

CHAPTER 5: INSTINCTS

"That fight was fucking epic! You fucking destroyed Xavion," Lycus said in awe, nudging Malach when he didn't receive a response.

"Dude? Are you listening?"

The angel stared at the tiles on the hallway floor as they walked alongside each other. His chest still felt heavy, ridden with guilt and regret because of what had happened with Xavion. He couldn't think of a way to make it up to the demon despite how badly he wanted to. The damage had already been done. He couldn't take it back.

"It wasn't a fight, it was just a match," Malach muttered. "And Xav did fairly well too. It isn't that big of a deal."

Lycus scooped, shaking his head. "Yeah right. You had the guy on his ass. Literally."

The angel's eyes narrowed but he refused to look at Lycus. He didn't want to give away what he was feeling. He didn't even completely understand it himself, but that didn't make it any better.

Lycus hummed to himself as the pair headed through the back doors. They were going to the park area outside of the school. It was the signature place for the popular kids to hang out at and they went practically every single day after school ended.

"What do you think he's doing right now?" the werewolf wondered aloud. "How much do you want to bet he's throwing a tantrum like a little kid? He practically looked ready to burn down the entire school after he lost the fight!" he snickered.

Malach, despite how warm-hearted and gentle his soul was handicapped to be, desperately wanted to punch Lycus in the face. But he didn't. He couldn't

"Hey guys!" Haven cheered as the two boys approached the picnic table all of the popular kids sat at. The sunlight felt warm on their skin, a cool breeze quickly soothing over. It was a beautiful day with the sky a vibrant blue and the green grass under their toes.

Malach forced a smile to Haven, moving toward the opposite side of the table until she reached out for his wrist. He stopped as she touched him, internally at war with himself. He knew how much she liked him but wasn't interested. Though he was too kind to be upfront about it and instead let her gently tug him toward the empty seat beside her.

"Do you want to sit next to me?" she asked shyly, batting her long lashes at him. "I could use some help with the Aerokenesis lesson. I haven't quite gotten the hang of it yet and you know about the big test next week."

Malach silently nodded. "Yeah, I can help," he mumbled, feeling obligated to assist. It was in his heart to sacrifice his needs for others and do whatever possible to bring peace.

"So I was thinking—"

Haven's voice was cut off by the fire alarm suddenly blasting through the halls. They were already outside but the sound was so loud it still made their ears ring.

"There's a fire?" Lycus said with his brows raised as a crowd of students rushed out of the building. "That's never happened before. What could've possibly started a fire?"

"Probably some kids experimenting in the lab," Haven shrugged. "Or maybe a group of demons did it. I wouldn't be surprised. You know how those creatures can be," she said with a hint of disgust lingering in her voice.

Malach ignored the two as they talked. He couldn't stop his eyes from searching for Xavion in the cluster of students. He couldn't even find Xavion's friends he was always with, Cyfrin and Zisa. His heart rate sped up as he wondered where the demon could be. Surely he could've been on the opposite side of the school, but Malach's gut knew something was off.

"I need to go check something," he randomly blurted out, interrupting Lycus mid sentence but not stopping for another second. He needed to find Xavion.

He weaved his way through the crowd. People immediately created space for him to walk by when they saw him coming which helped him hurry through the entrance faster.

"Malach, where are you going? It's not safe!" a teacher yelled from behind him, though he didn't hear.

The angel raced through the hallways until he was on Xavion's floor. He wasn't sure exactly which room belonged to the demon, so he tried to focus on Xav's scent, but the burning wood flooding his nostrils masked it.

Malach faintly heard the sound of glass shattering, a scream to run following right after. He stopped for a split second before sprinting towards it.

"But Cyfrin—" a girl spoke.

"I'll get him. Fucking run."

Malach watched Zisa scurry down the stairs. A chandelier was shattered on the ground with flames igniting it. The fire caught on the rug and quickly spread even further. He looked away when he realized Xavion was planning to go back inside his room.

"Xav?" the angel choked, rushing toward Xavion to pull him away from the door. "What are you doing? You should be outside where it's safe!"

Xavion couldn't deny the bubble of relief he felt, but he was also pissed. Partly because of Malach humiliating him. The other part was because he felt safer with the boy now in his presence.

"Get your filthy fucking hands off me," Xavion growled as he shoved Malach away from him. "If you want to play the hero then go save somebody else. I don't need your goddamn help."

He then kicked open the door to his room, freezing when he realized a piece of fallen wood was blocking his way to Cyfrin who was in the middle of a coughing fit. Malach's instincts kicked in and he immediately moved forward but then it was Xavion's turn to hold him back.

"If you go in there, I guarantee you that you'll light on fire and burn to death," he snarked, looking at the angel's pale, soot-covered skin. It wasn't a match for demon skin that was thick enough to ensure protection. "Actually, on second thought, go right ahead."

Malach frowned, knowing Xavion had a point. He was torn between going in anyway and rushing the demon out of the building to keep him safe. They barely knew each other but Malach couldn't contain the urge to protect him.

"Turn into your demon form," Malach said suddenly as a lightbulb went off in his head. "You won't get burned that way. I'll try to calm down the fire while you get him out."

The angel was already forming a ball of water between his hands. He was strong and knew hydrokenesis well, but the flames were spreading so rapidly that he wasn't sure if he'd be able to keep up. At least not fast enough to put out the fire and assist Xavion at the same time.

The demon angrily gritted his teeth. "Gee, why didn't I think of that?" he spat sarcastically.

"You can't shi—" Malach questioned, "Why? What's wrong?"

"I'm sorry, did you forget about the burning down building we're fucking standing in the middle of?" Xavion gawked.

Malach felt his heartstrings tug from realization. Xav couldn't shi—. He was too nervous. He was scared. The angel's urge to protect him grew so much stronger.

"Listen," Malach said in a soft voice, tilting his head as he gently gripped the demon's shoulder, "I'll take care of this. Go outside where it's safe and I'll be there with you after I get Cyfrin out. I promise."

Then, Xavion punched him in the gut. Hard.

Malach, not expecting the impact, bent over with a wheeze as he clutched his stomach. He quickly recovered but by the time he looked up, Xavion had already leapt into the room.

The demon moved as fast as he could. He choked down the coughs his lungs were desperate to let out, leaning down to shove a piece of wood that had fallen on Cyfrin.

"Shit, shit, shit," Xavion muttered to himself when Cyfrin barely responded. The boy didn't seem to be physically harmed very much although delirious and weak, partly because of Xavion's previous actions. He then slapped Cyfrin across the face and let out a sigh of relief when that finally did the trick.

"Ow!" he whined, "What was that for?!"

"Come on, get up." He tugged Cyfrin onto his feet. Cyfrin's knees were wobbly and he couldn't stop coughing but leaned on Xavion for support.

Just as they were about to worm their way out of the door, the demon heard a sound. He stopped in his tracks and slowly looked up to see the wooden bookshelf that was covered in flames wobbling, about to crash down on them. He noticed too late to move, yet too soon to not feel terrified. His grip on Cyfrin tightened as he squeezed his eyes shut.

