Serpent Delivery
by Dacelin

Summary

When Lucifer orders the demons back to Hell, he sends ALL the demons back. And a certain Serpent of Eden would really just like to get back to his love and life in Soho. But Lucifer has other plans for the demon who botched the apocalypse.

- Inspired by A Devil Put Aside (for me) by SpinnerDolphin
I finished watching *Lucifer, Season 4* while waiting for *Good Omens* to come out, so it's no surprise the two got muddled in my mind. I came across SpinnerDolphin's excellent *Angel Network* series, which definitely got me thinking about these two in the same universe. Then I got to wondering how Crowley would deal with being dragged back to Hell at the end of Season 4, so this is the result.

In this, the events of *Good Omens* took place twenty years before the events of *Lucifer, Season 4*. There is absolutely no good reason for that, except it felt like the right span of time in my mind.

I realized after writing that there's an 8 hour time difference between LA and London... but, whatever. It was a really dark afternoon in LA? Aziraphale and Crowley are having dinner at 5 in the morning? Whatever works in your mind.

If you are unfamiliar with the source material or need refreshers on the characters, please see the [CHARACTER AND INFO SHEET](#) for plot summaries and brief bios.

"No, my dear, Rand was not advocating for the dissolving of all government," Aziraphale said as he scooped a last bit of crème brûlée into his mouth.

The demon across the table only scoffed and slouched back in his seat. "Seems like the logical conclusion to draw after reading about her going on about how no one owes anything to anyone else."

Aziraphale merely smiled and wiped his mouth daintily. "I talked to her about that once. We went out for lunch, and I told her individuality was lovely, but we have a duty to protect and aid our fellow man."

"Fellow man, hmm?"

"It's merely an expression."

"How did she take that?"

Aziraphale winced. "She gave me quite a lot of points to the contrary and stuck me with the bill."

Crowley laughed and snagged a book off an adjacent table. "I think I would have liked her."

"Please clean your hands first," Aziraphale said anxiously. "I believe those are first editions."

The angel and demon were dining at home this evening. Home these days was a surprisingly spacious and luxurious apartment on the third level above Aziraphale's bookshop. The neighbors had been puzzled two decades prior as they could not recall the building having an additional level to it, but the bricks had looked as old as the rest of the building, so they certainly had been mistaken in their recollection. They were additionally puzzled by the rooftop garden which sprang...
up shortly after, housing a collection of very confused houseplants who grew frantically under dire threats that they'd be relegated to the cellar if they didn't comply.

The apartment was a curious blend of old and new, frequently scattered with books and scrolls dating well back into the BCs. The book in Crowley's hand only dated back to 1919 AD, but it was autographed by the author, which certainly helped its value. It, and the small collection of pulp novels sitting on the side table, had not been there that morning. But the afternoon had brought a brief visit from a certain young man once known as the 'Great-Beast-That-Is-Called-The-Dragon' but who now preferred his students call him 'Mr. Young'. And whenever he stopped in for a visit, a few stray comic books and pulp novels seemed to wander in to make their home in Aziraphale's ever-growing collection.

It had been some twenty years since the botched apocalypse. Aziraphale and Crowley considered it the best thing which had ever happened to them. In Crowley's case, Hell seemed to have decided he was an embarrassment best forgotten and had largely left him alone. Aziraphale heard rarely from his office, though occasionally he was still sent off on some errand of mercy or another. Mostly the pair had been able to quietly live their lives, spreading the occasional burst of goodness (or annoyance) into a world too busy with its own problems to really notice a little extra celestial or demonic influence.

They'd been relieved on a few occasions to have the antichrist living within driving distance of Soho. When a horde of heavenly hosts had clattered through London in search of an errant fallen angel, Crowley and Aziraphale had quietly nipped off to Tadfield, taking advantage of their sheer strength of Adam's aura to mask their own.

The second time they'd pulled that stunt, Adam had come looking for them, fully aware of their presence within his radar. He said it seemed to him that if they were going to take advantage of him, they ought to at least stop by the house for a proper 'hello'. And bring a brand of krisps from London which even the antichrist could not convince a set-in-her-ways grocer to carry.

Crowley and Aziraphale had visited once a year after that to see how their 'godson' was getting along. They always brought what Aziraphale referred to as 'gifts for the dear boy' and Crowley called, 'tributes to their overlord'. Whichever was right, Adam was relatively benign in his tyranny over supernatural influence in whatever region he considered his.

Adam had moved out of Tadfield after fifteen years of perfect weather had started making too many people suspicious. He'd been reading a great number of stories about the adventures a boy could get up to in boarding school, and a spot abruptly opened up for him at an ideal school for just the right sort of mischief. There'd been a subsequent number of stories in the paper about a friendly gang of boys catching a bank robber hiding out in their school, and a perfect record for the rugby team, despite a wacky series of misadventures regarding reaching every gaming event on time. Crowley just said they were lucky he hadn't been reading boarding school stories involving owls.

Once he'd moved on to the university, and from there decided to spend a few years traveling abroad, Crowley and Aziraphale had seen less of him. He'd stopped in unexpectedly this afternoon to say he was taking a teaching position in Wales. Aziraphale, who was very stuffy and very English, had muttered some choice things about how Wales wasn’t fit for anything except sheep. Crowley, who remembered far too many legends, was worried what Adam's overactive imagination might conjure. But they'd smiled, wished him well, and Crowley was a little relieved that the novels on the table had more to do with an American's adventures on Mars than Merlin or Gwydion.

The angel and demon had wondered on many occasions what was to happen to the son of the Great
Adversary, but as neither of their respective offices seemed to have anything to say on the subject, they'd at last concluded Adam was simply being allowed to live his very human (albeit slightly extraordinary) life. Adam didn't get involved in any supernatural matters, and no one suggested he should. The apocalypse had ended with one more, very unique, human in the world, and that was it. Aziraphale suggested they get on with their lives and not think about it too much, a sentiment to which Crowley wholeheartedly agreed.

Crowley wiped his hands with exaggerated care before flipping through the book. He'd tease Aziraphale about his love of books, certainly. But if pushed too hard, one of them would end up on the couch for the night, and Crowley was very addicted to snuggling. Especially on a night like this which was threatening rain.

"I think at least one might be a duplicate of one I picked up at auction," Aziraphale hummed as he collected the dishes. They were clean by the time he arrived in the kitchen. He began stacking them back in the cupboards.

Crowley opened the book to its first chapter. 

"In the shadows of the forest that flanks the crimson plain by the side of the Lost Sea of Korus in the Valley Dor," he read aloud. 

"Beneath the hurtling moons of Mars, speeding their meteoric way close above the bosom of the dying planet, I crept stealthily along the trail of a shadowy form..."

"Wait until I'm done, my dear!" Arizaphale called. "I can't enjoy it properly from here."

"Did you ever meet Burroughs?" Crowley asked, wandering from the table to the overstuffed sofa taking up a large portion of the living room. He'd never admit it, but he quite liked the old and comfortable furniture pieces Aziraphale had found to replace his modern and rather pointy ones. Especially the sofa. Many were the nights one of them sat reading aloud with the other's head propped comfortably in their lap. Crowley enjoyed the angel's fingers absently grooming his hair almost as much as he enjoyed playing with Aziraphale's curls. He settled down, leafing through the book in search of pictures.

"An American pulp novelist?" Aziraphale scoffed. "Really. I was far too busy in that century with other matters to hunt down the author of Tarzan." He said the name as if it was a bad word.

Crowley smiled and leaned his head back. His eyes sank closed as he listened to Aziraphale prattle about Willa Cather, although he wasn't sure what had brought her to the angel's mind. It occurred to him that he was happy. Happier than he deserved to be considering the life he'd led. But happy none the less. Maybe after 6,000 years on Earth, he was finally feeling a little old, but he couldn't think of anything he'd rather do for the rest of his existence but try out new dessert recipes to tempt the love of his life, and cuddle on this couch with the being he cared more about than any other in all creation. Maybe he was getting soft. He hadn't even threatened a houseplant in months. He smiled sleepily and thought he wouldn't particularly mind going soft.

Dimly he heard Aziraphale calling that he wanted to check something in his collection as he headed downstairs. Crowley settled deeper into the couch and tried to scold himself into staying awake until Aziraphale returned. Maybe just a short...

"YOU DO NOT BELONG HERE! GO HOME!"

The voice came from somewhere across the sea, and from Down Below, and from within Crowley's mind. He leaped fully awake, extending his wings in immediate instinct to flee, but it was far too late for that. More than 6,000 years and a lengthy Fall from grace too late. There was One Voice, One Being's command Crowley simply couldn't escape. He flailed and clung to his current plane of reality with all his demonic might, but in an instant, he was gone.
"I found it!" Aziraphale announced as he came through the apartment door, a novel in hand. "I already have 'The Gods of Mars'. I suppose I can always sell one of them. This is a bookstore after all, and I should keep up appearances. What do you think... Crowley? Where are you?"

Aziraphale stood staring at the empty couch. Crowley disappearing on a whim was nothing strange. But the odd scent of ozone and sulfur wafting in the air filled him with terrible dread. The angel turned a circle, reached for the phone, and realized with a sinking feeling that there was absolutely no one he could call in regards to a missing demon. Adam didn't get involved in supernatural matters, and the witch-finder army didn't extend its hunts to demons, if the army even still existed. And Aziraphale couldn't imagine the questions he'd get if he lit a candle and asked if anyone Up Above knew what had just happened. Because there was a lingering sense that SOMETHING had just happened.

He climbed up to the rooftop garden and stood among the plants, trying to dispel the feeling of utter tragedy clinging around him. But angels were too sensitive to these sort of things. Crowley was missing, and Aziraphale had a terrible sense of foreboding for what the absence meant.

Chapter End Notes

Quote Source: A Warlord of Mars, by Edgar Rice Burroughs
The Value of a Very Good Dog

Chapter Notes

This chapter contains a character who has not appeared in either fandom. Meet Marchosias, one of the demons listed in *The Lesser Keys of Solomon*. Everything you need to know about him is mentioned in the narrative, but here's his Wikipedia page if you're curious about him, or about 17th century demonology.

Crowley fell.

It was not as it had been once upon a time when he'd begun an unfortunate and poorly planned downward saunter which had ended with a very hard thump. No, this time he knew exactly where he was going and who was calling him there. This time he wasn't exactly falling so much as being pulled. But it amounted to a very hard thump all the same.

Crowley spread his wings to their fullest, less to slacken his descent, which was impossible, but more to cling to the form he was currently wearing. He tried to stay mostly human, despite *something* trying very hard to turn him inside out and make the serpent part of him rise to the surface. *Absolutely not*, he snarled inside his head. He didn't have a say in where he was going, but he was going to still have arms and legs when he got there, thank you very much.

He was aware of a great and terrible crowd of demons massing beneath him and hoped very much they weren't all present for his execution. He angled his rapid downward plunge for what looked like a clear spot in the crowd and tried to hit the ground as softly as possible. That wasn't possible. Hell wasn't known for its soft spots. Except maybe its bubbling pools of lava, which were too hot even for Crowley's taste.

Most of the demons didn't seem to be paying any attention to him, except someone on whose tail he landed. The demon shrieked and whirled, then sized him up and thought better of it. That was startling since Crowley wasn't exactly impressive as demons went. He did have a lovely set of wings going for him, if only because of Aziraphale's obsessive preening. Maybe they made him look higher-ranking than the lowly and disgraced field agent that he was.

He tried to blend in with the crowd, not at all liking the sheer volume of demons present - and more arriving every second. What was worse was the overlying sense of panic in the crowd. There were few things more dangerous than an unorganized crowd of panicked demons. Already he could hear multiple fights breaking out.

Crowley folded his wings closer around himself, not eager to accidentally catch them on someone's pointy bits. He kept them out and tense in case a hasty take-off should prove necessary for his immediate survival. *Step one*, his mind prompted, *get to the edge of the crowd. Preferably without catching the attention of...*

"CROWLEY!"

Crowley didn't have many friends in Hell... any actually. He'd spent as little time there as possible, and Hell wasn't exactly the sort of place to inspire trusting, lasting relationships. But he couldn't say he had many enemies either. Probably the overwhelming population of demons had no idea
who he was. So why, of all the thousands of demons crushed into this one spot, why, oh why, did the first one to set eyes on him have to be Hastur?

Crowley tensed and tried to back away from the duke of Hell shoving his way through the crowd with murder in his eyes. Options? Fight? He'd lose. Run? Where would he go? Beg and plead for mercy? Unlikely to be answered with anything but a laugh.

*I didn't get to say goodbye,* he thought miserably as Hastur's talons reached for his throat.

A blur of something dark and furry slammed Hastur with the speed and skill of an attack dog. Point of fact, that was exactly what it was.

The sudden slamming of his head against the ground did more to subdue Hastur than the beast on top of him. The panicked trampling of several dozen demons over the downed form didn't hurt to take him, at least temporarily, out of the fight.

The beast leaped out of the way of the melee and rushed toward Crowley. Crowley registered the vague shape of a German Shepherd wearing a service dog vest, a surprisingly familiar sight among this bewilderment. "Marchosias," he gasped.

"Get this off of me!" The dog yelped in something of a panic as he shoved his side into Crowley's hands.

A glance confirmed the demon was losing the battle to maintain his Earthly shape, and nothing good would come to the reputation of a marquis of Hell if he was recognized wearing a vest reading 'service'.

Crowley undid the buckles and collar as fast as his fingers could fly. Not a moment too soon as the German Shepherd reverted to being his demonic self - a fire-breathing wolf with eagle wings and a serpent tail.

Some fallen angels got all the impressive features, Crowley thought a little bitterly as he considered the small serpent which was the body he'd found himself stuck with after his Fall. Well, at least he still had this body. And it wasn't trying to turn itself inside out anymore.

"Let's get out of the crowd," Marchosias panted, arching his back as if he'd like nothing more than to sit down for a good scratching of the spot where his wings had just erupted. "Have you seen the others?"

"I just landed," Crowley replied, flaring out his wings to shield both of them as they shoved their way through the horde. "Did we all get called?"

"It seems so." Marchosias growled and showed his teeth at a gaggle of young demons until they backed from his path.

"Do you know what's going on?"

The canine demon snorted. "One minute I'm walking up a street in Chicago. The next our king is dragging us all Hell-ward." He glanced with narrowed eyes at Crowley. "All I know is this isn't going to end well for us."

Yes, that was probably a true statement.

The two demons found a space against a wall, gathering up several more compatriots along the way. Gradually they were joined by the rest of a select-minded party. They crowded together,
those with wings creating a barricade, and those without threatening with weapons or fangs any
other demons who strayed too near the group.

There were eleven of them all total - the last remaining demons on earth as far as they knew. They
kept up with each other casually - checking in every decade or so just to see who was still around.
They weren't friends - none of them would have called the others that. Most of them would have
willingly sold out the others if need arose. But over the centuries they'd all come to agree that in a
choice between Hell, Heaven, and Earth, Earth was the best of the lot and they'd prefer to keep
their lives there. Ideally without interference from Above or Below.

Once upon a time Earth had hosted far more field agents - both demonic and celestial. But as
humanity had proved just fine at creating their own Heavens and Hells without assistance, the
majority of agents had gradually been pulled and not replaced. The demons too good at their jobs
had been hunted down by Heavenly Hosts and snuffed out of existence. Those terrible at their jobs
had found themselves enjoying Hell's accommodations as permanent victims. The stupid had been
found out by humanity, discorporated, and shunted back to Hell where they were not returned to
Earthly corporeal bodies.

Of the eleven remaining on Earth, four (Marchosias included) had been summoned by human
intention, and never bothered to return to Hell. Two others remained due to bureaucratic mix-ups in
which Hell had simply lost track and forgotten about them.

The remaining five were like Crowley - field agents flying carefully below the radar of Heaven and
Hell as much as possible. Not causing enough trouble to get Heaven's attention, and turning in just
enough reports to convince Hell they still belonged on the payroll.

Some had worked out arrangements with their Heavenly counterparts (Crowley had facilitated it in
one case). All fibbed their reports as much as possible and avoided any work that could draw
attention.

The two things the eleven had in common was a preference for Earth and the creativity of
humanity over Hell and demonkind, and an absolute certainty that if they ever returned to Hell,
they were royally screwed.

And today was the day.

The cavern continued filling up with demons. Crowley recognized enough faces from enough
professions around Hell to suspect absolutely everyone was being summoned. He said as much to
his companions, receiving only tight-lipped nods in reply. The good news was their lot wasn't
being singled out. The bad? Absolutely everything else.

"STAY," came the command in everyone's minds.

The weaker demons whimpered and cowered to the floor at the force of the decree. Even the
stronger demons staggered and panted.

Crowley glanced sideways at Marchosias. The two of them were the only fallen angels of their
party, and Marchosias outranked him by quite a lot. But even a marquis was clearly not immune to
the force of the order. His ears were flattened against his skull, and his flaming breath had turned
to nervous puffs of smoke. Crowley fought the urge the pat him on the head.

Marchosias wasn't a bad sort as demons went. He'd actually regretted the Fall and had spent some
amount of time trying to get back into Heaven's good graces before giving up and embracing a new
life on Earth as a sort of canine eco-terrorist. Crowley suspected that, although Marchosias
probably had had nothing to do with Chernobyl, he had a lot to do with keeping humanity well away from the area for as long as they had, thus creating an odd sort of wildlife paradise which was where he could usually be found.

That was when he wasn't masquerading as a service dog so he could enjoy the best cuisine at all the best restaurants in the world. Crowley and Aziraphale had taken him pub-hopping on the occasion he'd visited them. Marchosias and Aziraphale had argued long into the evening about the merits of Heaven over Hell. Sadly, their blossoming friendship had terminated abruptly when Marchosias had declared sushi to be utterly disgusting. And although Aziraphale would tolerate blasphemies against Heaven if it led to a good argument, he refused to consort with any who defamed the name of the cuisine and art form which was sushi.

Right now, Marchosias looked as terrified and confused as the rest of them, and Crowley saw that no other high-ranking demons in the crowd looking any better. No, this was very bad.

Fighting died down, the demons clustering together mostly based on professions and types. No one really trusted anyone else, but in this madness, they took what reassurance they could from the least likely individuals in the crowd to stab them from behind.

They waited. They'd been commanded to do so. Free will wasn't much of an option for any of them. Especially not with THAT VOICE still echoing in the cavern.

And then, when they'd waited for an eternity, or maybe just a few long and horrible minutes, HE made his appearance.

In Hell, this was He with a capital H. The Great Adversary. The Father of Lies. The Great Deceiver. The Lord of Hell. Lucifer Morningstar.

He came down in a flash of white and glowing wings. The demons threw up hands and claws to shield their eyes against the terrible radiance of their king.

He alighted on his throne, poised and powerful. Anger and might rippled in a wave over the assembly.

The demonic horde hit the ground as one body. Every head bowed before the Lord of Hell. Whatever they privately thought of him, whatever dark secrets they held in their hearts, Lucifer controlled and commanded the horde with a twitch of his finger. Not one here would dare stand against him. Not radiating fury and strength as he was.

"I have returned," the king boomed in a voice which carried across the cavern and reverberated in every skull.

"He was gone?" Crowley hissed to the demon nearest him.

He was shushed from several sides.

