

## CHAPTER 24: EMOTIONAL RELIEF

Heaven truly was beautiful. Xavion was surprised by how bright the sky was and the peaceful state of mind it brought him. He figured his nature would naturally repel him from such a place, but it was undeniably tranquil. Malach had brought him to a private area near his home so there weren't any angels nearby to bother them. The demon was finally at ease.

"Close your eyes," Malach instructed, his chest pressed against Xavion's back.

Xav hesitantly complied. He didn't particularly enjoy taking orders, but he let it slide since Malach was only trying to help him a er all.

"Now take a deep breath in," the angel said as he inhaled, "And a deep breath out."

Their chests rose and fell in sync, breathing at a slow pace in harmony. Though a er a few breaths, Xavion quickly grew bored.

"Did you just bring me here to teach me how to breathe?" he asked sarcastically. "Because I know I might be a little behind, but I'm seriously questioning just how stupid you think I am."

Malach frowned, letting go of Xavion who pushed away his embrace. "I don't think you're stupid, Xav. I'm trying to help you relax before we delve into more complicated territory."

"I don't need coddling," Xavion huffed with a scowl. "Just teach me the actual lesson. I don't need all this extra bullshit that's only a waste of time."

"If it was a waste of time," Malach patiently said as he moved to hold Xav from behind again, "then I wouldn't be doing it."

The demon did his best not to melt as Mal's strong arms wrapped around him. "I don't see how this is entirely necessary," he halfheartedly grumbled, allowing it to happen anyway.

"Maybe this part isn't," Malach admitted as he affectionately rested his chin on top of Xav's shoulder, breathing in his woody cologne with a hint of citrus. "This part? It might just be for me. But you do need to be at peace to accomplish anything productive, and I happen to find this method very appealing for both of us."

Xavion didn't protest a er that. Malach's flirting made his tongue feel too heavy to even speak. So instead he shut his eyes again, breathing in and out as the angel instructed.

"Let go of everything causing you stress at the moment. It can be addressed and resolved later. Take this time to completely relax and just focus on the present." Mal's voice was so so as he spoke such sweet words. Words that made Xav turn into a puddle within Malach's tender grasp.

Malach gently took each of Xavion's hands in his, his palms against the back of Xav's calloused hands. The moment felt so intimate that the demon couldn't help but forget all his worries. How could he when Mal was touching him so lovingly?

"You know, emotions tie in more with emotions than people realize. The strongest warrior isn't the person with the most physical strength, but the most desire to succeed. That willpower will bring you farther than anything else, and it stems from a vulnerable place."

Malach interlocked their fingers together, gently squeezing as a sign of support. "So think of something in your life that makes you want to do better. Something that makes you feel vulnerable, despite falsely thinking that that vulnerability makes you weak."

All of Xavion's life, he'd been taught that emotions equated with weakness. Crying made him a baby, honesty made him ungrateful, and feeling anything at all made him a failure. It was ingrained in his head that he, the next ruler of Hell, couldn't possibly be vulnerable.

But now here he was, with Malach, hearing that the very thing he'd tried not to be his entire life, was actually the key to achieve the one thing he was trying to be.

Strong.

The wall of protection he built was demolished as all his trauma was brought to the forefront of his brain. He wasn't used to feeling anything but anger, so the sudden wave of sadness over this newfound realization was overwhelming. He couldn't help it. He started to cry.

"Xav?" Malach asked in concern, quickly turning the demon around when he heard faint sniffing. "What's wrong? Why are you crying?"

To say Xavion was embarrassed would be an understatement. It was humiliating as a waterfall of tears escaped his burning eyes, but his heart told him it was okay. That he could trust Malach. That Malach would never hurt him or judge him the way anyone else probably would. The angel wasn't like that. He was safe. He was trustworthy.

He cared about Xav in a way no one else ever had in his entire life.

That lingering thought was how the two ended up sitting on the ground, Xavion's large frame curled into Malach's equally large frame as the demon sobbed hysterically.

"It's okay, Xav," Mal murmured quietly as his fingers threaded through Xavion's hair, rocking him back and forth like a baby.

"Everything is okay, I promise. I've got you."

The demon weakly nodded against Malach's firm chest, tightening his arms circling around Mal's neck. His pride had already been obliterated by this point. There was no use in pretending to be strong anymore—although he supposed this did make him strong. At least it did in Mal's eyes.

"I'm sorry for ruining the lesson," Xavion said a er a while. His tears had stopped some time ago but neither man had any desire to move.

"Ruining?" Malach repeated in confusion. "This was a great start. You need to be more in tune with your emotions if you want to see any progress."

"I guess so," Xav sniffled, wiping his puffy eyes. "It still feels like a waste."

"Any time I get to hold you is no waste to me," Malach murmured with a lopsided grin.

Xavion, for once not feeling burdened with having to hid his emotions all the time, smiled back. A smile so raw and genuine that Malach's breath hitched. It was a beautiful sight to behold. The corners of Xav's eyes crinkled as his nose scrunched up, and Malach was nearly overwhelmed with a reaction for the demon.

