest problem would be actually having to even survive attempts at my own life because a prince gave the order.

Maybe that was why Ren's offer to stay with him sounded like something out of a movie. Almost unreal.

I was no stranger to bullying. It's the perks of having a father dubbed a traitor of the entire community. Back at Gold crest, even though I was treated like an outcast because of my last name, only a specic group of people seemed to have it out for me. I had experienced peace in between the days and when I started dating Cade... even though I had later found out that the peace was a false construct and that I was not being bullied because I was dating Cade at the time.

Shadow Cove academy was much worse. These guys were actually after my life. I had been dealing with a lot of emotional damage after the fallout with Cade and I thought that coming here would be the best way to take back control of my life. To seize the moment. I thought that I was nally ready to reintegrate back into society again. But now not only was I dealing with emotional trauma but also physical ones and it didn't make any sense why someone like Ren would want to associate himself with that.

It made zero sense. If Bia was here, she would call me an eternal pessimist but as much as I wanted to hang out with Ren and as much as I found his offer to stay attractive since it meant that I could be away from the outside world for a while, even if it was for a little while, I could not imagine why he would want to hang out with me.

"Why do you want to hang out with me? I'm a pariah. A degenerate." I added with a fake smile, referencing the words Courtney had used and the smile that was on his face dropped before he closed the distance between us until he was standing only inches away from me.

I swallowed nervously, staring at him as he looked back at me before he nally took a step back, the air charged and thick with tension.

"Why I want to hang out with you? It's because those words that Courtney used do not describe who you are. You are not a degenerate. Or a pariah." He answered and I wanted so badly to believe that he was saying those words because he meant them, because he saw me as a person truly.

"And who am I?" I asked, intrigued to know more.

For a second his brown eyes looked like they glowed or it could just be than I was staring at him for too long, but they were so beautiful like the rest of him was.

"You smell like the breath of fresh air and give off a splash of the most soothing colours that I've seen in anyone in a while."

I didn't understand. Was he referring to me using terms because he was a painter?

Sensing my confusion, his smile widened and I paled when he took my hand and led me to a couch that was not too far from the chair where he had been sitting to paint.

Sitting on the arm of the couch, he pointed to the half nished painting he was making.

"Can you see that?" He asked and when I nodded, he looked away from the painting back to me.

"I can see people's souls and they appear as different colours and sometimes, even scents. So that's how I describe them. Exactly the way I see them. Usually, a person's soul appears as one colour. But yours is the rst that exudes different colours." He explained and my mouth fell open.

Was he kidding? He didn't look like he was and yet I wanted to test him.

"What colour is Courtney?"

"Believe it or not, it's a pale yellow. She's someone who is not necessarily bad at heart and would have a bright sunower yellow if she was not obsessed with keeping on a mean facade and doing wicked deeds to belong. That is what has paleed her colour."

It was real. He was serious then. But I needed more convincing.

"And me? What colours do I give off?"

This time when his eyes glowed, I realized that I had not imagined it then.

"There's black to signify your pain, soul shearing pain. Red to represent your rage, hot and ery. There is green that shows that despite what you have gone through, there is still a part of you that is hopeful about the world. Blue that shows your enduring spirit, yellow that like I said shows how bright and naive about the world you are, interested in discovering new things and pink, your innocent heart."

Speechless. I was speechless because no one, not even Bia had ever described me like this. Like they could see me, all of me. I felt naked but at the same time I felt so seen, it made tears trickle down my cheeks.

And he let me have this moment in silence, squeezing my hand gently before he walked over to sit in front of his painting.

"Who is that?" I said moments later when he resumed painting and I went to stand beside him, admiring the portrait of the woman that I could see coming to life in his strokes.

"I don't know yet." He answered thoughtfully and when he looked at me, the two of us laughed and I found myself relaxing even more.

"It must be so nice to be so gifted and talented. I'm sure everyone likes you" I whispered as he continued to paint and he shrugged.

"I wasn't always loved, Lily. It's probably hard to believe but my nickname when I grew up was Ghost. Because of the colour of my hair and then there is my personal favorite. Bastard." He whispered the last part and his smile was feigned, an exact replica of the kinds that I was used to giving other people.

"You were bullied?" I asked in surprise and he nodded.

"For many reasons, Lily and for no reason at all. It was a long time ago but that kind of memory remains with you. It shapes you. But only if you let it. Don't let it shape you, Lily. You are not dened by what people say or think about you. You are dened by who you think you are, by your choices. Find your anchor. Mine was art. Who knows what yours could be?"

I nodded, taking a seat beside me and listened attentively as he taught me about the different instrumentals while mine was heavily inuenced by Bia's love for pop and rock music.

And I realized with a grin that maybe I was not as alone as I thought. Maybe I could survive Shadow cove academy with someone like Ren as a friend.