"I have been patient with you," Lucifer continued. "I trusted you to get on with your work and not require me hovering over your every step." He glared down at the assembly. "It seems I was mistaken."

He flared out his wings, looming large and horrifying over them as those brave or dumb (Crowley) enough to look up could later attest. His form shifted - reflecting both the leather-winged, devil-faced sovereign of Hell, and the blinding and beautiful light-bringer of Heaven. Lucifer had lost none of his glory in his Fall - it was just fed by darker flames now.
"There will be no more rebellion. There will be no more violating of my laws. Possession was banned. Those who disobeyed..." His eyes swept the crowd. "I know who you are. You will know my wrath. There is nowhere in Hell for you to go."

"The rest of you..." He descended from his throne in a headlong plunge. Demons scattered to escape the buffeting of his wings as he landed on their level. "...Go to your tasks. Do as you have been commanded. I will examine each and every one of you. And hope I find none of you lacking. Go!"

Demons bolted from the cavern as fast as feet, coils, and wings could take them.

In seconds the only remaining in the room were the very young who had no assigned place, those who'd decided their most necessary task was to fawn attention on their king, and the small gaggle of Earthbound demon who whispered uncertainly to one another as to what they should do. Did anyone have a home they could hide in? Who'd come from Hell most recently? A thousand years ago? That wasn't good. They had to go somewhere...

"You lot!"

The group whirled, then bunched together and cowered as Lucifer stalked toward them.

"What are you still doing here?" The king demanded, fury ringing in his voice.

The demons glanced among each other, most eyes fastening on Marchosias as the highest ranking among them. But Marchosias had sunk lower than the rest, trying hard not to draw attention to himself.

Crowley understood why. No one lied to Lucifer Morningstar, and for Marchosias to confess he'd been vacationing on Earth for the last 3,000 years wouldn't end well for any of them.

But someone had to speak up, and Crowley supposed he couldn't fall much lower in Hell's esteem than ruining the apocalypse and hooking up with an angel. (He realized a second too late that, in Hell, life could ALWAYS be worse.) Besides, he owed Marchosias for taking out Hastur.

"We're field agents," he blurted out thoughtlessly. "On Earth."

"Not anymore," Lucifer snapped with a cool air of finality. "No one is returning to Earth. You'll remain here. Every last one of you. Now, get out of my sight!"

The demons scattered.

*That was short-sighted,* Crowley thought soon after, as he huddled in an unoccupied crevice of Hell and listened in a panic for any sound of approaching footsteps. He was now trapped in Hell. Without the protection of a profession. Without the protection of the few demons he could almost call friends. Without anything.

The Serpent of Eden curled himself as tight and small as he could make himself, and prepared to hide for the foreseeable future.

Eternity if it came to that.
Once long ago, there had been a Garden.

It wasn't a garden one could find on Earth now. Not among the islands in the Caribbean. Not between the rivers in the Middle East. Not in the Midwest of America.

Nothing was left of it now but myths and murmurs.

But it had existed. It had been real. The first life had belonged there.

Evil had not.

The Fallen had no place there. They'd been shut out. Quite firmly. Lots of angels with flaming swords had made it abundantly clear they weren't welcome.

"Forget it," some of the Fallen had said. "It's probably rubbish anyway."

But the best way to make a rebellious son want IN was to say he must stay OUT. So Lucifer wanted in.

"Find me a way," he'd commanded those who'd followed him into the Below. "Find a way into the Garden."

And so the strong had stormed the gates. The agile had swarmed the walls. The swift had launched themselves over the sides.

All had failed.

And then, when the Lord of Hell was grinding his teeth in fury, and taking that fury out on any who dared glance his way, a small serpent of a demon came to him and hissed the words he wanted to hear.

"I've found a way in."

Crowley surveyed the gates of Hell and reckoned if he could get into Eden, he could get out of Hell. Not the direct way. Not through the gates. Any of the gate. No, designated throughways were never useful ways anywhere forbidden.

If you wanted to get somewhere, you had to think creatively. You had to arrange things.

It was like driving the Bentley at top speed through London. There was a way. You just had to make sure nothing was in the way.
And if you did the impossible right, nobody even noticed.

Crowley wasn't sure how long he'd been in Hell. Time wasn't really relative there. The passing of time didn't entirely concern him. Aziraphale would wait for him. Even on the off chance the angel hooked up with a human out of loneliness, Crowley didn't have a problem sharing for the brief span the human would be alive. He'd have his angel all to himself in the end.

No, the only way he'd lose Aziraphale was if Heaven took him back. And he trusted the angel would find a way to leave a message if that happened. And chances were Aziraphale would do exactly what Crowley was doing - find a way home.

It was more important to do this right and stay alive, than rush and fail.

Crowley slithered through the bowels of Hell, familiarizing himself with a place he'd spent as little time as possible in his entire immortal existence. Interesting place. Deeply, deeply unpleasant place. Crowley didn't even want to know what he was crawling through most of the time. He ignored the damned. He avoided other demons. Even if he could find the other field agents, he was getting out alone. A group would just draw notice.

To call Heaven 'Above' and Hell 'Below' were both incorrect. Neither were on the same plane of existence as Earth. Except that they were. Except when they weren't.

Crowley always though the Norse and their World Tree was the most accurate way to explain the cosmic realms. This over here, that over there, all connected by a tree. Separate. But connected. You couldn't walk from one to the other. Except when you could.

But in those stories, there was a squirrel who could run up and down the tree easy as you please. Visit any world it wanted anytime.

He just had to figure out how Ratatoskr did it.

Human souls came in through the gates. They did not go out.

Not-fallen angels came in through the gates (on the off chance of visitors). They went out that way too. Demons on official business used the gates. With permission. No go.

Demons could get out if summoned by someone on Earth. Could Aziraphale summon him? If it didn't work for angels, he might ask Anathema to do it. But summoning was a noisy business. It might attract the wrong kind of attention. Crowley had to get out without anyone noticing he was missing. And anyway, Anathema might bind him to clean up a river or some other disgusting task.

There were the rivers - Styx and Lethe and the others. But those were guarded. And unpleasant. Not the sort of water anyone, demon or not, could safely touch.

How had Dante gotten out? Through Lucifer's innermost chamber...

There was something to that. The outskirts of Hell had seemed the logical place to hunt. But it wasn't as if the outskirts of Hell were actually any closer to an exit than the innermost reaches.

The downside was the deeper one went, the more populated Hell became.

Well, Crowley could hopefully blend in. Or hide effectively. The only demon he really needed to watch out for was Hastur. And maybe Beelzebub. And anyone who could recognize him from the field office - although he'd rarely reported in person. Probably none of the Lilim would know him by sight, and most of the fallen were either thoroughly dead or insane. If he kept to his serpentine
form, he was less likely to be recognized as one of the Fallen. He just had to keep out of sight as much as possible.

So Crowley descended deep into Hell. And with every length he slithered, he sought any sign of possible escape.

He explored dozens of possibilities, coming up short every time. But Crowley was an optimist. Also, he was very much in survival mode. He would not do well in Hell long-term. Earth was waiting for him. Aziraphale was waiting for him. He simply had to get out.

He eluded Hell-Loops, torture sessions, sulfur pits, hellhounds, serpent-eating serpents, wraiths, and all the other nightmares of Hades. He snuck through crowds of demons, some torturing each other when they couldn't find available souls. He escaped every which way until he found himself in the castle of the Ruler of Hell.

Here he found many more possibilities. Such a brutally powerful presence residing here for so long had inevitably made the boundaries of reality shiver. There were cracks in the foundation of Hell. Not enough to topple the firmaments or anything so poetic as that. No. But there were possibilities if you were a particularly small, particularly skilled, particularly desperate demon.

Crowley flicked out his tongue and tested the aura of yet another crevice. No... wait... Yes! Yes, this was what he needed. A soft place between the worlds. Enough wiggling. A little digging. A LOT of arranging. He could do this! It didn't matter where on the planet it dropped him. It could be the middle of the ocean for all he cared (although he didn't fancy the Antarctic). So long as he could get to THAT realm, he could get home!

He thrust his wedge-shaped head into the hole and wriggled little by little deeper inside, widening the hole very slowly and carefully as he went. Create a way. Get him...

Something had him by the tail!

Crowley thrashed frantically. He couldn't twist around and strike. He had little he could grip. He writhed and fought, trying to dislodge the vice around his tail. But little by little, he was dragged backward, the grip growing stronger and more certain as the hands found more to clutch.

In Crowley's panicked mind, there was only one plan. He let his body go limp, popping out of the hole in a rush. Quick as lightning, he whirled around to strike his captor.

Crowley was a particularly venomous viper. Not enough to kill, admittedly. He wasn't strong enough to kill a demon, and he was forbidden from killing humans. So his venom didn't do him much good. But it could sicken and, hopefully, incapacitate a demon long enough for him to escape.

Unfortunately for Crowley, or perhaps fortunately, the individual holding his tail knew quite a lot about snakes. He knew how they moved. He knew how fast they were. And he knew how to grab them right behind the head to keep them immobilized.

Crowley was caged in a tight and effective grip before he got anywhere near anything he could sink his teeth into. An instant later, he realized how very fortunate that was. His captor held him up to his face. Crowley quailed and shook as he stared back at the coldly amused eyes of Lucifer Morningstar.
For a fun history/religious lesson... There have been many, many proposals throughout time of the location of the Garden of Eden. The ones mentioned here are:

- Between the Tigress and Euphrates Rivers - where human life is said to have originated.
- Jackson County, Missouri - Where the Church of Latter Day Saints (Mormons) said it could be found.
- The Island of Trinidad - Christopher Columbus claimed it was the Garden of Eden when he first sailed around it. (Didn't stop him from destroying the place and enslaving the natives. There's a man who deserves whatever Hell-Loop he's in.)
The Lord of Hell ambled through his rounds with a snake held securely in one hand. Plenty of demons noticed it. Several noticed that the snake looked terrified beyond the ability to hiss. Not one dared ask why Lucifer had decided to carry a pet with him.

Lucifer seemed particularly interested on this occasion in visiting the regions of Hell in which demons were being punished for crimes against him. He asked the guards after Dromos and marveled approval to see at how the last demon to annoy him was paying for his crimes.

Dromos screamed beautifully for mercy the whole time.

The snake practically turned to jelly in Lucifer's hand.

True to his word, Lucifer was checking up on each and every demon in Hell. He was mostly satisfied with what he found. As satisfied as a devil trapped where he did not want to be, doing a job he did not want to do, separated from everything he cared about, could possibly be.

Admittedly, that wasn't much.

It was hard not to kick the fawning demons out of his way.

It was hard not to ask the torturers what was the point of what they did.

It was hard not to ask the guards if they were there to keep him in.

It was hard to endure.

But at least today had delivered him some unexpected fun.

He wondered a little if it was possible for a demon to die of fright. The snake had stopped struggling the moment it recognized him. It had shaken very badly for a while. Now it hung limp and glassy-eyed in his grip. He'd teasingly slung it over his shoulder for a moment when he needed two hands.

The snake had lain prone and outwardly dead the whole time.

Lucifer returned to his private chambers after a lengthy and tedious trip through the necessities of running Hell.

How very much he hated his kingdom.

He'd redecorated his chambers in model of his penthouse over Lux. He wasn't sure if that made him feel at home, or just relived the misery of where he was not. His own personal Hell-Loop.

What would the good doctor say?

He dumped the snake onto the bar and sauntered into his bedroom to change into something more comfortable. The formality of suits seemed necessary for his returned position to being the Lord of Hell, but it was nice to slip off the jacket and stiff shirt at the end of a long day of work. Not that Hell boasted night and day. Night happened pretty much whenever Lucifer decided he was done working.

Now more casually dressed, he returned to the bar and poured himself a drink.
The snake had balled its coils together as tight as possible, hiding its head somewhere amidst its length. Beyond that, it hadn't moved from where it had been dropped.

Lucifer took his time pouring a drink and taking a sample taste. He grimaced. Something about Hell utterly fouled alcohol. That was one of many problems with Hell. Whatever vice was your passion, Hell found a way to ruin it.

"Sit up," Lucifer grumbled. "I can’t bloody well have a conversation with you like that."

The demon obediently uncoiled, transforming as his coils settled themselves into their more human pattern.

The demon was not particularly remarkable. A lanky human shape with yellow serpent eyes, hair hovering in color somewhere between red and black, and a lovely pair of sable wings. The demon sat cross-legged on the bar, hunched in on himself, obviously not daring to move from where Lucifer had dropped him. He folded his wings tight against his back, making himself as small as possible.

Lucifer eyed him coldly. He knew who it was, of course. He hadn't forgotten a single member of the Fallen. He knew most of the Lilim by name as well, though the younger demons could turn into a forgotten muddle in his mind until they distinguished themselves somehow. Since his return, the youngsters had been tripping over each other to please him. Irritating little beasts. It was rather relaxing to be alone in a room with a demon who didn't look likely to please Lucifer in any way except regarding how loudly he could scream.

He couldn't recall having seen much of Crawly since the Eden business. And even then, after he'd gotten Lucifer in, the demon had hastily gotten out of Lucifer's way. If identities hadn’t become muddled, and Crawly hadn't stuck his nose where it didn't belong, he probably could have gotten in and out of the story with none the wiser. But he had, and his part in the whole business had become something of an annoyance to Lucifer. Not that he'd minded having someone to blame for everything which happened immediately after. He just never liked sharing credit. Gradually in his mind, he'd taken the solo role. Even the incident with Eve recently hadn't reminded him of who else had been in the Garden.

Really, he'd mostly forgotten that a demon named Crawly even existed.

"What were you up to, Crawly?" He asked.

"Crowley," the demon corrected in a mutter, then flinched and ducked lower. "Trying to get out," he explained hastily.

"Out?" Lucifer rummaged through the liquor shelves for something which wouldn't taste like rubbing alcohol once poured. "Out of my castle?"

"Out of Hell," the demon replied.

Lucifer turned around quickly, his eyes snapping with Hellfire. "Your orders are to remain here." He stepped closer and loomed over the shrinking demon. His hand shot out and caught Crawly by the throat. "What’s so important you'd disobey me? Tell me," his voice turned to a purr as he powered up his satanic abilities. "Where is it you desired to go?"

Crawly squeaked and gasped, at last unwillingly fighting out the reply. "Soho... a bookstore."

Lucifer wasn't entirely sure what answer he was expecting, but it definitely wasn't that. He loosened his grip a few degrees. "A bookstore in Soho?" He repeated. "Why there?"
"I live there," the demon replied, his eyes flicking around the room to light on anything other than the devil currently strangling him.

Lucifer tightened his grip again, dissatisfied with the answer. It wasn't as if Crawly needed to breathe anyway, although he was squirming as if he'd forgotten that fact. "So you thought you'd pack up a few things before moving down here properly?" He mocked. "Just needed to pick up your pornography collection before returning like a good little demon. Is that it?"

Crawly looked as if he wanted to just nod and comply with Lucifer's mocking suggestions, but at the moment Lucifer had his influence turned up so high that the demon couldn't not answer, and definitely couldn't lie. Free will wasn't allowed when Lucifer didn't want it to be. Not when his demons were concerned.

"I wasn't coming back," Crawly gasped in a weak whimper.

"Crawly," Lucifer scolded in a friendly purr, his tone undercut with daggers. "You're not helping your cause."

The demon trembled.

"What's so important that you'd try and run away?" Lucifer puzzled. "You must know you'd be found. And you're not foolish enough to go where you know they'll look for you."

Crowley choked out a frightened whine in response.

Lucifer yanked the demon off the bar and held him suspended by the neck, forcing his terrified underling to look him in the eye. "So why there?" He demanded. "What's there?"

A new level of desperation came to Crawly's eyes. He clawed frantically at Lucifer's grip as his suspended body writhed with serpentine terror.

Lucifer gave him a few shakes until the demon gave up the fight.

He could just crush Crawly's neck, Lucifer mused. He hadn't done that in a long time. Detective Decker was always on hand to order him to set the nice human down before he did any permanent damage. The demon had no such protection.

The reminder of the good detective made him pause. She'd definitely not approve of his current actions. She'd also always insisted they had the full story before moving on to the punishment part.

And punishment was done by the proper authorities. Not on a whim by the arresting officers.

Here, Lucifer was judge, jury, and executioner. He'd been merciless since his return to Hell. It was the fault of the demons he'd had to return. Each and every one of them would know his displeasure in the worst way should they step out of line. But... maybe a little human logic had rubbed off on him. He should probably be clear on what was going on before he moved on to punishment.

"Answer me!" he demanded. "What's on Earth which made you risk the wrath of Hell?"

That Crawly didn't want to answer was evident from his terror and thrashing. That he didn't have a choice was known to both of them. "Aziraphale!" He shrieked at last, the words coming out with greatest agony.

Aziraphale? Who was...?

An image swam to Lucifer's mind of a slightly pudgy principality with a penchant for music.
Definitely not one of the Fallen. Definitely not anyone Lucifer had ever taken more than a passing glance at.

But the look in Crawly's eyes (somewhere beneath the terror of the moment) said he'd taken much more than a passing glance. And Lucifer recognized that expression. He knew exactly what it meant.

He released his grip, and Crawly crashed to the floor. The demon balled himself into a defensive curl, his arms wrapped around his wounded neck and his wings raised in feeble attempt to ward off the inevitable blows.

Lucifer leaned against the wall and sipped something which now tasted like Clorox. It suited his mood.

He missed Chloe.

And here was someone who might actually understand what he was going through.

Not that it looked like Crawly was going to be much for conversation for a while.

"Could you really get out, Crawly?" Lucifer asked, methodically swirling his glass. No ice. That was definitely not something which could be found in Hell.

The demon peeked from under his wing, clearly wary at Lucifer's sudden change in tone. "...I thought I'd found a way," he admitted.

Lucifer continued to study his glass and wish for ice cubes. It kept him from wishing for other things. "Could you get back in the same way?"

The demon's tongue flicked nervously. "Probably."

Ideas were forming in Lucifer's mind. He couldn't leave Hell. Not in the state it was in. He couldn't send someone waltzing in and out of the gates. They'd draw attention. They'd attract questions. He could not be seen as weak in his current state. And he couldn't do anything which might put Chloe in the wrong sort of notice.

But Crawly had once facilitated another love affair of his. And he'd not been the one who'd gotten caught sneaking in and out that time.

"You're getting your wish," Lucifer announced. "You're going back to Earth."

Crawly looked up quickly, clearly confused and fearful of this change in sentiments.

Lucifer put his foot down on Crawly's wing. He didn't apply pressure. It wouldn't be necessary to get his point across.

"You're going to go where I send you," Lucifer purred. "You're going to deliver some messages for me. And you're going to come right back when you're done." He squatted down and took Crawly by the chin. "And if you even think of crossing me... well... angels are just as easy to track down as demons. How well do you think your friend would do in Hell?"
I finished the *Good Omens* mini-series last night. Just so we're clear, this is based off the book, not the show. That distinction is only really important for two things. First - the ending in relation to Aziraphale, Crowley, and Lucifer is the much less dramatic in the book. Second, Aziraphale's sword becomes War's sword on the show, but it's not entirely specified in the book. Plus, the sword has a very different history on *Lucifer*, so it couldn't just be left with the humans. In either case, I'm combining several canons here, so details will be different from both shows and the book out of necessity of fitting them together.