"I really like you, Xav," Malach whispered.

Xavion swallowed the lump in his throat, his heart speeding up as Mal pressed their foreheads together. It was undeniable that Xav had intense feelings for the angel. He didn't want to lie about them anymore, and he didn't think he had to—when they were alone at least.

So he so ended in Mal's embrace, allowing himself to feel cared for. "I really like you too, Malach. So much that I don't know how to deal with it sometimes," he said honestly.

"Maybe... maybe you could give being my boyfriend a try."

Xavion's bloodshot eyes widened and he pulled back a fraction with parted lips. "You would really want that?"

Malach scoffed in disbelief. "Of course I would. Have I not made that apparent so far?"

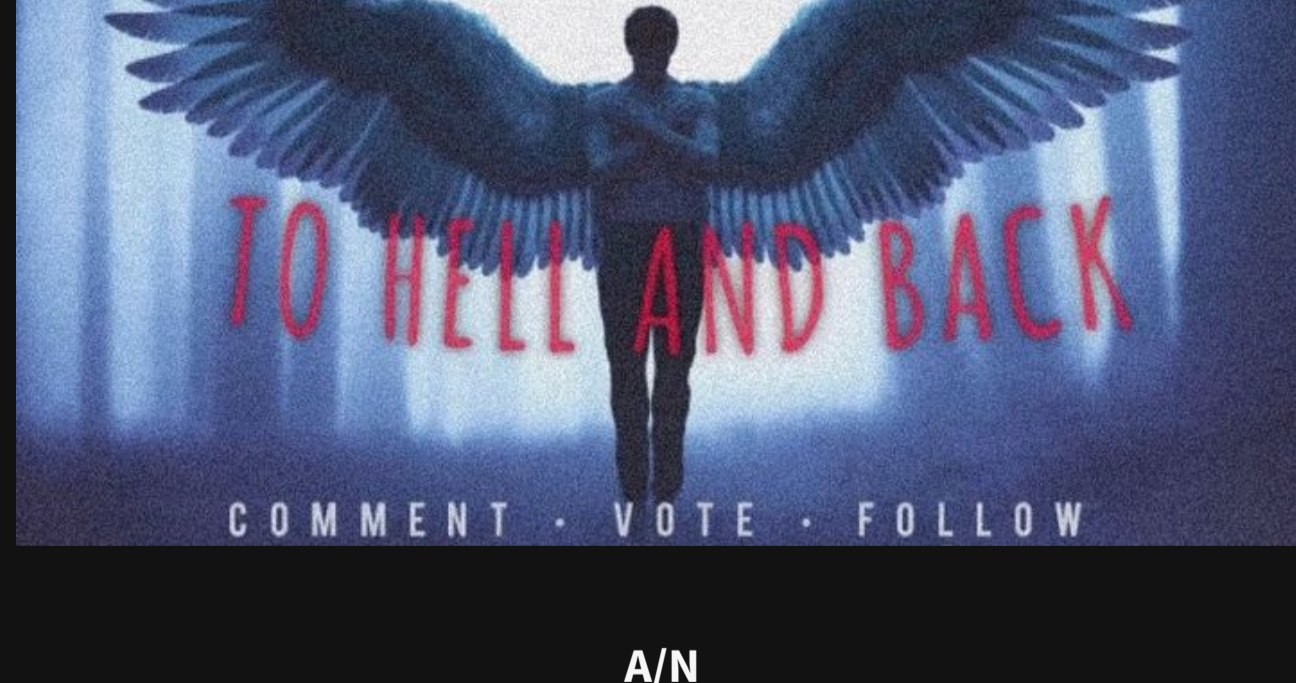
Xavion hated his mind, but truthfully, he wasn't sure exactly what Mal saw in him. While Malach had so much to offer, Xav, on the other hand, had extremely poor anger issues, he wasn't very good at magic yet, and the two being together would cause a lot of unnecessary chaos in their lives. He didn't want to ask and sound insecure, but it was a fair question: why would the man who could have quite literally anything he wanted, choose Xav of all people?

Malach pulled him from his overbearing thoughts. "You can say no if you don't want to. I won't be mad." He tried his best not to sound too disappointed, but Xav could see right through him as Mal stared at the floor.

The demon dismissed any thoughts of what Lucifer would think or how people would react. As he stared at Malach, all Xav could think about was what he wanted and how he felt. No one else mattered. Not the upcoming war, not anyone.

"Mal," Xavion murmured, cupping the angel's face to reconnect their gazes. It was hard for him to be open about how he felt, but he tried his hardest for Malach's sake. "I... I want to. I can't promise I'll be any good at it and you'll have to put up with a lot of shit, but I've never felt like this about anyone before. I didn't think I would ever even want to or that I'd be capable of it, but I want to. I want you, Malach."

Their lips connected, the tender kiss fluttering as their uncontainable smiles prevented them from continuing.



A/N

Why are my eyes sweating rn