Also, although I have no problem writing Aziraphale as if Michael Sheen is saying the lines, I'm trying not to hear David Tennent's voice while I write Crowley or else he's going to come off sounding like a combination of Doctor Who and Scrooge McDuck.

Aziraphale never forgot the first time he met Crowley.

At the time he had no idea the encounter would alter his immortal existence.

He'd wanted to see Earth. Everyone was whispering about it. This was the project the Almighty had been working on for so long. It wasn't finished yet, but angels were starting to get opportunities to visit. To help facilitate the Grand Plan. To thwart the workings of evil.

It all sounded so much more interesting than Heaven.

Aziraphale had been giddy when his transfer was approved. He even had a title! Guardian of the Eastern Gate. How interesting! Guardian of what, though? Well, he'd find out when he got there.

It was lovely at first. Feeling so important standing with his flaming sword, protecting the newly created from the ravages of the world. He liked watching life in the Garden. And sometimes a lion or something would wander past on the other side of the wall. It spiced things up.

There had been a few demon attacks right at the beginning. But those had stopped.

Aziraphale had been proud of himself at first. He'd thwarted the evil so well they weren't even coming by anymore!

Gradually he started wishing evil would occasionally stop by for a little more thwarting. And maybe bring him a scroll to read while they were at it.

"You look bored," a voice remarked one day when Aziraphale was trying not to nod off. He'd discovered the hard way that angels could fall asleep if they had nothing better to do with their time. Explaining the small brush fire his sword had caused had been difficult.

Aziraphale looked around to find a serpent coiled just out of flaming sword reach.

He knew it was a demon, of course. There were serpents in the Garden, but they weren't known for being conversationalists. They also weren't so obviously venomous as this one clearly was. "You're
not supposed to be here," he said.

The serpent shrugged an indifferent ripple down his body. "I don't see what all the fuss is about. It's a pretty Garden, but does it need this much security?" He lifted his head and looked around. "And I don't understand why there are gates. If nothing's supposed to go in or out, why bother with gates? Why not put a roof on it?"

Deep down, Aziraphale had been having similar thoughts, but he'd pushed those quandaries back down. Questioning orders wasn't supposed to be in his nature. "I'm sorry but I have to ask you to leave." He really was sorry. No one had stopped to talk to him in ever so long. All he got from his superiors was a quick query of had he seen anything worth reporting? No? Goodbye, then.

The serpent regarded him lazily. "I don't think you do."

"But that's my job," Aziraphale protested.

"I thought your job was to keep things out," the serpent replied sensibly. "And I'm already in. There's nothing in your job about putting things out."

"My job is to thwart evil," Aziraphale protested. "Which you are, so I have to thwart you." He did not, however, raise his sword to do exactly that.

"I'm not evil," the serpent protested. "I do evil sometimes. But I don't think that should define entirely who I am. Besides." He settled a little more comfortably on the tree branch he'd claimed. "I'm not doing anything evil right now. My boss told me to go make some trouble, but there's not a lot of trouble to be found. There's only the two humans, and they're busy right now. I'm not going to make trouble for the animals. That's just mean."

Aziraphale nodded. On that they agreed.

"And if I make trouble for the angels, I'm liable to get stabbed," the serpent went on. "It's too nice a day to think about being stabbed."

"You might make trouble for me," Aziraphale reasoned. "If someone catches us talking."

"If they do, just make a lunge at me and I'll slip off and we can say we both did our jobs."

"How did you get in?" Aziraphale asked. The question was partially out of curiosity, and partially because he thought he could claim to be interrogating the demon if someone caught them.

The serpent looked smug. "That's my secret." He looked as if he wanted Aziraphale to push him for the answer. When the angel didn't, the serpent looked glum, but went on in anyway. "It's just a matter of arranging things, really."

"What do you mean?" Aziraphale asked despite trying hard not to say anything. He'd been counting not asking as thwarting evil since the serpent clearly wanted him to.

"You just have to make sure ahead of time nothing's in the way."

Aziraphale thought this was nonsense. "Did you trick an angel out of their post?"

"No, of course not. There would have been a row if I had. I just found a spot that was unguarded. Not anywhere near you," he added hastily. "I wouldn't be talking to you if I'd snuck past your section. That would be rude."
"You might be lying to me about that."

"I might," the serpent agreed. "But lying's tricky. It seems small, but it leads to all sorts of trouble if you don't arrange it right. It's really best to just say what's true, and leave out the parts that you'd rather lie about."

"Are you leaving out parts with me?"

"Of course I am. What kind of demon would I be if I told an angel the absolute truth all the time?"

Aziraphale was about to ask what he'd left out, but there was shouting in the Garden just then. True to suggestion, the angel made a lunge at the serpent, and the serpent darted into the underbrush. Several angry cherubim arrived demanding to know if Aziraphale had seen a demon. Yes, he had. And he'd tried to catch it. But he'd failed. No, he hadn't gone chasing after it. Why? Well, he was the Guardian of the Eastern Gate, of course. He couldn't exactly leave his post, could he?

When they'd gone, Aziraphale had the uneasy feeling he'd been tempted and had lost. But he also couldn't find he felt terribly bad about it.

The serpent - Crawly (but he wasn't fond of the name) - came to visit him from time to time after that. Aziraphale looked forward to the visits because he had nothing else to look forward to. He did suggest to his superiors, because he felt his should, that someone check up on the unguarded section of the walls. He assumed someone followed up it, but Crawly continued to get in anyway.

He heard from the other angels that the Great Adversary had snuck into the Garden and was consortign with the humans. It was clear to Aziraphale at least that Crawly was the one who could get through the walls, but he had no particular interest in the Garden, and only kept returning as escort for the Great Adversary. Once inside, Lucifer would tell Crawly to bugger off while he made acquaintance with the humans, and Crawly would go chat up Aziraphale or play with the animals until Lucifer was either spotted, or decided it was time to leave.

Aziraphale felt rather conflicted and hoped one of his superiors would deal with Lucifer so he wouldn't have to stew. Obviously the easiest way to keep evil influences out would be to eliminate Crawly, but Aziraphale thought a death sentence for violating a 'keep out' sign seemed rather harsh.

Aziraphale justified that his purposes were to guard the Eastern Gate and thwart evil. If he saw Crawly do something evil, then he could thwart him. Until then, he'd concentrate on guarding the gate.

Meanwhile, Lucifer had taken a fancy to the humans and spent quite a lot of time with the woman in particular. It concerned everyone, of course. But it was Crawly who did something about it.

"He told me to make trouble," he explained to Aziraphale as they sat together on the wall and listened to the argument going on in what had been a blissfully peaceful Garden only hours before. "I did."

What had happened was he'd suggested to the humans that if they were going to run around with his boss, they ought to have the insight to know what informed consent looked like. One taste of the forbidden fruit and the world had suddenly seemed very different to them.

A three-way argument was now raging somewhere near the Tree of Good and Evil. Eve was angrily wanting to know why Adam never treated her as well as Lucifer did, and suggesting he was still hung up on his ex. Adam was shouting back that at least Lilith was willing to be experimental, and maybe he should get a turn with Lucifer if he was so much better. Lucifer was insisting he was
happy to engage in a three-way, but could everyone please keep their voices down?

"I'm not sure this is the trouble anyone wanted," Aziraphale replied.

Crawly shrugged. "What's the big deal with knowing the difference between good and evil? Might make it easier for everyone in the long run. And it's a first offense anyway. They'll talk it out. Be forgiven. That's what your side does. What's the harm?"

Quite a lot as it turned out. Aziraphale was not sure who got the worst of it when it was over. The humans, probably. They got turned out of the Garden. But he also felt rather sorry for Crawly, who was left to take the blame when Lucifer vanished while no one was looking.

It wasn't right to feel sorry for a demon, Aziraphale reminded himself. It wasn't right to like a demon either.

But they kept bumping into each other.

At first it was a little hostile, but they worked out the ground rules early on. After that it was hard not to get to like one of the few other celestial beings on the planet.

It was Crowley (he'd changed the name soon after they left the Garden) who helped him get his flaming sword back, with the promise Aziraphale would never stick him with it. It was Aziraphale who warned Crowley out of Babylon when a sovereign with occult skills started binding demons to the crown's bidding. It was Crowley Aziraphale asked for help in tracking down a nice young man he was supposed to be protecting but who'd eluded him. It was Aziraphale Crowley came to for protection when he'd annoyed the wrong heavenly hosts.

By the time they came to their official Arrangement, they'd had an informal arrangement for so long that it felt only natural. And it was abundantly clear neither of their superiors were paying much attention to them. What was the point of working too hard at thwarting and undermining when Earth was so much more interesting than any divine plan?

Aziraphale didn't know when he started missing Crowley if they didn't see each other for a few decades. He didn't know when he started storing up anecdotes with thoughts of 'Crowley will like that one'. He didn't know when he started requesting posts based on where he knew Crowley would be. But somewhere during the centuries, it happened.

He thought it was one-sided. Demons weren't capable of more than lust, after all. And angels... well, they could love, but they weren't supposed to desire. Aziraphale thought there was probably something wrong that he wanted both.

He didn't know when Crowley had started hinting. It had taken him a long time to catch on. "A bit thick, aren't you?" Crowley had teased when his innuendos finally registered. But then he'd sobered up and hinted more strongly that what he was getting at was more than innuendo.

Aziraphale wasn't sure which one of them resisted that final plunge. Probably both. But, in the light of Armageddon and the certainty neither of them was going to survive what their superiors did to them afterwards, resisting didn't seem to have a purpose any longer.

And after. After the apocalypse came and went with none on Earth the wiser. After both their offices seemed to turn a blind eye to their part in it. After they realized how comfortably they fit together. Nothing seemed to stand in their way any longer.

Twenty years. Twenty wonderful years. For a human couple, it would have been an impressive stretch. Most pairings didn't last nearly that long. For two immortal beings, it felt like the blink of
an eye. Not nearly long enough.

And not a shred of closure.

Aziraphale stood on the roof, scanning the skyline in vain hope of seeing a black-winged demon flapping toward him. Around him, the plants drooped dejectedly. Crowley had been much nicer to them since moving in with Aziraphale - his threats taking on more of a tough-love motivational chant tone. They’d all been off-color and mopey since his disappearance.

Aziraphale knew with every fiber of his celestial being that Crowley hadn't left him by choice. There hadn't been a second's doubt in his mind that something had happened which had taken Crowley against his will at worst, and reluctant consent at best. That his absence might have been in some way to protect Aziraphale had crossed his mind, but he thought Crowley would have left him some sort of message if that was the case.

No, there was neither sign of secret message or sign of struggle.

Correction, there was one sign of a struggle.

The book Crowley had been reading was lying carelessly on the ground. To anyone else it might have been nothing, but Crowley knew how Aziraphale felt about his books. Nothing short of an absolute emergency would have made him forget he was holding a signed first edition.

No, Crowley was in danger. And Aziraphale had to help if he could.

He'd searched the city - both on foot and wing. No hint.

When his own sensitivity to demonic presences in general, and Crowley's specifically, had registered nothing, he'd gone to Anathema. She'd obligingly scryed for him, and the results had been disturbingly blank. No demonic presence in England, no demonic presence in Europe. No demonic presence... anywhere?

The world had suddenly become vacant of demons, according to her. She could only find one pinprick of demonic force - the United States. Los Angeles to be precise.

Having spent enough time around Crowley, Anathema knew the aura of a greater demon quite well. This wasn't it. Whatever was in Los Angeles, it wasn't Crowley.

Aziraphale didn't know what to do. He waited at the bookshop, hoping Crowley would come back on his own. Or at least get in touch. It was the only hope he had. Because he had a pretty good idea where Crowley was.

And how could he follow Crowley to Hell? It wasn't that he wouldn't. It was that it was nearly impossible.

Angels did go to Hell on occasions. Sometimes someone needed to deliver a message, or fetch a redeemed soul. Some of the Archangels were still chummy with Lucifer and might pop in for a chat.

Aziraphale was neither messenger, redeemer, or part of the clique of Archangels. His chances of getting a travel permit for Hell were about the same as him finally understanding was 'gangnam style' was.

Formal channels were out. Informal channels... What was he supposed to do? Show up at the gates and ask them to unhand his love? Romantic, but it wouldn't work out well for either of them.
Aziraphale would end up tortured. Crowley probably as well. And the first step of torture would be separating them. 'At least we’re together', was not a hope Hell endorsed.

Sneaking in? Aziraphale wasn't confident in his ability to sneak even on Earth. In Hell he'd be spotted for certain.

Crowley was the sneaky one. If he could get out, he would. And Aziraphale had to be ready to help and protect him if he arrived.

He could search the world, but if Crowley escaped, he'd likely go to the bookshop. Until Aziraphale could come up with a better plan, his best course of action seemed to be to keep watch and keep hoping.

Weeks had passed already. Aziraphale waited and sought any plan which would facilitate Crowley's return. Nothing panned out.

His phone rang. Suppressing the flutter of hope he always felt, he answered it. "Hello?"

"Angel?"

Aziraphale gripped the phone with both hands. The voice was distant and weak, but he knew it as well as he knew his own. "Crowley! Are you alright? Where are you? Where have you been?"

There was a lengthy pause before the voice came again. "Can you... come to Los Angeles?"
Crowley the Carrier Pigeon

Chapter Notes

And we check in with the cast of *Lucifer* at last. I know a few people have mentioned they haven't finished Season 4 yet, so be aware, spoilers ahead.

If you have not seen Lucifer, there is a cast list in the notes at the bottom. I hope that helps! And if you are unfamiliar with the source material or need refreshers on the characters, please see the [CHARACTER AND INFO SHEET] page at any time for character bios and plot summaries.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Chloe Decker tried not to let the fact that she cried at night and slept very little show in her expression when she arrived at the precinct each day.

The first few days had been the hardest as her colleagues innocently asked her if Lucifer was coming in. Ella had been the most distressed when Chloe said he'd returned home, and probably wasn't coming back. Even Dan had been strangely upset, admitting reluctantly that he had some apologizing to do. Most everyone else didn't seem entirely surprised. Lucifer had been making noises about ending his relationship with the LAPD not long before. Most accepted he'd finally decided it was time.

Ella was more proactive. She wanted his new phone number since he wasn't answering his old. Or forwarding address. Or anything so she could get in touch with him and ask him to return. Or at least hug him goodbye. And scold him for leaving without a proper farewell. It hurt her when none of these were options Chloe could provide.

Chloe tried to put on a brave face at work. It was harder at home when Trixie asked after him.

At least she had a few she could to talk to. But Linda was busy with the baby. Maze and Amenadiel were likewise more concerned with little Charlie than anything else.

Amenadiel had awkwardly said this was probably inevitable. Lucifer's place was in Hell. No matter his feelings, Hell needed a king. At some point, Lucifer had to accept the job was his and no other's. He couldn't lounge on Earth forever.

There was a sad look in Amenadiel's eyes when he said that. Chloe wondered if the angel believed his own days on Earth to be numbered.

Mazikeen at least had the closure of having spoken with Lucifer before he'd left. He'd offered her the choice, and she'd picked Linda and Charlie. Although she could signal when she was ready to return, that would likely be a one-way trip. Leaving Hell was nearly impossible once you were there, and Maze intended to stay on Earth as long as she possibly could.

Maze did take over the business side of Lux. The club remained open, although perhaps not quite as flashy and intense as it had been with the devil in residence. Still, Lux offered an Earthly haven for Lucifer should the option to return ever present itself.
Eve was staying in the penthouse for the time being. She said she'd look after it while she found a job and a place of her own. She'd shrugged off offered assistance from Linda and Chloe. She wanted to do this herself. Find who she was. For the present, all they could do was wish her well.

So the days turned into weeks and Chloe tried to find something resembling closure. Something to let her move on.

That was when a very nervous dark-haired man slunk into the precinct.

There were a few things which drew her notice the moment he reached her floor. The first were the dark sunglasses he wore despite it being evening. The second was the way he warily slid along the walls, jerking his head at every loud noise and movement. But the most noticeable was the way officers would accost him, then walk away with benign smiles, having failed to stop his slow progress through the room.

Chloe tensed and clicked off the safety on her gun. She wondered if maybe she should start keeping something like holy water in her desk if weird things were going to continue happening despite no longer having a guardian devil at her back.

The man threaded his way through the desks, reading the name tags on them until he spotted hers. With sudden clarity of movement, he came toward her.

"Stop," Chloe warned, straightening so he could see her hand on the gun.

He froze, his tongue flicking out in a nervous fashion.

Was it her imagination, or was his tongue forked?

"Pleassse don't," he stuttered with an odd hiss to his words. He held up his hands - one empty, one containing what looked like a parchment. "If I get discorporated, I don't think he'll let me have another body."

The words confirmed at least roughly what he was, and likely where he'd come from. "What's with the sunglasses?" Chloe asked. It probably wasn't the most pertinent question right now, but it was a starting place. And a better starting point than, 'Are you from Hell?' If she was wrong, that was liable to attract the wrong attention.

The man winced. "You don't really want to see."

"I do," Chloe replied levelly. "I like to know what I'm dealing with."

The man swallowed and twitched a few times. "Fine... could you... not panic and shoot me?"

"I'm not in the business of shooting people unless they give me a reason to."

"Right... okay. Here." The man pulled off the glasses.

Two wide snake eyes looked back at her. The man blinked with evident discomfort and looked away.

Chloe swallowed hard, then took a deep breath. Of the things she'd seen the past year, this was not the strangest. Yes, she could handle that. "So you're a demon."

The man nodded jerkily. "Can I... put my glasses back on?"

It occurred to Chloe that he was acting frightened of her. Strange. "Yes, of course. Please, sit down,
"Mr...?"

"Crowley." The demon dropped into the nearest chair. "Anthony Crowley. But people just call me Crowley."

His voice had stopped trembling enough for her to hear the English accent. Was that typical for demons? Maze didn't have one.

Chloe took her hand from her gun and laid both hands on her desk in a careful display of trust. "What can I do for you, Crowley?"

"Nothing. Well, take this." He slid the parchment across the desk to her. "And I'm supposed to wait for a reply." He squirmed in his chair and looked uncomfortably elsewhere.

Chloe unfolded the parchment slowly.

Hello, My Darling,

I don't want to say much until I'm sure about the reliability of this messenger service. Traveling through obscure regions may cause lost or delayed missives, but I do hope this reaches you.

I miss you more than I can express. The company here is absolutely miserable. It's nothing but work, work, work all day long. These idiots expect me to do everything. What I wouldn't give for a corpse and a lineup of suspects. What is your latest case? Do share the best details. If the victims ended up in my neck of the woods, I might be able to give you a helpful push in the right direction.

Give my love to Miss Lopez and your urchin. And tell my brother he should visit sometime. I would delight to see a disapproving face.

You'll be pleased to know little Charlie has nothing to fear from Dromos or any of his followers now. They regret their actions and would apologize personally to Miss Linda if they could. They will not have the opportunity.

If Crawly gives you any trouble, he responds well to threats. He's relatively harmless so long as he doesn't bite. I'll muzzle him if he makes you at all nervous.

You're in my thoughts always, Detective. There is not a second I can forget you.

With Love

Lucifer Morningstar

P.S.: The alcohol here is absolute rubbish. I haven't enjoyed a good drink since I left.

Chloe read it twice, tears coming to her eyes. It was selfish, rambling, and so very Lucifer.

She wiped her eyes, looking across the desk at the still hunched and fidgeting messenger. "Did you read this?"

He jumped with an increasing look of anxiety. "What? No! I couldn't... I'm... sorry if it's something
bad." His hand flew protectively to his neck. "I know shooting the messenger is a thing, but..."

"It's fine. Relax." Chloe tapped the paper and tried for a smile through her tears. "I'm very happy to receive this."

"You are?" Crowley frowned and studied her. "Well, alright then. Uh... Do you... have a reply?"

"Yes... Of course." Chloe jiggled the computer mouse. "It'll take me a little while to come up with something. Can you come back in... maybe an hour?"

Crowley sat frozen for a second, then rose hastily. "Yeah... if that's what you want... uh..." He glanced uncertainly around the room. "Is there somewhere to eat around here?"

"There's a coffee shop a couple places down," Chloe started to say, then felt a sudden stab of unease. The last time demons had been loose in this city... "Or, the break room is over there." She waved her finger in the proper direction. "We have a cappuccino machine."

The demon grimaced. "I'm partial to tea, really. I'll try the shop." To her surprise, he pulled out a wallet. He studied the contents, then turned to her. "Do you know the exchange rate to the pound?"

"Uh... here." Chloe fished a twenty out of her pocket and offered it to him.

Crowley took it and studied the picture. "Andrew Jackson..." He shook his head. "Why do you suppose the genocidal bastards get remembered?" He walked off, moving with more purpose and less clutching at the walls as he headed for the stairs.

Chloe shook her head. On the short list of demons she'd encountered, this one was definitely weird.

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An hour later, Crowley collected a fat envelope from Detective Decker and made his way out of the building. He was exhausted. Crawling scale by scale between realms had been as labor-intensive as he'd imagined. And he'd had all of Lucifer’s threats of fire and brimstone if he failed, or if he harmed this Detective Decker in any way, hovering over his head.

The good news was he'd managed to swipe a cell phone long enough to call Aziraphale. At least Aziraphale now knew he was alive. And hopefully they’d be able to see each other soon. If Lucifer intended to keep sending him with messages.

And if he survived the process.

Funny, he'd spent all of his demonic existence trying to keep from being noticed by his superiors. Now he was in the last place he wanted to be.

Who was this Detective Decker anyway? Lucifer hadn't told him anything except how to find her, to do whatever she said, answer any questions she had, and that if he hurt her, he'd wish he got as mild a punishment as Dromos was receiving.

She was definitely perceptive for a human. She'd pegged him for a demon right away. Sure, the eyes were a bit of a giveaway, but she'd known what she was looking at. Chances were she knew what Lucifer was too. And she'd been happy to receive a letter from him? Humanity was weird.

Crowley halted at the edge of the fissure between Earth and Hell. He folded the letter carefully inside his clothes. It was going to be harder carrying an Earth thing like that. Sure, his clothes were Earth-made too. But he'd had them a while. They felt like him. This... did not.
He glanced one last time around the pretty little planet he'd wanted so badly to get back to. If anyone had told him he'd escape Hell just to crawl back to it... well... the things ones did for survival.

He traced Aziraphale's name in its true characters onto the wind and whispered a brief message of love. If he didn't make it back this time, at least he'd have said goodbye. With a tired sigh, Crowley plunged back toward Hell.

Chapter End Notes

Who's Who on *Lucifer*

- **Chloe Decker** A homicide detective with the LAPD. Was in a relationship with Lucifer until he returned to Hell. Has a 10y/o daughter named Trixie.
- **Ella Lopez** Forensic scientist for the LAPD. Bright and chipper personality. Does not know what Lucifer really is.
- **Dr. Linda Martin** A psychiatrist. Was therapist to Lucifer and several other cast members. Recently gave birth to a half-angel baby named Charlie.
- **Mazikeen "Maze"** A demon with protective tendencies for the humans she considers her friends. Works as a bounty hunter. Currently living with Linda.
- **Amenadiel** The first-born angel of Heaven. Currently living on Earth. Powers are on the fritz, but can stop time when they're working. Charlie's father.
- **Eve** As in Eve from the Garden of Eden. Has broken up with Adam and is on Earth giving life a second chance.
Reason for Visiting?

Air travel, Aziraphale decided, was just not as luxurious as it once had been.

Not that he used it much. He'd take a relaxing cruise whenever the option presented itself as the more peaceful way to get from one destination to another. Really, the travel was half the joy of reaching a destination. He couldn't see why people were in such a hurry.

Maybe it was because they had so little time to live.

The airports were crowded and unpleasant. He hadn't had that many people shout at him to get moving in years. Removing his shoes had seemed so undignified. And the way they'd torn open his luggage and strewn about his things. Really insufferable. He'd have to write a strongly worded note to someone.

And all because he'd made a few slip-ups on the passport. Was there really that much difference between saying he was born in 1880 instead of 1980? It was merely a century. And that place of birth question had slipped him up too.

Maybe he should have just flown himself, but that could draw the wrong sort of attention. And until he was clear why there were no longer any demons on Earth, he felt it was better not to make anyone notice one of the few angels still present.

The most disturbing part of the whole thing had happened before he even left London. He'd been standing in the terminal, trying to sort out departure times, when he heard someone call his name. He was surprised to find Adam Young lounging against the wall next to a 'No Pets Allowed' sign. Dog was sitting next to the sign, watching the people with perk-eared interest. As Aziraphale walked over, a security agent patted him on the head, then continued on their way.

"I'm picking up a friend," Adam explained when Aziraphale asked. "She teaches in Wales with me, so we're driving up together."

Aziraphale quietly thought the strangest moments with Adam were the occasions he was being so perfectly normal that you forgot why your brain was doing a slight short-circuit dance every time he spoke.

"I'm going to Los Angeles," Aziraphale explained when asked for his own plans.

Adam's face darkened. "If you see my father, tell him he shouldn't have tried to take Dog."

Aziraphale blinked unsteadily. "Mr. Young is in America?" That seemed more impossible than Crowley vanishing back to Hell.

"No. My real father." Adam spoke with pure disgust.

Aziraphale blanched. "He... He's there?"

"He was." Adam turned his head westward and Aziraphale had the distinct impression he was scanning across an ocean and a continent as easily as Aziraphale browsed auction catalogs. "He's not there now." He scowled, turning his piercing eyes on the angel, who stepped back instinctively. "If you see him, you can tell him Dog's mine. He doesn't go back. Ever."

Adam smiled reassuringly after that, and Aziraphale found himself sitting in the terminal with a slight hiccup in his memory.
which didn't catch up with him until the plane was somewhere near the arctic.

He’d thought arriving at LAX would conclude his troubles. But having completed the trials of air travel, he now had the further difficulties of ground travel. He didn't want to rent a car, since that would have involved admitting he'd never properly learned how to drive. Crowley had taught him, but Crowley's methods hardly lined up with generally agreed upon schools of safe driving etiquette. Besides, this was America. They drove on the wrong side of the road here. It was sure to be confusing.

Apparently the airport did not offer the rental of bicycles or horses. They suggested 'uber', but that required a 'smart phone'. Aziraphale wasn't sure of the intelligence of his phone, but since Crowley snickered about how flip phones were the equivalent of still using papyrus, he thought perhaps his didn't count. Oh, why couldn't Crowley be here? He loved all this modern complexity.

But it was Crowley he was seeking. And that made him gird his proverbial loins and find someone to assist with this uber business. One lengthy ride from a driver he wasn't sure was any better trained with a motorized vehicle than Crowley later, he stood before the work residence of the mysterious Detective Decker.

Getting into the precinct was effortless, although he left a trail of blithely smiling officers in his wake. Hopefully none of them would encounter armed ne'er-do-wells before the euphoria wore off.

"Pardon me. Would you by chance happen to be Detective Decker?"

Chloe looked up from her desk at the vaguely smiling man before her. She wondered for a moment what her life was coming to that the English accent made her automatically think 'demon'. She rose and offered the man her hand. "Yes? How can I help you, Mr...?"

"Fell. My name that is." He beamed and took a chair. He smiled around the precinct, then turned back to her. "Do you know, it's been twenty years since I was last in America? I met a tel-evangelist that day. Quite the charlatan, I'm afraid." He tutted disapprovingly. "I fear I may have ruined his reputation."

"What can I do for you, Mr. Fell?" Chloe thought she'd better get this man to the point and out of the precinct as fast as possible. She had a double homicide on her plate at the moment.

"Well, as a matter of fact, I'm looking for someone."

"The Missing Persons bureau is on another floor."

"Yes, yes, I'm aware. He's not exactly missing. That is, I know where he is. He just can't leave."

Chloe frowned. "Has this person been kidnapped?"

"Yes, actually. But it's quite alright. Well, it isn't. But it's part of the job description. He works for a... rather severe organization."

"I'm not following, Mr. Fell."

"Well it's rather simple really. My friend... well, he's more than..." He leaned a little closer to Chloe. "I'm sorry, I lose track. Is this country... accepting of, ah, alternative lifestyles?"

Chloe laced her fingers over her eyes. "It's fine. He's your partner?"
The man nodded. "Yes, that's right. He vanished some weeks ago. But he was able to get in touch with me just yesterday. Or maybe two days ago. The airplane ride from London has gotten me terribly confused. The point is..." He stabbed a finger on her desk. "He called to tell me he was in Los Angeles and I should find a Detective Decker."

"Me? Why should I know about your friend?"

"Chloe?" A woman's voice sounded behind them. "Sorry, but do you have a minute?"

Mr. Fell sat up as straight as if someone had a gun pointed at his back.

Chloe managed a brief smile to the woman approaching her desk. "Just a moment, Eve. Let me finish with..."

Mr. Fell rose and pushed a bowler hat he certainly hadn't been wearing when he'd arrived low over his face. "Never mind! You're clearly terrifically busy! I'll try another time. Lovely meeting you. Must be going now." He rushed for the stairs.

"Wait!" Eve turned as he hastened past. "Do I know you?"

"What? Oh, no. Must be mistaking me for someone else. Good day." The man sprinted up the stairs and out the precinct.

Eve frowned after him, then turned to Chloe. "I swear I know that voice." She rolled her eyes. "Ugh! This is going to bother me." She dropped into the vacant chair.

Chloe mentally gave up solving murders for the day. "What's wrong, Eve?"

"Okay, so. You know I've been trying to find a job, right? Well, everyone wants 'work experience' and 'education background', and I'm having a little trouble explaining I've been a homemaker for 6,000 years. With a long break in the middle being, you know, dead." She ran her fingers through her hair, her voice rising in exasperation. "It's driving me crazy. Am I not capable of doing anything but being someone's wife?"

Several unmarried officers slowed and grinned hopefully in her direction.

"Eve, it's okay!" Chloe caught Eve's flailing hand and gave it a squeeze. "We just need to assess your skills. That'll help you find a career path. Okay? What are you good at?"

Eve cocked her head and considered. "Sex," she said with a confident nod. "I'm great at sex. People get paid for that, right?" She leaped from her chair. "Perfect! That's what I'll do!"

Chloe pursued her out of the room. "Eve, wait! That's illegal!"
Lucifer paced restlessly, grumbling to himself.

He'd finished his response to Chloe. So wonderful she'd sent him print-outs of her case files. Certainly, he'd always hated reading them, but if he couldn't 'pound the pavement' with her as the beat-cops said, at least he could read what she was reading.

He'd drafted out his brilliant insights on the case and had them ready to go. There was just one small problem.

Crawly wouldn't wake up.

The demon had crawled back to Hell looking utterly spent. Lucifer had told him to find somewhere to rest, and Crawly had refused to leave the castle. They both knew he'd be easy pickings for any bored demons who came across him in his current state. Lucifer had relented and directed him to a bedroom. Crawly collapsed and hadn't moved again.

That had been, in Earth terms, three days ago.

Lucifer had tried to rouse him after a day. Crawly had swatted weakly at him, mumbled, 'Five minutes, Angel,' and collapsed deeper into slumber.

Lucifer debated tearing some feathers out in retaliation, then let him alone. He needed the little worm at this moment. He could always punish later if Crawly tried to take advantage of him.

After three days, Lucifer decided enough was enough. He stalked into the room, grabbed the demon by the leg and dragged him from bed. "You're going back to Earth, Crawly," he growled.

"Crowley," the demon protested as his head bopped against the floor. He tried to get command of his limbs but Lucifer declined to let go and simply hauled him along.

He only released the demon as they arrived at the crevice Crawly had found between realities. The demon found his feet and put a very careful distance between himself and Lucifer.

Lucifer's smile showed many more teeth than were necessary. "Right." He dropped the sealed letter at Crawly's feet. "Well, get on with it."

Crawly looked wearily at the fissure, then back at him. "How long do I have before I have to come back?"

"How long? Immediately, of course! Find the detective, give her my insights into the case. Then bring back her words so I can hear how brilliantly I've assisted her."

Crawly looked pleadingly at him.

Lucifer huffed out an annoyed snort. Honestly, he needed to get a telephone transmission set up between Hell and Earth. Even the U.S. postal service got faster speed than this.

But he needed the irritating little viper. There weren't many demons - any as far he knew - who could creep into and out of places the way Crawly could. And until he found a more reliable mode of communication, he did need to see this one didn't break.
"Fine," he sighed. "You have two days. But I expect you back promptly and with an excellent report. And check up on my godson while you're there."

"Your godson?" The demon repeated slowly.

"Yes. Charlie. The detective will know where to find him. And Linda of course. And make certain Miss Lopez is well."

Crawly blinked once. "Anyone else?"

"Oh... I'd say Mazikeen but she may not be in the mood for demonic visitations."

Crawly studied him strangely. "That's it? Nobody else?"

"Not that I can think of, no." Lucifer scowled. "Are you stalling?"

"No... not at all. You're the boss." The demon stuffed the parchment beneath his shirt and transformed down to a smaller size.

"Yes, yes. Hurry back, Crawly."

"Crowley," the serpent grumbled as he vanished into the hole.

Another day, another demon, Chloe thought a little wryly.

Crowley had been waiting for her when she returned from her latest crime scene. He was asleep in a visitor's chair, but he awoke when she sat down and passed a heavy parchment envelope across the desk to her. "Hi," he said. "Do you know there's blood on your shoes?"

Chloe grimaced. "The victim was decapitated and gutted. There was blood everywhere."

Crowley looked a little queasy.

"Are you not fond of blood?" Chloe asked. She'd been under the vague impression demons drank it like water.

The demon sighed and slouched. "I've seen enough." He sounded bothered by that.

"Chloe!" Ella ran to the detective's desk, an evidence bag containing a scalpel and a massive amount of human bodily fluid waving in her hand. "We found the murder weapon! It was wedged between the diaphragm and the heart. The killer must have slashed open the body, and did all that intestinal strewing about, and then shoved it up in there." She mimed the action with gleeful thrusts of her arms.

Crowley stared at her with an expression of horrified fascination.

"Oh, hi!" Ella turned to him brightly. She faltered, half hiding the scalpel behind her back, though her smile never wavered. "You're not a relative of the victim, are you? Cause... that was so tragic." She clasped her hands together. "I am so sorry for your loss if you are."

"Ella, this is Crowley. He's an... employee of Lucifer's." Chloe managed the introduction as best she could.

"Oh. Oh!" Ella opened her arms. "Dude! Any friend of Lucifer's is a friend of ours. Oh, sorry." She
dropped the scalpel on Chloe's desk and gave the dazed demon a hug. "Do you know where he is? Is he alright? He is coming back, isn't he? Because it's just not the same around here without him!"

"I think he's busy with work," Crowley mumbled weakly. He looked past the scientist to Chloe with a panicked and helpless expression.

"Ella. Maybe you should get the weapon back to the lab?" Chloe suggested tactfully.

"Right. Right. Chain of evidence. I was just really excited. Nice meeting you!" Ella dashed off as quickly as she'd come.

Crowley stared after her. "She smells like Death."

"Well, she works in forensics," Chloe reasoned. "She's around a lot of bodies."

"No... not dead things. Death..." His tongue flicked out in Ella's direction, and Chloe could see this time it was definitely forked. He shuddered and hunched a little lower in his chair. "I didn't sign up for all this."

Chloe tried to look sympathetic. "I'll get this written and you'll be home soon."

"I could be so lucky," Crowley sighed. "But I'm stuck in Hell until the boss decides otherwise."

"Stuck? Don't you live in Hell?"

"No, I live in London."

Chloe stared. "The accent's real?"

"Oh, sure. Picked it up a few centuries back."

"Centuries? How long have you been on Earth?"

"Since the beginning. Listen." Crowley ran his fingers nervously through his hair. "The boss said I could stick around Earth for a couple days. Recover. Traveling between realms is... kind of a workout. So... you don't have to finish that now or anything. I can swing by tomorrow, yeah?"

"Oh, of course." Chloe roused herself back to present-day mysteries. "And I should probably work on solving a murder." She hesitated. "Do you have anywhere to go in LA?"

Crowley shrugged. "I can find somewhere to sleep. And my partner's coming into town. I hope." His anxious look returned. "Did he get in touch with you? I gave him your name... I don't know anyone else."

An image swam into Chloe's mind. Definitely not the person she would have paired with a demon, but... "Is he English? Blond hair? A little..."

"Clueless? Yeah, that's Aziraphale."

"He said it was Mr. Fell."

Crowley lurched. "I may have forgotten to mention you know about us."

Chloe dropped her voice. "He's a demon, too?"

"The opposite." Crowley rose. "If he's in town, I should hunt him up. How many sushi restaurants
are there in LA?"

"Wait." Chloe rose with him. "Why don't you come by my house tonight?"

Crowley paled.

"And Az... Azi... Mr. Fell too. I can make you both dinner. Call it thanks for these." She tapped the envelope. "And we can talk without..." She waved a hand at the precinct.

Crowley swallowed hard. "Listen... my boss seems to really like you... and he's not really the forgiving type if he thinks... you know... I'd..."

"It's fine." Chloe tried to look reassuring. "I'm sure I can trust both of you."

The demon froze and stared at her. Several seconds passed before he unfroze into babbling unsteadiness. "Okay, yeah. Brilliant. What time do you want us there?"
Who Brought the Apple Pie?

There wasn't a chance a home-cooked meal was going to happen. Not after a full day of interviewing suspects (this had been easier when Lucifer could just convince people to talk), dropping Trixie off with Dan, and trying to write a reply to Lucifer. But the grocery store had ready-for-table meals which just required heating. Chloe hoped it would be acceptable.

The invitation proved doubly useful after 'Mr. Fell' wandered back into the precinct still in search of Crowley several hours after the demon had departed. Chloe helpfully gave him directions of where Crowley could be found and at what time.

Mr. Fell arrived exactly ten minutes early and carrying dessert. He admired Trixie's drawings and made inane small talk with Chloe while glancing hopefully at the front door every few seconds.

Crowley arrived in a wary slouch exactly five minutes after the agreed upon time. He brought a bottle of wine. He started to say something in thanks to Chloe, then his eyes fell upon the other visitor and Chloe watched them forget all else.

The pair met midway across the room. Grasping one another by the arms, they leaned their foreheads together, a painful look of longing and relief passing between them.

"Angel," Crowley murmured hoarsely.

"My dear." Mr. Fell's hand strayed up to touch the pattern of fading bruises across Crowley's neck. "What did he do to you?"

Crowley burrowed his head into the other man's shoulders and broke into shudders of barely restrained sobs.

Mr. Fell looked over his head at Chloe. "I'm terribly sorry, but is there somewhere we could...?"

Chloe nodded and showed them into her bedroom.

"We'll just need a minute," Mr. Fell whispered, and the door clicked shut without anyone touching it.

Chloe returned to the kitchen, fuming that she needed to have a talk with Lucifer about how he treated his 'employees'.

Several minutes passed when the doorbell abruptly rang. Chloe answered it cautiously.

"I thought about what you said," Eve announced without preamble as she breezed through the door, hauling a duffle bag with her. "So, I was thinking, if sex is out, what else am I good at? And then I thought... sales! I'm great at convincing people I have great ideas, right?"

She hoisted the duffle bag onto the kitchen table. "Anyway, I was looking around Lucifer's apartment, and I realized he had some stuff that wasn't going to last, so I took some of the cocaine down the club. And I was going to just pass it out, but then I thought I could make some money off of it..."

"Eve." Chloe rubbed her eyes. "Maybe you shouldn't tell..."

"...And then he asked if I could get any more, and I said 'yes'! And he asked if I did transporting,
and I said I'd been thinking about doing some traveling...

"Listen you really shouldn't..."

"...So I'm supposed to take this bag up to San Francisco, and I was wondering if I could borrow your car."

The detective leaned on the back of a chair. "Okay, I need to explain a few things to you..."

She heard a door open behind her.

"Oh, sorry," Eve said, looking up quickly. "I didn't know you had company."

"Sorry about that," Mr. Fell hummed as he guided a very subdued looking Crowley back into the room. "I think we're past the worst of the-"

"Eve," Crowley whispered and froze.

Eve stared blankly at him. Her eyes flickered to the other man, her mouth curving into a searching frown. "You... where have I..." She took a step closer, then a look of clarity snapped into her eyes. "The Garden! You were there! You gave us your sword."

Mr. Fell backed away, hands raised defensively. "My dear lady, I..." He began to sputter. "Now, I know it was rude of us to take the sword back, but I got into a lot of trouble over that, and you have to agree, your son just wasn't the sort of person to leave with a weapon that could kill celestial beings. He was far too effective with mortal knives after all."

Crowley collapsed to the ground, his knees balled to his chin and tremors rolling through him. "It's a Hell-Loop. It's gotta be," he moaned, clutching his head. "It's the only explanation. I'm stuck in a ruddy Hell-Loop."

Chloe covered her eyes. Why had she thought a small dinner party would make her life less complicated?

~

"...I agree asking him to name all the animals required a level of creativity he didn't have."

"You're telling me? He just kept naming them Adam II, Adam III, Adam with Fins..."

Chloe rested her chin on her hands and listened to the conversation with growing amusement.

It wasn't so much a conversation as Aziraphale and Eve reminiscing about events 6,000 years in the past. Once they'd worked out the identities of both Aziraphale and Crowley, Eve had assured Aziraphale she held him in high regard for loaning them his sword, and any lingering annoyance regarding Crowley's part in things had long since dissipated. They'd settled in cheerfully to recount bygone times.

Crowley sat huddled up in a chair, leaning against Aziraphale, who kept a protective arm draped over him. It had taken a little work to convince him he wasn't in Hell, and to get him off the floor, but he'd at least joined them for dinner. He'd stayed quiet, but Chloe noticed he'd relaxed enough by dessert to at least pay attention.

Chloe had decided it was better not to ask probing, spiritual questions, although it was hard to resist when dining with an angel, a demon, and the mother of humanity. From her experience with
similar beings, she doubted they had any answers.

After all, at least in Eve's case, they were still trying to get their own lives together.

"...So, if being a transporter is out, I'm not sure what else to do," Eve concluded as she explained her current job-hunting dilemmas, and Chloe concluded her explanation of why Eve couldn't run cocaine, and definitely not in a police detective's car.

"Gardening," Crowley said hoarsely, joining the conversation for the first time. "You were good with the plants."

"I was, wasn't I?" Eve preened. She sighed. "But I don't know anything about the clipped lawns and ornamentals they have these days. Our Garden was mostly just wild."

"There are places for that sort of gardening as well," Aziraphale offered. "We have a friend very involved with conservation groups. She's told us about places where humans take care of wild lands - cleaning up trash, removing exotics, educating locals about sustainable farming..."

Eve's eyes sparked with interest. "I could do that."

"I warn you, these are probably not paying jobs. She often does some things with her own resources, or with little assistance from where she goes," the angel cautioned.

"But it's something on the resume," Chloe said. "Volunteer work would really help you find something long-term. You'll make connections, get some skills..."

"Do I still need ID? That's been a problem."

"I'm good at IDs," Crowley offered. "I don't know what American ones look like, but..." He glanced at Chloe.

Chloe rubbed her eyes. "I suppose this is a case where a little breaking the law is necessary, isn't it?"

When dinner was done, they sat in the living room drinking coffee (tea in the case of the two resolutely English supernatural beings). The others talked while Crowley studied Chloe's driver's license, passport, and social security card.

"You remembered my birthday!" Eve squealed when Crowley handed her the newly miracled documentation. "Even Lucifer could never keep mine and Lilith's straight." She walked up to a mirror and smiled at her reflection. "Hello," she said, thrusting out her hand to an imaginary prospective employer. "I'm Eve Gardner from," she checked the license and looked up again, "Independence, Missouri."
Aziraphale drew the sleeping demon a little tighter to his chest and looked up at the stars.

After leaving Chloe's, Crowley had said he wasn't ready for the evening to end yet, so they'd wandered, neither saying much of anything, as they crossed the sprawling city by foot and hitched rides. Eventually they'd reached the Pacific.

They'd found a deserted stretch of beach and bedded down in the sand. With darkness hiding them, Aziraphale unfurled his wings and tucked them around the exhausted demon. Crowley had snuggled tight against him and fallen deeply asleep.

Aziraphale lay awake, watching the world pass by. He was worried, much as he'd been trying to put on a calm face.

He brushed back a lock of Crowley's hair and smoothed down the demon's dark mane. His hand trailed along Crowley's cheekbone.

The demon whimpered in his sleep.

"Just me, my dear," Aziraphale whispered. "You're safe."

Crowley exhaled and burrowed closer against him.

Crowley wasn't well, Aziraphale could see it at a glance. He'd healed the demon's bruises, but there was more to Crowley's injuries than the superficial.

An angel shouldn't have been able to heal a demon. Their powers ran counter-current to one another. Aziraphale had tried to heal Crowley the first time somewhere around 3,000BC when a little argument of theirs had resulted in Crowley getting stabbed in what Aziraphale had meant to be a warning gesture. He'd forgotten in the heat of the moment that Crowley was no fighter, and hadn't been properly trained in ducking.

He'd tried to fix his mistake and burned the demon rather badly, which had made him feel worse about the whole business.

After that, he'd been careful to never hurt him, even back when they were thwarting one another. He'd also taught Crowley some basic lessons in sword-play - like how to get out of the way when someone was aiming for his head. And he'd been careful not to try healing again.

Somewhere around 1500AD, a priest and a divinely blessed spear had forced Aziraphale's hand. Crowley hadn't deserved the priest's attempts to exorcise him - he'd only come by the monastery to see if Aziraphale wanted to join him for lunch. And Aziraphale, deciding burns were better than discorporation, which neither were ever sure they'd come back from, had healed his friend.

Crowley had been fine afterwards.

That was when Aziraphale had discovered there was one demon in all of creation who he knew well enough to heal without harming. One demon whose aura he knew as well as his own. One demon he lo...

It would be some time before he admitted those feelings.
Well, now he had no trouble knowing those feelings were a part of him right down to the very core of his being. And with the knowledge of those feelings came certain certainties about his demon love and his condition.

Crowley slept heavily, a fact which disturbed Aziraphale greatly. He knew when Crowley was sleeping because he enjoyed it, when he was sleeping to avoid dealing with the world, and when he was sleeping because he was utterly exhausted. This was the latter.

The demon was also scared. Aziraphale had watched the way Crowley had flinched at every loud noise and sudden movement as they traveled across the city. He'd felt the demon tremble against him at any potential danger. There had also been the way he'd studiously avoided contact with Chloe and Eve all evening, practically hiding behind Aziraphale when Eve tried to give him a hug in thanks for the paperwork.

Aziraphale had weathered Armageddon beside Crowley. And before that there had been witch burnings, world wars, crusades, and one very alarming Rolling Stones concert. He'd seen Crowley afraid. But not like this.

No... there had been one occasion. After the business in the Garden.

There was a short list of subjects Aziraphale and Crowley had agreed - whether informally or by mutual agreement - to never discuss.

The Fall was one of them, of course. They'd hinted around it, but Aziraphale had carefully never asked why Crowley's welcome in Heaven had been rescinded, or even what he'd been like before. Aziraphale was fairly certain they hadn't traveled in the same circles, and the Fallen had been stripped of name and form, so reconnecting with, and even identifying, old comrades was a challenge. Aziraphale sometimes thought he remembered a sable-winged angel who never seemed to remember the words to the hymns, but who always had questions at the end of sermons. But he'd never pressed, nor had Crowley ever asked why Aziraphale had chosen Heaven when the war began.

The ark was another unspoken subject. Aziraphale had endured a lot of teasing from the other angels for letting six species go extinct on his watch. But Crowley, who could see when Aziraphale was genuinely upset, had never teased him on that point and carefully never brought up the flood business, except occasionally muttering that a rainbow was hardly enough of an apology for the loss of lives.

Crowley was touchy about the Spanish Inquisition, and Puritanism made Aziraphale uncomfortable, though those weren't entirely taboo subjects. They'd had enough arguments about who to blame for the crusades that they'd agreed to let the matter drop.

But the events which had gone on in the Garden, despite both of them being present, had never been discussed much after the fact. Aziraphale had been called in for reprimand after his superiors noticed he was lacking a sword, and Crowley had vanished around the same time.

When they'd met again, Aziraphale had still been under the impression that his extended stay on Earth was a punishment and had been short-tempered with the demon. Crowley, Aziraphale realized long after the fact, had been extraordinarily skittish for years after the Garden. It hadn't been until after they'd dealt with that flaming sword business that he'd seemed to settled down at all. And it had been a few centuries before Aziraphale had seen him as the sleek and self-satisfied demon he'd eventually come to love.

And they'd never talked about the Garden.
Come to think about it, Crowley was always the one to steer those conversations elsewhere.

And now he was afraid again.

What was worse for Aziraphale was the loneliness of the fear. Aziraphale couldn't follow him this time. He couldn't stand in Hell beside his love and face down whatever made Crowley shake.

All he could do was hold him close this night and protect him until Crowley returned to waking.

~

"I should go," Crowley murmured into Aziraphale's wing.

It was nearly morning - the second night they'd spent together on the beach.

They'd gotten up the day before well after the sun rose. Crowley had awoken at last with a tired smile and teased Aziraphale for mussing up his wings with sand.

Mutual preening seemed to soothe any lingering nerves in the demon. They'd spent most of the day roaming Los Angeles, which was not the most pedestrian-friendly locale. But they made it work. Crowley seemed calmer, if far more subdued and lacking in quick-tongued retorts.

They'd gone by the precinct to fetch the mail and get Linda's address. Chloe had called ahead for them, and Linda had expressed reservations about having a strange demon and angel anywhere near her baby after everything which had happened, especially since Amenadiel was away. At the mention of Amenadiel, Crowley had hastily insisted to the detective and the doctor that they didn't need to lay eyes on the baby, and an assurance from Dr. Martin that everything was fine was enough. They'd fled before anyone could ask anything which might dredge up Aziraphale and Amenadiel's sordid history.

"Him of all angels connecting with a human!" Aziraphale was still fuming hours later. "After all that business in Gomorrah. And Nineveh. And New Orleans!"

Crowley merely smiled and bought him another round.

Another night of sleep, a short flight and now they strolled the short distance to Crowley's gateway.

"Are you sure I can't come with you?" Aziraphale asked as they halted before the slender fault line.

"Sorry, Angel. There's too much of you to bring along." Crowley kissed him. His forked tongue flicked across Aziraphale's cheek.

(Aziraphale had once asked what Crowley scented when he did that. "Old books... celestial fire... hot cocoa... love," the demon had replied.)

Aziraphale clung a little tighter to his hand. "You brought Lucifer into the Garden."

Crowley faltered. "That was different."

"Why?"

The demon shuddered, then pulled free of Aziraphale’s grasp by the simple act of becoming a serpent. He slithered toward the crevice and paused on the edge. "You'll be here when I come back?" There was a note of begging in his voice which clutched at Aziraphale's heart.

"Of course." Aziraphale dropped to the ground beside the viper. "I won't leave if this is where
"Well, take care of the plants and pay the shop bills." Crowley tried for a careless grin, but the serpent mouth wasn't really made for that. "I don't want to come back and scold the plants for a failure to grow if it's really your fault."

"I'll take care of them. You know I wouldn't forget them. They're going to be happy to know you're alright."

Crowley scoffed and thrust his head into the crevice. He was about to dive, when the angel scooped him back up.

Aziraphale pressed the serpent head to his lips. "Come back to me," he whispered. "Promise you'll come back."

Crowley nipped him lightly on the nose. "You're such a worrier," he scolded. "Now, put me down before the boss sends someone looking for me."

Aziraphale started to, then paused. "That reminds me. I saw Adam before I left."

"What did he want?"

"He asked me to give a message to his father... you know... Him. He wanted..."

"Don't." The serpent flared up.

Aziraphale frowned. "My dear?"

Crowley swayed nervously. He butted his head beneath the angel's chin and pressed himself securely there. "I'm not sure he remembers about Adam."

Aziraphale's frown deepened. "How could he forget?"

"I don't know. It's not like he's been much of a father. Runs in the family, don't you think?"

"Please don't say things like that."

"I'm just saying. Did you have any sort of childhood?"

"We were created to be as we are," Aziraphale protested.

"Really?" The serpent's head appeared in Aziraphale's line of vision and danced back and forth mockingly. "So I was meant to be an errand boy for the devil and you were destined to be a used book dealer in Soho?"

"Crowley..." Aziraphale protested with a painful catch in his voice. Did they have to have this argument now?

Crowley sighed and leaned his head between the Aziraphale's eyes. "I'm sorry, Angel. But it's a family problem. Let's not get caught in the middle again. You and me. We picked our own side, yeah?"

Aziraphale stroked down the serpent's soft scales. "If you think that's best." He set the serpent on the ground.

Crowley coiled briefly around his fingers. He hesitated a moment, looking as if there was more he
wanted to say. Then, with a flick of his tail, he plunged out of Earth's reality.

Aziraphale stayed beside the fissure for a long time afterwards.
"I can't believe you're back to working full-time already."

"Well, I have a support team that's literally Heaven-sent. And Hell."

Chloe and Linda sat at a back booth of a café, catching up over lunch before they'd both inevitably rush back to work.

Linda, Chloe thought with a mild stir of jealousy, looked amazing for having had a baby so recently. Certainly far more rested than Chloe had felt when Trixie was an infant.

"As soon as Charlie was on the bottle, Maze took all the night feedings. She says she's up all night anyway." Linda leaned in slightly. "I'm pretty sure she's been standing guard every night since... you know."

"Is she still leaving weapons everywhere?"

"I think I've found most of them. I wish she'd stop demonstrating their uses to Charlie. Cerebrally, I know she won't drop a blade when she's swinging it around, but..."

"She kept teaching Trixie, too."

"How did you get her to stop?"

"I didn't."

Linda gave a nervous laugh. "I guess I don't have to worry about that until Charlie's motor skills improve. Anyway, Amenadiel has been a huge help too. He's trying so hard to be the perfect dad. I've told him mistakes are okay... but I don't think he hears me." Her gaze turned distant. "I hope he's back in town soon."

"Did he say where he was going?"

"Something about a family matter... I decided not to ask."

Chloe nodded and opted for a change in subject. "How does it feel being back to work?"

"Great. And exhausting. I worry about Charlie, but it's nice the building has a daycare, so I can see him between sessions. But it's good to be back with my patients again."

"Dan said he's been seeing you." Chloe held up a hand before Linda could respond. "I know. You can't talk about your patients. But I did want to say thank you. He's really trying to improve. He's been apologizing for some things. So... thank you for helping him."

"Well." Linda tried not to look too pleased with the compliment. "It is my job." Her face softened. "But how are you?"

"Are you asking as a doctor?"

"I'm asking as your friend. Things ended really suddenly between you and Lucifer."
Chloe sighed. "I don't blame him, you know? He made the right call... but..." She rubbed her eyes. "I just... wanted more time with him. And now he's gotten back in touch. Like we could make a long-distance relationship work. But that's impossible, isn't it? He can't come back. I can't go there. It's just... over."

"Clearly he doesn't want it to be. If he's making an effort to contact you again."

"And I'm... grateful he did? Except... how does this end?"

"Have you told him how you feel?"

"Not yet. I'm trying to understand what he's going through. His last letter... he rambled into a lot of details about things I can't even begin to process." Chloe massaged her temples. "This was easier when I thought he was speaking in metaphor."

"Believe me, I've been there," Linda muttered.

"Right now... I just want to get a grasp on what's happening. I did want some professional advice from you, though. Not about me. Trixie."

"Is she alright?"

Chloe shook her head. "This has been hard on her. Lucifer was really important to her. I don't think I realized how much. She says she always knew I was safe when he was here... I can't really explain why he just walked away from us... well, flew. I wondered if she should talk to someone."

"Has she been to therapy before?"

"When Dan and I separated, we sent her to a counselor. But they've moved out of LA. I wondered if you could recommend anyone."

"I could talk to her, if you wanted."

"Wouldn't that be awkward? You're seeing Dan already. And we're friends."

"It's..." Linda hesitated. "A little strange. But... well... does she know? About Lucifer? And Maze?"

"...Sort of. You know Lucifer. He always told people what he was. Trixie definitely believed him back when they first met. But I don't think he ever... did anything in front of her. So... I don't know what she thinks anymore."

"Then I might be the best qualified. I certainly won't think she's crazy if she starts going on about angels and devils." Linda winced. "If I ever dreamed this would be my life..."

Chloe smiled thinly. "You and me both."

"It was one thing to get excited about a patient with such fixed delusions!" Linda went on. "I thought I could write a paper about him. Get any teaching job in the country if I ever wanted to get out of counseling. And then he turns out to be..." She dropped her voice to a whisper. "The literal devil. What does that mean for me?" She gestured a little wildly. "Am I damned now? Being therapist to the devil can't get you points toward Heaven, right? And the things I've done... I helped break a man out a psychiatric ward because I thought he was God. I snuck into a hospital so I could kill the devil and help send him to Hell!"

"You what?!"
Linda paused. "We should probably have a talk sometime about everything you missed by not believing Lucifer for the first few years. But, seriously... the stuff we've seen. My baby got kidnapped by demons. And his father..." She clutched at the table. "Sometimes I think I'm going to wake up one day and find out all this was just a massive psychotic break."

Chloe grabbed her hand. "You're not crazy. It's real. All of it. Lucifer, and Eve... and Charlie. All of it. I don't know why you and I got pulled into the midst of it all. But... I don't think that damns your soul or anything." She smiled reassuringly. "And if it does, I think you have an in with management."

Linda laughed slightly hysterically. "You have a point there." She resettled her glasses. "I'm past the point of no return anyway, right? I just have to hope my baby doesn't grow wings or something."

They sat in silence for a moment.

"So..." Chloe started up the conversation again cautiously. "What... did I miss? Not knowing?"

"Well... did anyone ever explain everything about Charlotte Richards?"

Chapter End Notes

Just a short chapter of human beings talking about human stuff. Work, raising kids, dating Satan... the usual. The next chapter will get this story properly back to Hell.
Another demon enters the story. This is Mammon, the personification of greed, one of the seven princes of Hell, and one of Lucifer's advisors according to Paradise Lost.

According to Dante, the capital city in Hell is Dis. According to Milton, it's Pandæmonium. It is Pandæmonium here because that's a way better name.

Lucifer sat upon his throne, the princes of Hell at his side. Fawning, servile demons crouched at his feet, whispering a stream of unending praise. Armed warriors stood in statuesque attention, ready at a snap of their Lord's fingers to carry out his command. Advisors and attendants lined the room. Supplicants awaited his notice, held at bay and in fretful silence by the bristling row of guards between them and their King.

The Lord of Hell listened to the issues of the day - allotment of space for tortures, unrest among the mines of Tartarus, the anticipated arrival of the tributes from Faerie, damage to the walls of Pandæmonium which had not yet been repaired, quarreling among the demons on the fourth level... it went on endlessly.

Lucifer remained upright and focused for the most part, sometimes lounging his head on one fist and wishing for a cappuccino. This was why he'd avoided paperwork on Earth. A vacation with only his chosen responsibilities had been so delightful. And the ecstasies and agonies of Earth meant so much more than this endless drabble of complaints and troubles.

The day's tasks wore down eventually, and Lucifer spared a glance to one of his waiting Lieutenants. "Honestly," he sighed. "Who could take an eternity of this?"

"The weight of the crown and the reward of it are yours, my King," Mammon replied stiffly.

Lucifer huffed. "Oh, stop with that nonsense. It's bloody dull listening to this lot whimpering to me with every last problem."

"The troubles piled up while you were away, Sire," the prince replied with no change in mannerism. "We, the faithful, could only handle so much while the throne was..." His eyes drifted with suspicious hunger to the chair. "...Vacant."

The devil turned his head deliberately away, watching Mammon's hungry gaze from the corner of his eye. So... that was how it was.

There had been more princess of Hell once upon a time - seven all total. But their numbers had been sliced in half due to the idiocy and impatience of the lot. It had seemed fortuitous at the time when four of them had declared the apocalypse eminent somewhere around the 11th century, galloped away to end humanity, and never returned. Lucifer had thought it was easier than having to execute them himself for deciding they knew better than him. He hadn't been eager for the headache the apocalypse would have caused.
Nor had he been any more eager centuries later when Beelzebub had nagged him to get on with it. At least that business had been settled relatively painlessly. He hadn't even had to pay child support.

Three councilors were enough, he thought. Although studying them now, he wondered if he needed to do a cleansing of their ranks once again. None of them had looked entirely thrilled to have him back. Oh, they'd gone to their knees and sworn their loyalty to him for all eternity as they had that day on the shores of the burning lake so long ago when they'd first Fallen, but he'd never really trusted the lot of them.

Trust wasn't something Hell inspired. Considering its original inhabitants had all rebelled against their Creator hadn't made Lucifer eager to put much faith in them. He'd been marginally hopeful the Lilim would prove of different stock, but they'd slaughtered one another too agreeably, and eventually turned on their own mother. To be fair, Lilith had absolutely had it coming. Lucifer hadn't lifted a pinion to help her when the Lilim had finally tired of her abuse.

Time had not been good for the original Fallen. Between infighting in their ranks and clashes with the Heavenly Hosts, their numbers had been steadily reduced. It was possible for an angel or demon to die - to be thoroughly snuffed out of existence. Not just discorporated back to Heaven or Hell to explain to management how they'd lost a corporeal body. No, the celestial beings could indeed die. And there was nothing left of them when that happened.

It didn't matter really. The demons bred like rabbits. A missing entity was just replaced with two or three more within a short span.

Some of them really were relentlessly faithful. Maybe Mazikeen had been the only one to accompany him out the gates, but there were others who would have been willing. Still. A demon was a demon. It was rarely safe to close one's eyes with one lurking nearby.

He wondered, as he watched his lieutenants, why one hadn't simply taken over his empty throne. He wouldn't have stopped them. Although... it might have been the worse for humanity. Beelzebub with her dreams of cleansing the planet. Mammon, coveting all the wealth of the world. Belial, well immersed in the insanity which seemed to claim many of the Fallen.

But no matter their inner thoughts, they held enough fear of him to keep them in check. Good. If he held the throne, his humans were safe. That was all he could do for them now.

He rose, and the assembly bowed low. Declaring the workday concluded, he returned to the castle.

He shook off his attendants as he neared his private chambers. His servants dipped their heads and scurried away at his dismissive gesture. None entered his rooms without his permission. It was part of how he'd avoided potential assassinations.

He seated himself and drew Chloe's letters to him. He'd read them so many times the words were burned in his mind, yet he kept reading them over and over. It was what little he had. What little remained of a world with people who were... decent.

He found, to his puzzlement, that it was the ordinariness of life he missed. Not the orgies and vice, although those were nice too. And not just the humans of his inner circle. Of course he longed for the detective, and her urchin, and the others who had become so close to him. But... those other humans. The bartenders and waiters and bouncers at Lux. The door guards at the precinct who buzzed him in. The officers he spoke to in the hallways and breakroom. He'd even gotten to know the cleaning crews by name.
They were humans with lives, and families, and dreams all their own. He'd done favors for some of them. And when he totaled it up, humanity had come out well ahead. He'd given far more than he received... and that didn't bother him. He was happy to have gotten to know them. To have been granted a small part in the story of their lives.

It felt better than ten thousand demons swearing that he was the center of their existence.

He wrote for a long time - writing to Linda, and Ella, and his brother as well (although the last was just a scolding to Amenadiel for not visiting him). When he finished, he sat studying the letters for a long span, then went in search of Crawly.

Crawly (no, Crowley. He'd been very insistent upon that, annoying little worm) was awake for once. He was coiled on the windowsill, watching the city of Pandæmonium broil below him.

"Enjoying looking down on it all?" Lucifer purred.

The demon jumped but didn't turn away from the view. "There's a lot of fighting going on out there."

Lucifer joined him at the window. "It is a city of demons. What would you expect?"

"A lot of the buildings are coming down," Crowley continued. He hunched low and arched away from Lucifer, still not looking at him.

"Yes, well, I haven't had opportunity to address repairs."

A roll of thunder sounded overhead, though no rain fell from the grey sky. It rarely ever did.

"Are you capable of slithering on your own or do I have to drag you?" The devil asked, though there was little threat in his words. Chloe's last letter had indicated she thought he was driving the serpent too hard, and if she wished him be a touch softer, he would.

"Yeah... yeah, I can go." Crowley dropped to the ground, resuming his more human shape as he did. He glanced nervously at Lucifer, beginning to babble a little. "Feeling a lot better this time, you know? Resting up there really seemed to help." His eyes flickered hopefully toward Lucifer's face, then away, then back again.

The devil rolled his eyes. Crowley wasn't exactly subtle in what he was asking. But he was correct. He'd recovered far faster from the trip this time. Lucifer suspected the lingering scent of celestial healing had a lot to do with that.

He made a gesture for Crowley to proceed him out the door (never leave a demon behind your back) and followed at a leisurely pace. "Yes, Crowley. Spend the night." He scoffed. "How does an angel end up with a demon in its bed?"

The demon in question shrugged and glanced back. "Oh, you know. After 6,000 years, fighting gets a bit dull."

"So your alternative was sex?"


"Ducks?" The devil repeated.
Crowley nodded eagerly. "At St. James' Place. We used to bring them bread, but Aziraphale read it wasn't good for them. So now we mostly bring corn. Or bird seed." He looked abruptly even more awkward. "It's... you know... relaxing."

Those were words Lucifer never thought he'd hear a demon say without their knives plunged into someone's stomach.

They reached the fissure. Lucifer handed off the post, tapping the letters to emphasize who received what.

Crowley took the letters and tucked them beneath his jacket. He hesitated. "I saw Eve."

Lucifer looked away. "Yes... she's trying out life again."

Crowley wavered, then spoke in a rush. "Does she know?"

Lucifer whirled on the demon with a glare brimming with hellfire. "There is nothing to discuss!"

Crowley flinched away from him, averting his gaze and bowing his head low.

Lucifer felt a flicker of satisfaction that the demon hadn't completely lost his ability to show proper deferment after too many years among the humans. Only Mazikeen had earned the right not to bow before him.

"Get on," he grumbled. "And don't start any trouble."

"I wasn't going to," Crowley muttered. His form shifted.

Lucifer planted a foot in the serpent's path. "I mean it. She doesn't need more difficulties in her life."

"Neither do I," Crowley protested. He looked up, his eyes as earnest as a viper's could be. "I just want to be with Aziraphale. I'm not going to do anything to ruin that."

Lucifer drew back with a satisfied nod.

A second later, the serpent was gone.

Alone, the devil walked the halls of his palace, disquieted to be reminded of too long-buried a history.

Crowley could be a problem, Lucifer reflected. He'd forgotten how many of his secrets the viper knew. And unlike most of the fallen, Crowley was still securely sane.

Chapter End Notes

The duck thing is legit! Bread is bad for ducks. Malnutrition can cause wing deformities. Feeding wildlife is generally bad, but stuff like cracked corn, lettuce, and grapes are better if you must feed the ducks.

That's it for the week. The story will resume on Monday with another full week of updates. After that... things may slow down. We'll see. Short chapters and me having
lots of fun writing this are moving things along nicely for the moment. Thanks everyone for all the encouragement and comments! It means a lot. I am blown away by all the support.
Chloe was not surprised to arrive home one evening to find a demon teaching her daughter Three-Card-Monty. She was only slightly more surprised by the second demon asleep on the sofa.

"Visitor for you," Maze called, pointing a finger at the couch without looking up from instructing Trixie. "Grip the card with the sides of your hand once it comes out of your sleeve. Yes, like that."

"Are you teaching her to be a street hustler?"

"That's the point of the game. If people don't know they're being cheated, they deserve to lose their money."

"Trixie." Chloe swept the cards into a pile. "Go take a bath and get ready for bed. And we're all going to have a talk about ethics later, okay?"

Once the bathroom door closed behind Trixie, Chloe turned to Maze with a gesture at the couch. "Did you knock him out or did he fall asleep?"

Maze shrugged. "Little of both." She snorted contemptuously. "He's not much good in a fight." She tapped a collection of letters stacked on the table. "He said he brought these for you before he passed out." She looked hopeful. "Want me to string him up and see what secrets he's hiding?"

"No, thank you." Chloe dialed her phone. "Hi, is this Aziraphale?... Yes, he's here... My home. Do you remember the address?... I think you'll have to come pick him up... five minutes? Yes... thank you... Goodbye." She returned her phone to her pocket. "His ride will be here soon."

Mazikeen spun the top letter around and eyed the wax seal binding it closed. "So, Lucifer found a way to stay in touch, huh? What's he sending you?"

"Um..." Chloe breathed out a tired note and dropped into a chair. "Mostly asks about cases and things. I think he's lonely." She looked up at Maze. "You didn't open them?"

"With that seal on it? If anyone but the recipient broke that, they'd be dead."

Chloe blinked. "That's... alarming. What if someone got it by accident?"

"Messengers are supposed to protect those things with their lives partially for that reason." Mazikeen scowled in Crowley's direction. "Lucifer should really send a better protector if he doesn't want his letters falling into the wrong hands."

Chloe dropped her voice. "Is he... safe?" She nodded at the couch.

"Crawly?" Maze shrugged. "I don't really know him. But he's not a fighter. You could just shoot him a few times if he does anything. Or I can leave you a couple knives. Go for the wings if you can. They're sensitive there."

There was a knock on the door and Chloe rose to answer it. Maze paced along behind her, blades drawn despite Chloe's insistence that everything was fine.

Aziraphale was all blustering politeness. "Hello, Detective. So lovely to see you again. I'm sorry
the hour is so late. Where's our mutual... Oh, hello!" He beamed at Mazikeen, sizing up the demon and her knives rapidly. "Oh, my... Well, hello. Yes." He licked his lips, then smiled with a sudden look of clarity. "Oh! You're the lesser demon the scrying picked up!"

Mazikeen snarled. "What did you say?"

"Angel?" Crowley sat up, rubbing his eyes. "Never call a Lilim lesser to their face. Or ever, if you want to keep that corporation's spleen intact."

Aziraphale drew back and touched his chest. "Oh! My deepest apologies. I assure you, no offense was meant."

Maze continued to glare with narrowed eyes. "I don't like him."

"Maze, this is Aziraphale. Aziraphale, Mazikeen." Chloe gestured between them. "And I'd appreciate if no one gets stabbed in my living room."

"Fine with me." Maze shrugged. "The back street's good."

Aziraphale blustered. "I'm not going to engage in a common street brawl."

"You do have a celestial sword," Crowley pointed out.

"You do?" Maze's expression turned eager. "I haven't seen one of those in centuries. Let's see it!"

Chloe pointed to the door. "If you're going to fight, do it outside."

Maze pushed Aziraphale out ahead of her. "Come on, angel."

"I don't know about this! And only Crowley calls me that!"

Chloe shut the door firmly behind them. She hesitated and looked at Crowley. "Was that a bad idea?"

Crowley shrugged. "She probably won't kill him." He swung his legs to the floor, still rubbing his eyes.

Chloe joined him on the couch, keeping a careful distance between them. "Are you alright?"

Crowley gave her a crooked smile and fumbled for his glasses. "Belly-crawling out of Hell isn't the easiest activity. But Aziraphale will put me right. Thanks for calling him. You found the letters, yeah? That Lilim didn't run off with them?"

Chloe nodded. "What was that about lesser demons?"

Crowley huffed a small laugh. "The boss never explained much about us? There are classes to demons. Lots of them. Depends how pretentious you want to be, really. But the simplest divide is there are the Fallen - the 'greater demons' as they've declared themselves. We're the ones who overstayed our welcome in Heaven. And then there are the lesser demons, like your friend with the knives. They were born in Hell. Mostly to Lilith. She was... very effective at litters."

"Oh." Chloe nodded slowly. Why, her mind wondered, did these conversations no longer seem at all weird? "So... you were an angel?"

"Oh, sure. Wings, halo, harp. The whole deal."
"You're making that up."

"Yes... except for the wings." His grin faded. "We... don't really talk about all that."

"Sorry," Chloe said quickly. She cast around for another subject. "How is Lucifer?"

Crowley flinched. "He sent a letter," he replied tentatively.

"Yes, but how is he really?"

The demon hesitated. "Honestly? Pretty sure he's miserable." He leaned back. "'As the king goes,
so goes the land,' and all that."

Chloe blinked. "What do you mean?"

"Oh... it's an old concept. Medieval I think. If you've got a good king, everything's good crops and
peace. Bad king means pestilence and... no, she's retired... um..." He glanced around, his eyes
fixing on a rack of DVDs. "Oh! Like this!" He slid one out of the stack and handed it to her.
"Perfect example."

Chloe stared at it, then at him. "'The Lion King'?"

"Yeah! You've seen it, right? Good king - everything's sunny and green. Lots of species. Happy
musical numbers. Bad king - no rain. Everything's grey. Nothing left but predators. Songs about
rape..."

"Nobody gets raped."

"Right... that's just the musical. Aziraphale insisted we go when it was in London. Anyway. Then,
good king again. Starts raining. There's sunshine and biodiversity again, right?"

"I've seen it," Chloe said slowly, not at all sure where this was going.

"There you go. 'As the king goes, so goes the land'. The idea was that the land reflects the strength
and mood of the king. Doesn't actually work on Earth, but it's exactly how Hell goes. If the boss is
happy it's... still the worst place imaginable to live... but it's not awful. The realm kind of... reflects
his mood. Except right now, the king's really not happy to be there, and you can see it all over
Hell."

Chloe studied the cartoon images in her hand. "So, you're saying Hell is worse since Lucifer went
back?"

"Well, I don't know about that. The place was neglected for a while, so it's probably good
someone's telling everyone what to do. But..." Crowley looked at her earnestly. "From what they're
saying, while he was here, while he was happy, it was nicer down there. For everyone." He sat
back. "But what do I know? I took the first job opening to get me out of Hell 6,000 years ago and
I've never looked back."

The front door opened.

"I have got to get one of those," Maze crowed.

"I don't think they pass them out to just anyone," Aziraphale sputtered on her heels. "I was
absolutely denied a replacement flaming sword when I... loaned mine out. They were most
displeased with me."
Crowley rose. "Aww, that's old history, isn't it, Angel? We got it back. And found you a replacement blade. Even if it doesn't flame. No harm done." He butted his head beneath Aziraphale's chin and looked prepared to fall asleep there.

"My dear," the angel sighed. "You can't fall asleep in this nice detective's house."

"Carry me," Crowley mumbled.

"Actually, I've procured transportation. It's a motor bike. With a side car."

Crowley popped back awake. "Aziraphale, I am not riding in a side car!"

"Well, it's my motor bike." Aziraphale drew himself up stiffly. "And I will not have you ruining it with your... reckless driving."

"What are you talking about? You love my driving." Crowley started for the door, then turned back. "The other letters. Right."

Maze snatched them up before he could reach them. "I'll take Linda's. And Amenadiel's." She gave him a challenging look.

Crowley stared for a second, then shrugged. "Fine. Leaves me with..." He studied the name. "Ella Lopez." He frowned, then gave a quick nod. "Right... the one Death likes." He stumbled back toward Aziraphale. "I'll come find you tomorrow, Detective. Enjoy your let..." He collapsed asleep in the angel's arms.

Aziraphale hefted him off the ground. "Thank you for your hospitality." He paused in the doorway. "Until we meet again, good people. A blessing on your home." He made as best a formal bow as he could with a demon slung over his shoulder. The door closed behind him without the use of hands.

Chloe turned to Mazikeen. "Okay, I know I've only met a few angels and demons... but, are they normal?"

Maze shook her head slowly. "No. No, not at all."

Chapter End Notes

There really is a song in the musical where Scar threatens to get cubs out of Nala whether she's willing or not. I can't imagine why it wasn't in the kids' movie.
"Looks like an ordinary hit and run, right?" Ella asked with an eager gleam in her eye as Chloe knelt beside the scientist and surveyed the crushed body in the road. "Guy just happens to walk into traffic. Tragic, but nothing out of the ordinary. Until you look at... this!" She pulled up the victim's sleeve with a flourish, revealing a long string of tattoos. Ella grinned. "Great workmanship, right? Look at all these colors! Must have cost a fortune. But what's important is if you look here..." She spread the skin flatter.

Chloe bent her head. "Looks like a serial number. Something he had tattooed over?"

"Ding, ding, ding!" Ella grinned. "You know, I have a buddy who does tattoo art. She does just the most incredibly detailed stuff you can imagine. I was thinking about maybe getting like a gothic-style cross... but then things weren't real right with me and the Big Guy there for a while so I put that on hold. Anyway, she gets loads of people who got shady tattoos when they were young, and now they want covered up - you know - racial slurs, or gang tattoos, or..."

"Prison brands."

"Exactly! And this, guy, according to his Visa, just came in from... Moscow!"

Chloe sighed. "Alright. See what you can find out. But if this is Russian mob related, we may have to turn it over."

"That is so not fair! Guy gets killed. We do all the dirty work. And then someone just takes it away from us?! Ugh."

Chloe rose. "I'm going to talk to the unis. Thanks, Ella."

"Yep! I'll be here." Her voice dropped to a mutter. "Solving this crime... without someone taking it away..."

Ella hummed a little as she worked, pausing to eagerly describe just how the car tires had caught the victim's foot and dragged him several feet before releasing its grip to an unfortunate officer who happened to walk over to ask when she'd be done with the body. "Oh, yeah. Ten minutes," she said once the officer managed to spit out the query on the end of Ella's monologue.

It was midway through photographing that Ella happened to look away from her task and take in the world around her. As her eyes swept past the small crowd standing at the edge of the police tape, she did a sudden double-take.

A short girl wearing a dark sweatshirt adorned with a large image of a cat waved cheerfully at her.
Ella glanced around cautiously, but no one seemed to be paying attention. She gave the girl a small wave back, then forcibly concentrated on the victim.

Her stomach clenched in an uncomfortable knot. Yes, she'd said she was okay with seeing Rae-Rae again... but she hadn't really thought her ghost would appear so publicly like this. Had something happened? Maybe to one of her family members and Rae-Rae had come to tell her? Or maybe Rae-Rae had finally found out what she needed to do to cross over and needed Ella's help? She'd certainly be happy to do so... but did the ghost have to come out in public to talk to her?

She forced herself not to look again until the body was loaded and the crime scene dealt with. Waving goodbye to the ambulance, she took a steadying breath and turned to face her friend.

Rae-Rae was still standing at the edge of the police tape. Except now she wasn't alone. That man Chloe said worked for Lucifer was standing nearby. What was his name? Crowley? He was studying the ground, but Ella could hear him speaking as she approached.

"...not really your problem, I know. But you're family, right? And he seems pretty lonely with..." He broke off his murmuring and took a step back as Ella ducked under the police tape.

"Hi, Ella!" Rae-Rae chirped brightly.

"Hey." Ella managed to direct the welcome to both of them before focusing on Crowley with a glance of silent apology to the ghost. "You're... Lucifer's friend, right?"

"That's an... overstatement." His tongue flicked once rapidly. "But... here." He held out an envelope. "He sent this for you."

"Fancy seal," Ella remarked, holding the envelope at arm's length to survey it properly. "You know, he could just call. Or stop in and visit? It's crazy he left so suddenly. I know he does that sometime. One time, he came back married. Can you believe it? But this time just feels..." She sighed. "Final? Like we're never going to see him again."

"Well, you might." Crowley's head twitched ever so slightly in Rae-Rae's direction, before focusing back on the ground. "But... probably not."

"That's such a bummer!"

" Depends how you look at it." Crowley stepped back. "Anyway... uh... if you want to get in touch with him, just write a reply and I'll pick it up next time I'm in town. Speaking of... Hi, Detective."

Chloe walked up with a nod. "Hi. I'm afraid I'm not done with the letter. I've been interviewing suspects all morning, and now this. Work takes precedent."

"Tell that to my boss," Crowley muttered.

"Could you stop by my house tomorrow morning?"

Crowley shrugged. "I will never have a problem delaying the trip back down. Except for the reception waiting for me."

"I'll put in a good word for you."

Crowley brightened. "In that case, Aziraphale wanted to try The Belvedere."

"Oh, sorry Dude." Ella jumped into the conversation. "You'd need a reservation like a month in
Crowley straightened his shades. "I never have that problem." He waved a hand vaguely. "Enjoy your murder." He sauntered off.

"Make it for three and at seven!" Rae-Rae called after him. She turned to Ella, beaming. "You should come!"

Ella coughed to hide a grin. "So, I'm all done here," she said to Chloe. "I'll start processing everything and tell you what I find."

"Great." Chloe already had her phone out. "Unfortunately, I'm going to have to get back to my other murder before dealing with this one."

"I could help!" Rae-Rae piped up. "Do you want me to tell you about the guy who ran that guy down? He died instantly, so I saw a lot."

"Anyway," Ella said loudly. "I drove myself so... I'll just drive... myself to the precinct now. Yeah?" She tried to make a 'come hither' nod of her head to Rae-Rae without being too obvious about it.

The ghost smiled brightly, soon appearing in the passenger seat of Ella's car. "Can I drive?"

"No! Can you even hold onto things?" Ella grew animated. "Wait, can you phase the car through stuff? Could you make the car invisible?"

Rae-Rae laughed. "I don't have super-powers, El."

Ella glanced her way, then hastily returned to driving. "What are you doing here, Rae-Rae?"

"I thought you'd be happy to see me."

"I am! I really am. I know I said you could... check in. But at a crime scene? Was it someone you knew?"

"Not personally, no."

"And that guy... was he talking to you? Can other people see you?"

"I guess..." Rae-Rae sounded evasive. "If I want people to."

"So people other than me? That's crazy! Do they know you're a ghost?"

"People think I'm different things."

"So that guy... Wait, he didn't kill your or something, did he? Is he why you can't move on?"

"El, no! He doesn't have anything to do with that. We just... met a while ago. I was different back then. More... um... detached. And some stuff happened. And I started thinking I should get better connected with the world. You really helped with that, you know."

"Me?"

"Sure. You're amazing. And you let me hang out with you. Most people panic when I show up."

"Aww, Rae-Rae. We need to find you better ghost friends." Ella was silent for a minute while
navigating traffic. "Are you really going out to dinner with him?"

"Maybe. Do you want to come?"

"I'll probably have to work all night. And he can't really get reservations this late anyway."

"You really should go! It would be good for you. And they'll totally get in."

"I don't know..." Ella murmured distantly.

"Turn right," Rae-Rae said abruptly.

"What? Why?" Ella obediently took the turn onto a side street.

"There's about to be a car accident up ahead."

"About to be?" Ella twisted around in her seat. "I don't see..."

They heard a screech of tires and frantic horns.

"I have to go." Rae-Rae reached for the door.

"What?! Rae-Rae!" Ella stared at the spot where her friend had been. She hadn't seen Rae-Rae get out, but she was definitely alone. She parked the car, and ran toward the accident, dialing 9-1-1 as she went.

Chapter End Notes

For those who need the information: Ella, the LAPD's forensic scientist, befriended Azrael, the Angel of Death when she was a kid. She doesn't know who/what 'Rae-Rae' really is. She thinks she's a ghost only she can see, although she worried she was going crazy for a while. They met up again after a long absence, and Ella became accepting of having an invisible friend.

Wow, this has hit 1,000 kudos! I can't believe the support. Thanks to everyone for commenting, sharing, and liking. I don't share my writing a whole lot, so I'm still floored by the positive feedback (and critical analysis). Thank you all!
And (probably) the last demon joins the cast. Belial is another of Lucifer's advisors from *Paradise Lost*. I went with Belial because my other option was Moloch and it seemed weird if every (sort of) OC I added had a name starting with the letter M. So, Moloch's dead.

Oh, and Beelzebub's around, as mentioned a few chapters back. The three of them (Mammon, Belial, and Beelzebub) make up what's left of Lucifer's advisory team. Beelzebub looks the same as she did in the miniseries, except she sometimes dissolves into flies when angry.

In Hell, blood rained from the sky.

In the fields of torment, souls wailed and scrambled to escape the onslaught which burned like acid through their essence.

It poured down on Pandæmonium, leaving the walls streaked in oozing reds.

Demons of particular type frolicked in the streets, their mouths wide to catch the burning drops. Demons of other sorts huddled in whatever shelter they could find, watching the sky with wary tension.

The rain slackened at last, leaving the sky twisting with colors and patterns not dissimilar the human digestive tract.

Across the sky flew a dark swarm which dove low and menacing over the cities of Hell.

Demons scattered with fearful cries.

The King was on the hunt.

Harpies flew a great crowd around him, diving and snapping at any moving body beneath them. They snatched up an unfortunate young demon, who shrieked and wriggled free, losing a pound of flesh along the way but at least surviving for another day of torment.

Belial flew at the King's heels, shrieking out a litany of madness. She cartwheeled through the air, sometimes making lunges at the harpies who scattered at her touch. She shouted curses of death and misery upon the enemies of the throne of Hell, hacking out bones and bottle caps between utterance.

Any vestige of humanity was gone from the Lord of Hell. Dragon wings cleaved the bloodied sky. Hellfire burned in his eyes. His skin rippled in red-black broils. His mouth was curled back in the ugliest of grins.

His laws had been broken. Despite his warnings, despite his leniency, there had been disobedience. He'd warned them. He'd said what he would do. The guilty would be found. And they would be punished.
On the ground beneath, the hordes of Hell huddled in whatever cover they could find and prayed to any listening that the hunt was not for them. Many a demon held a dark secret in their heart. And now they shook that their time had come.

The hunting party wheeled overhead, seeking out sign and scent of the condemned. They ranged further abroad, leaving the city behind and flying over the fields of torment.

Demons halted their administrations to the souls of the damned. They prostrated themselves in ranks of terrified trembling, only arising to their tasks once more when the swarm had passed by. The souls panted for those scant seconds of relief, then shrieked in renewed agony as the demons took out their fear on the helpless.

Onward they flew, sometimes doubling back to examine a trace or whisper. Then abruptly the scent was fresh. The harpies cried the trail and quickened their wing beats.

Behind, the demons breathed a collective sigh to find themselves not the target. On the heels of the flood of relief came the hunger to see the guilty punished. A crowd massed upon the ground, running in the swarm's wake with eager cries for bloodshed.

Their quarry ran a long trail, weaving amidst the dark places of Hell in desperate attempt to shake their pursuers. But the hunters had their trail and there was no shaking them once on the scent. The swarm flew onward, eating up the miles of Hell with relentless speed.

At last, their prey could run no more. The swarm was ahead and behind, hemming them from every side. The harpies alighted, ringing their captives in rows of slathering fangs and twitching talons. They gave ground only when the King approached.

Lucifer loosed an obsidian blade from its sheath and stalked toward the huddled captives.

The hordes of Hell bunched behind the hunters, licking their lips in anticipation of suffering.

The King came to a halt a distance off, surveying the helpless pair with blazing eyes.

The demon pair cowered closer together, eyes flitting for any escape into the crowd. But every claw in Hell was turned against them now. They'd earned their Lord's ire. There was no solace.

One untangled themselves from the other and crawled to the King's feet. "Mercy," they whispered. It was not a word heard in Hell. Laughter and jeers followed the supplication. Demonkind had judged them already. Not a single look of softening came to any face.

Not even the King's. But to his came a flicker of intrigue. "Whatever for?" He mused.

"Death-death-death!" Shrieked Belial. "Traitors to the throne. Deceivers! Strike the unworthy from your sight!"

The mad demon prince's cries were ignored by everyone. Except perhaps by the captives, whose trembling increased.

The second demon inched beside the first. She reached out and caught her fellow by the hand. "Let them go," she begged. "Take me alone. The blame should be mine."

"No!" The other wept. "Spare her, please! Let me be punished!"

The horde laughed all the harder.
But one among them studied the pair with new interest. His eyes were on their joined hands, on the way they clasped the other as close as they could. He saw something no other did. And he recognized their emotion down to the depths of his essence.

A word brought the guards to him and he gestured to the captives. "Take them to the dungeons. See them fettered and guarded, with no chance of further escape. But..." He considered their interlocked hands one last time. "Leave them together."

Despite protesting whines from the harpies, and disappointed grumbles from the assembled, his words were obeyed without question.

He singled out a guard before they could follow the procession and spoke low. "Have a concealed watch on them at all times. I want to know anything they say."

The demon horde thinned with discontented mumbles.

Belial was the only one to voice her displeasure in loudest terms. "They insult the throne. They betray the king. Smite the guilty. Drive them from your sight!"

"Smiting's for my brothers," Lucifer grumbled. "And I'd like to know the details of how this came about before we get to the punishing."

"What matters the reason? They broke your law! They must be punished."

"They will. But punishment must fit the crime, wouldn't you say?" Lucifer sheathed his blade. "I want the entire story before I decide their fate."


"Yes, it is." Lucifer unfurled his wings. "Now we've all had our fun. I suggest everyone returns to work."

Feathered wings, the brightest Heaven had ever birthed, cleaved through the dark sky of Hell as the devil returned to his throne.
"Do you think they're really coming?"

Crowley leaned against the wall outside the restaurant. He thought he should consider taking up smoking if he was going to loiter outside a restaurant. Otherwise people might think he was waiting for a reservation number to be called, and Crowley never wanted to be mistaken for those kind of people. "They... she, now, I guess... said to get a table for three."

"But does that mean she's coming?" Aziraphale straightened his bowtie in the window reflection. "And how will it work if she does? Will we be the only ones able to see her? Will we be able to see her?"

"I don't know, Angel." Crowley rolled his eyes. "I've never dined with the Angel of Death. She's one of your lot, not mine. Don't you know the rules?"

"I don't know if Azrael is really... anyone's lot. When we met him... her... before, did she really seem to be working for either side? If she was, it was definitely your side."

"Hold on a sec, your side was just as frothy as mine for the world to end."

Aziraphale turned to him. "She just walked up to you and said to make dinner plans?"

"No! I got directions from some guy at the precinct on where to find Lopez, and I'm waiting and suddenly the bloody Angel of Death turns around and greets me by name!" Crowley threw up his hands. "What was I supposed to do?! Not say hello? I'd like to keep living."

"I don't think she actually kills anyone. She's more... a collection agent."

"Whatever. She asks about the boss, so I tell her, and then she's telling me to plan for three for dinner. And I'm not going to say no... so now we're standing out here like idiots getting stood up by Death."

Aziraphale studied him critically. "Perhaps we should just get a table."

"Uh... Hey... Crowley, right?" Ella walked up hesitantly, looking a little lost.

"Miss Lopez." Crowley took a quick step back.

Aziraphale caught him by the shoulders. "Crowley, are you going to introduce me to this charming person?"

"Right..." Crowley made hasty and mumbled introductions.

Aziraphale put himself between Ella and Crowley with a beaming smile. "That's a lovely crucifix you're wearing."

Although grateful as always for Aziraphale's defense, the cross was not the reason Ella made Crowley want to bolt. Enough years on Earth, and quite a lot of them in the presence of the angel, had built up his tolerance for holy relics, so that, although he found them unpleasant, it took much more than a simple piece of jewelry to make his skin burn.
What bothered him was a certain scent on her. Two actually.

It had been more common once upon a time, when the forces of Heaven and Hell had walked the Earth in larger numbers, for certain humans to be claimed under the protection of some force otherworldly. Humans might not ever know – unless they were particularly gifted at seeing auras or particularly attuned to the supernatural. Even other angels and demons might not notice unless there was reason for them to take notice.

Heaven and Hell both boasted trackers of the finest variety. A hunter like Remiel could have zeroed in on Ella from halfway across Los Angeles and known exactly who'd taken an interest in her.

Crowley was no hunter. But he was relatively defenseless as demons went, and had a bad habit of irritating both Heaven and Hell. His senses for danger had been heightened over the centuries, screaming at him when running for cover was his wisest course of action.

He'd been expecting to find humans bearing Lucifer's scent. He'd certainly been warned on pains of dismemberment to leave them alone before he'd been allowed out of Hell. He'd not expected to find a human doubly favored. And by Azrael no less.

From their first meeting, he'd classified Ella as the second most dangerous being in the city to his survival. Detective Decker was the first. Azrael could only kill him. Lucifer would keep him alive.

(Eve and the yet-unseen Linda and Charlie ranked at a jumbled number 3 on his list, with Mazikeen and Amenadiel coming in at the bottom. They wouldn't have been thrilled with his classification.)

Crowley and Aziraphale had humans of their own they kept their eyes on, though not to as intense a degree as Lucifer had brazenly claimed his. Aziraphale had insisted they keep paying Sergeant Shadwell's bills, even after they discovered he'd been fleecing both of them. They'd been present at his marriage to Madame Tracy - Aziraphale to bless the union, and Crowley to mutter dire threats against any supernatural powers who might bother them. (Madame Tracy found herself completely unable to contact the spirit world after that.) They'd kept an eye on the pair through the years, and had been on hand for Shadwell's funeral two years before. Aziraphale had even uncovered the proper benediction of the Witch-Finder Army to send him on his way.

He would have blessed Anathema and Newt's marriage too, but after a few years it had become clear they were content living together without a formal arrangement, and Crowley had snapped at Aziraphale to get his mind out of the 19th century and bless whatever they had going for them. Anathema and Newt were frequently off on environmental protection excursions to far reaches of the globe (remote and away from electronics as much as possible), so Aziraphale blessed them as often as they saw them for fear of what harm they'd come to in the unknown.

They'd kept in contact with Warlock after he returned to America, feeling they owed him that since they'd helped raise him. If nothing else, they ought to make sure his twelfth birthday went better than his eleventh. They'd seen him more when he'd returned to England, but he was occupied with life now, and they hadn't seen much of him lately.

They would have looked out for the other children who'd stood against the Riders of the Apocalypse, but Adam had placed a blur over his friends' identities to defend them from both sides. Enough visits to Tadfield, and enough comparing of flawed memories, had confirmed to Aziraphale and Crowley that they were being blocked from that knowledge. They prudently pressed no further.
Oddly, Crowley was aware, what repulsed him from Ella attracted Aziraphale to her. The angel had no skill for scents. What he sensed was an overwhelming feeling of love and protection emanating from the scientist. It delighted him to find someone who felt so very loved.

"Won't you join us for supper?" He asked gallantly.

"I guess." Ella stood on her toes to scan the crowd. "I thought I was meeting a friend here. But I don't see her."

"We can always snag another chair," Crowley said and headed into the restaurant.

"I don't think it's that kind of place," Ella protested. "And we may be waiting for hours for a table."

Within two minutes, they were seated at a table set for three in a comfortable corner of the restaurant.

Ella whistled at the prices on the menu.

Aziraphale patted her hand and told her supper was on them.

Crowley ordered several bottles of wine.

Ella looked stunned. "Wow. What do you do for a living?"

"Oh, I run a used bookshop."

"Occasionally he even sells one," Crowley muttered.

Ella blinked. "Okay... what about you?"

Crowley slouched a little lower. "Whatever my boss tells me to, these days."

"Right." Ella grinned. "It must be great working for Lucifer. He's so sweet."

They stared.

Crowley ordered another bottle of wine.

The food was excellent and the wine flowed freely. Ella was never shy about talking, and her companions grew more careless and animated as the evening progressed.

"What I want to know is," Ella demanded with a slur to her words. "Why did Lucifer just run off like that? Again. He's always doing this! It's so not fair. He should at least let me hug him goodbye!"

"He doesn't want to be back either," Crowley replied. "He'd rather be here... we'd rather he was here. I mean... somebody's gotta run H-"

Aziraphale kicked him.

"The family business." He waved a hand vaguely. "And it's probably better off being him than one of those other pricks."

"But he should visit! Or at least call."

Crowley shook his head. "No service. Gotta be letters." He leaned back. "An' only I can take 'em."
Lucky me."

Aziraphale cuddled him to his side.

"Well, I'll visit him."

"Nope. One way trip for a human. He's all by himself. His family could visit. But they don't. That's why I was asking 'Zrael to come."

"Who?"

Crowley drew unsteadily in the air with one finger. "That girl today. In the cat shirt."

Ella blinked. "You mean Rae-Rae?"

Crowley nodded. "Right. 'Zrael. She could visit. Goes wherever she wants, her." He lolled back against Aziraphale. "What's the poem? Death couldn't stop..."

"Because I could not stop for Death - he kindly stopped for me," Aziraphale supplied. "Dickinson of course." He shook his head. "She should have gotten out of the house more often."

"That's my point," Crowley rambled. "She could stop by and see how he is, but no... Whole family just dumped us down there and never comes by. The boss has got a right to be grumpy." He slumped. "Wish he'd not take it out of me..."

"Aww." Ella grabbed his hand. "Lucifer should know better than that. He can be so great. Deep down, he's such a softy."

Crowley eyed her and nodded slowly. "You're good for him. You're nice. Must be why he likes you. And Death too. Everybody likes Ella."

Ella laughed as they toasted her, and life in general.

"Right." Crowley stood up abruptly. "We should go. I gotta be in Hell tomorrow." He pulled Aziraphale out of his chair. "C'mon, Angel. We gotta take Ella home."

Aziraphale groaned.

"No way," Ella protested. "You're as drunk as I am. None of us can drive."

Crowley thwacked Aziraphale's chest. "Sober up, Angel."

"You sober up."

"I don't wanna. I live in Hell now. You can't get drunk in Hell. I wanna be drunk."

Enough badgering and Aziraphale dutifully sobered up, loaded them both in Ella's car, and drove to the address she gave him with only minor traffic violations.

Crowley watched the world sleepily. A small part of his mind thought he'd said too much and would regret it the next day, but he opted to push that aside and worry only about small matters. Like helping Ella get into her apartment safely. And discovering an empty apartment two doors down where they could crash for the night.

"Thanks for letting me be drunk," he murmured as he burrowed against the angel.
Aziraphale patted him affectionately. "You should sober up now or you'll feel it in the morning."

"I don't wanna."

Aziraphale kissed him, and that was enough to stir up his blood. He sighed and dutifully sobered up.

Crowley moaned as his memories of the evening came into focus. "I'm going to regret everything I said."

"I think she's a lovely person." Aziraphale smiled. "And you said very sweet things tonight." He lowered his voice and whispered in Crowley's ear. "Even about Lucifer."

Crowley groaned. "He's gonna have me drawn and quartered when he hears about me running my mouth to one of his humans."

"You'll be fine."

"How would you know?"

"Well." Aziraphale kissed him again. "I found out there's goodness in a demon. Why shouldn't there be some goodness in the devil?"

Crowley pulled Aziraphale down on top of him. "Or maybe we're all just equally awful."

He fell asleep safe in the arms of his guardian angel.

Chapter End Notes

Quoted Poem: Because I Could Not Stop for Death, by Emily Dickinson
"It is so not fair! The feds took everything!" Ella fumed as she stalked up to Detective Decker's desk.

Chloe glanced up from typing into her phone. "It happens sometimes. And they think they know who did it." She brought the phone to her ear. "Hello, Maze? Did you get the photos I sent you?... Yes... Pasadena... Yes, that's the last known address... Enjoy." She hung up and gave Ella a small shrug. "If we can't go after them, that's no reason someone else can't."

Ella grinned broadly. "Nice one, Decker!" She crowed. She looked down at the case file on the detective's desk. "The Mendoza Murder? Isn't that case like... five years old?"

"Seven," Chloe corrected absently, sorting through the paperwork.

"I thought it was completely cold."

"I had a new idea... One of the witnesses wouldn't talk. We always thought they knew more than they were admitting. They died a few days ago."

"Guess they won't talk now."

"Not to me at least," Chloe murmured.

"Chloe! You're not into summoning ghosts or something, are you? This one great aunt of mine? She was supposed to have the gift. Spirits talked to her and stuff." Ella looked suddenly distracted. "Maybe that's where I get it... Anyway. This one ghost starting going on about the housing market, so she invested a ton, and... boom! Market crashed. Now she lives with her son and like twenty cats."

Chloe stared at her. "What are you talking about?"

"Ghosts!"

"I'm not talking to ghosts."

"Oh. Great. Never mind then." Ella hesitated, watching Chloe deliberately return to work. "While we're on the subject..."

Chloe suppressed a small sigh and closed the file in front of her. "Did something happen, Ella?"

"Okay... so..." Ella dropped into a chair, quivering with increasing nerves. "You know how I told you one time I talk to ghosts... well, one ghost. You said that wasn't crazy, right? You still don't think I'm crazy?"

"Believe me, I don't think there's anything crazy about that."

"Great! Okay... Not crazy, I swear. Anyway, last week at the crime scene? The hit and run? Rae-Rae was there... she's the ghost. And I swear I saw... well, I thought I saw... but that guy Lucifer sent to bring you the letters? I thought he was talking to her. But he couldn't be, right? And then... I went out for dinner with him and his boyfriend that night... I got so drunk... but I thought he was
talking like... like he thought Rae-Rae should go visit Lucifer..." She looked stricken. "Lucifer's not dead, is he?"

"No." Chloe brought her hands down in a flat-palmed 'simmer down' gesture. "I know for a fact he isn't."

"Okay, great. But.. why would a ghost need to talk to him?"

"Are you sure this... Rae-Rae is a ghost?"

"She said she was a ghost." Ella paused and reflected. "I mean... that's what she told me eventually... I just thought I had a cool imaginary friend at first. Or brain trauma from the car wreck."

"Ella... can you start at the beginning of this story?"

~

"He cried like a baby when I handcuffed him," Maze scoffed into her drink. "Said his mother would be so disappointed in him."

"For a life of crime?" Chloe asked from her seat beside her at the bar.

"For getting caught. Said he only went into the mafia because she pressured him."

"Parental expectations are the worst," Chloe agreed.

On Maze’s other side, Linda looked stricken. "Oh, please don't say that."

"Who cares about parents?" Maze demanded, shoving another drink at Linda. "I disemboweled my mother, and it was the best bonding experience my siblings and I ever had."

"You're not helping me," the doctor protested.

"Drink!" The demon shouted at her. "We're having fun." She leaned forward, looking past Chloe at Ella. "Speaking of fun, why are you being all quiet and not-drinky?"

Ella, still nursing her first, looked uncomfortable. "I... don't want to forget a bunch this time."

"This time? Who've you been black-out drinking with?"

"Ah... those guys? The English ones who were hear last week?"

"Who? Crawly and that nerd?" Maze slammed a knife onto the bar. "If they hurt you, I'll tear their wings off."

"No, Maze." Chloe hastily put her arm over the knife and slid it into Maze's lap. "They just took her to dinner."

"And they didn't invite me?" Maze glowered moodily into her drink. "Bastards."

"Anyway," Chloe said loudly. "We'll make sure you don't drink too much, Ella."

"Thanks, guys. It is so great we got to do this again." Ella gave the others a slightly pathetic smile. "When Chloe invited me out, I thought she was freaked out that I was talking about ghosts." She stood up. "I'll be right back. But we're doing karaoke later, right?" She headed for the bathroom.
Maze turned on Chloe. "What's this about ghosts?"

"I wanted to ask you about that. Are there such things?"

"Oh, sure. Souls fall out of the Hell-Loops all the time. Come back here. Mostly bug their families or something for a while." Maze played with the rim of her glass. "Traveling between worlds like that? It does a number on their minds. Plus, the torture doesn't help. So the ones that make it here are pretty much just fixated on one thing. Or just repeating the same pattern over and over. Like a Hell-Loop. That's all they know, right? And then, once in a while, Lucifer sends a hunting party up to fetch them all back."

"So... if there's a ghost that's been following Ella around for years...?"

Maze shrugged. "Probably won't hurt her or anything. They're just human souls. There's not enough left of them to do much but be annoying. Why? Has it been causing problems?"

"She talks like this ghost... if it is a ghost... has been a pretty good friend to her."

"Oh, I would hate it if some of my dead relatives started bugging me," Linda groaned. "I have enough trouble from the ones that are alive."

"I'm back!" Ella slid onto her barstool. "What did I miss?"

"You have a ghost?" Maze asked bluntly.

Chloe glared. "Maze!"

"What? I want to know who it is to make sure I don't have to stab it."

"I'm sorry." Maze turned to Ella. "I just thought Maze might... know something."

Ella colored. "Rae-Rae's nice. She just... needs someone to talk to, I guess."

"When do you see her?" Linda asked.

"Not often." Ella looked as if she'd suddenly remembered Linda was a psychiatrist. "You don't think I'm crazy...?"

"You're not crazy," the three insisted in unison.

Ella beamed. "Aww, you guys are the best. Um... she was at a crime scene the other week. But... she left because of a car accident and I haven't seen her since."

Maze studied her strangely. "So she talks with you? Like about stuff going on now?"

"Yeah! She told me how the guy from the hit-and-run died. And she said I should go out to dinner with those guys." She looked defensive. "It's weird, but she's a friend, okay?"

Maze made a non-committal sound and tipped back her glass.

"I think even a ghost would be lucky to have a friend like you," Chloe said.

They clinked glasses.

Linda jumped as her phone buzzed. She groaned. "It's my mom again."
"How is she?"

"Frustrating. She thinks I should move closer to the family now that I've got a kid."

Maze tensed. "You're not leaving, are you?"

"No, of course not. My whole life is in LA. Plus." She looked a little shifty. "It's a safe distance from my parents."

"I'll drink to that," Ella declared.

"Hi guys."

They turned as Eve walked up.

"Eve!" Chloe greeted her. "What's going on?"

"I... just came to say I've found a job." She wrung her hands a touch nervously, a grin on her face.

A chorus of congratulations met her announcement.

"It's not much. Volunteer work. Not a paying job yet. But I'm excited to get out of the city. See some nature. I forgot how much I missed it." She turned to Maze, more than a little awkwardly. "So, I thought I'd let you know I'll be moving out of the penthouse next week."

Maze nodded without quite making eye contact.

"We should celebrate!" Ella cried. "Join us for a drink!"

"Oh," Eve glanced at the others, then climbed onto a stool. "Okay." She ordered a drink, then turned to the group. "So... what were you talking about?"

"Parental expectations," Ella said.

"I never had parents." Eve tilted her head reflectively. "I mean, I was created from Adam's rib... so I guess my ex was... also my father?"

There was silence down the row.

Maze held up a hand to the bartender. "We need a round of shots. And keep them coming."

Ella awoke with a headache and a surprisingly intact set of memories of the night before.

She dragged herself through her morning, struggling to sort the alcohol-flavored memories into something which made sense.

It was weird the way her friends talked on nights like that when drinks and casual company loosened their reserves. She was used to Maze saying the strangest things, and Linda acting as if it was perfectly normal. But, Eve... that was a new one.

Was it possible...? No... no, that was crazy.

It had to just be method acting or something. Like Lucifer did. Drawing his closest friends into this weird role-play of his...
...But...

Several cups of coffee and her Uncle Diego's tried-and-true hangover tonic later, she headed for work.

Her head buzzed with questions, but she stilled them for now. She had murders to solve. That's where her mind should be.

Not wondering why a stranger would say Death liked her.

Chapter End Notes

I'm just making up details about everyone's backstory at this point. I have no regrets. And Linda needs more character development!

That's it for the week. As always, thanks to everyone for commenting, liking, and sharing the story around. We'll be back on Monday for the next set of chapters. Next week is going to be kind of flashback-heavy, so you'll have to wait a while for some of these plot threads to continue. But I think next Friday's payoff will be worth it, so stick with me!
Lucifer sat back and watched Reese Getty stumble through his Hell-Loop. He'd lost count of how many times he'd watched this play out. He'd stepped into his role the first time, but he'd found he preferred to watch himself investigate, attend therapy sessions, enjoy a little light bondage at the penthouse... all the things which made life on Earth worth living.

It was a good loop for watching his life on Earth unfold, although observing his early sexual relations with Linda stirred an odd feeling of regret that that had happened. He'd enjoyed the sex immensely while it had gone on, and been disappointed when she'd called off that portion of their relationship. But it felt so distant now. Oddly... unnecessary for what their relationship had become.

To hear her call him a good man. Her friend.

He trailed Reese through his investigation, savoring the opportunities to watch Chloe work, Maze threaten, Dan be... Dan.

He closed his eyes, holding to the sensation of them as Reese drank poison and went down, still professing his love for Linda.

The Loop concluded and reset itself.

Lucifer shook his head. "Oh, Reese," he murmured. "Let it go."

He watched the Loop again.

~

Mammon approached him, simpering and groveling, as Lucifer made his rounds through Hell. "$\text{How doth my Lord fare this day?}$"

Lucifer rolled his eyes. "$\text{Mammon, do get your mind out of the 16th century.}$"

"$\text{It was a good time, my Lord.}$" Mammon licked his lips greedily. "$\text{The raiding of the monasteries. So much gold...}$"

"$\text{Yes, well, there's greed in every century. Humans don't lack for that. What's on your mind?}$"

"$\text{There is disquiet in the south, my Lord,}$" Mammon. "$\text{Whispers of demons meeting in secret in the wood of suicides. Duke Vepar complains weapons have been stolen from his legions.}$"

"$\text{If the demons can't keep track of their own weapons, they hardly deserve to have them, now do they?}$" Lucifer strode on, his Lieutenant trotting to keep up. With feet and legs of gold, walking was arduous for the demon. Lucifer knew he could terminate this annoyance with a brisk pace.

"$\text{But this might be a rebellion, my Lord!}$" Mammon protested. "$\text{Not all are as pleased to have you return as I. Ought we not send a legion to crush them? Amaymon stands ready to do so.}$"

"$\text{Amaymon just wants to lord it over Vepar if she gets his weapons back. If that idiot hasn't just lost an entire weapons cache in the bottom of the river. Again.}$"
"But if there are armed rebels..."

Lucifer snorted. "This is Hell. If someone isn't spreading dissent, the lake of fire would freeze over." And I could get some ice for my scotch, he thought.

"But my Lord..."

Lucifer quickened his pace. "Send Räum to scout the wood if you're so concerned. We'll discuss this later."

He spread his wings and outdistanced Mammon with ease once aloft over the city.

Room after endless room of Hell-Loops played below him. The knowledge of who lay in each and why they endured their self-created torture filtered up to him as he flew. One of the perks of ruling Hell - innate knowledge of the identity of every inmate.

He alighted beside a door after a brief time of searching. Pushing it open, he entered a lavish living room.

"This is cozy," he murmured and took a seat on the couch. A piano sat in the corner. At a gesture from him, it began to play.

Lucifer sighed and leaned back.

From inside the bedroom, he could hear a woman strangling her lover. Funny, he thought with amusement, that the act of murder was not what had sunk her soul to Hell. Because murder though it might be, the woman exuded justification for her actions. An escape from the manipulation and abuse she'd suffered under the other woman's hands. Dosing her with muscle relaxers and strangling her with an extension cord had been an act of survival.

No, her regret was not the woman dead beneath her. Her regret was the children - the victims of human trafficking - starving in her lover's cellar without her knowledge. Her regret was that her act of salvation had condemned eight innocent lives to slow and suffering death - only one barely gasping to life when they would be found a week later.

The children would be here in a moment - skeleton versions of themselves - to stand around the woman and condemn her actions and her part in their deaths.

But the murdered and the innocent didn't concern Lucifer this day. It was the murdered woman's partner - still alive and pursued for murders and human right's violations. Last seen in Los Angeles, another discarded corpse attributed to his record.

And if the dead had any information as to his whereabouts, Lucifer was eager to provide.

It was the little he could still do - the connection he still had to the life he longed to return to. Chloe gave him what information she could regarding her cases, and he interrogated the witnesses if they resided within his reach. She was working more cold cases these days. Maybe the evidence he provided wasn't admissible in court, but he'd been able to direct her questioning of the living toward useful whispers to spark a confession.

Amazing what secrets lay buried in Hell.

Shortly after, Lucifer hurried back to his castle, satisfied with how the interview had gone. He'd offer the detective what he'd learned as swiftly as possible.
Mammon and Beelzebub were waiting at his door.

Lucifer gave them a look which should have made the princes cower and back from his path, but they held their ground.

"My Lord," Beelzebub buzzed. "The work is not done. Amaymon stands waiting to speak to you."

"It can wait," Lucifer snapped. "I have other matters to attend to."

"But your kingdom..."

"Isn't any worse off than it will be in an hour." He flared out his wings, the hellfire burning dangerously in his eyes. "Go to the throne and wait. I will join you when I am ready."

The princes bowed low and backed out of his presence.

Lucifer watched until they were gone, then strode into his chambers.

He tried not to write to Chloe about how alone he was. About how badly he wanted to see her again. About how every second of every day was nothing but a wish to be with her. He tried to keep his letters positive. As positive as letters about life in Hell and testimony of long-deceased murderers could be. No sense distressing her.

His letter to Linda was more on point. He thought he needed his therapist as badly as he needed the detective. Perhaps more so.

He'd been grateful for the advice she'd written to him so far. Although it hinted strongly that he ought to move on and do his job, two things he had little interest in doing.

To do so would be to admit his life was here. And that it would be here for eternity. Or until some idiot decided the apocalypse was really going to happen this time around.

The thought gave him moment's pause. The apocalypse. As it had been written thirty years before. And 6,000 years before. And from the moment creation had begun.

Well, he'd played his part, hadn't he? He'd given the Earth its king. Heaven couldn't complain he hadn't provided his pieces. And Earth's king was still present. Somewhere in England, last he'd heard. Just because the rebellious twit hadn't taken his throne at age eleven, didn't mean he wouldn't decide to ascend later. Just wait until he'd suffered enough heartache of the human variety. Just wait until he recognized the unfairness of humanity and chose to act.

Idealism and hope in the human condition might be possible for a child, but he'd come around eventually. How could he not?

That had been Lucifer's thinking twenty years before when the boy had stood against the Riders, dismissed the armies back to Heaven and Hell, and stood defiant against his own father's wrath. Lucifer had been amused once his fury had passed. Could he have expected otherwise considering the boy’s parentage?

His son hadn't wanted him. Fine. He'd never wanted the boy either. Armageddon had certainly never been his idea, inevitable though it seemed to be. Apocalyptic predictions were mostly just useful to keep the demons occupied with something more forward-thinking than killing each other.

He'd wait. Adam would see things his way in the end. How could he not?
But as the child continued to reject his power, Lucifer had begun to wonder. So he'd found his way to Earth. And once he'd discovered the experiences Los Angeles had to offer, he'd never wanted to leave.

The Earth belonged to Adam Young, whether he accepted it or hid from his crown. Lucifer kept his distance, making no attempt to make contact and doing little to attract his son's notice. On Earth, he had the weaker claim. If Adam wished him gone, he could exercise far more power. In Hell, it would have been a different matter had Lucifer succeeded in dragging the boy into the depths for the reprimand he deserved.

But time, human closeness, and a general softening had stilled his temper to indifference. What Adam did was his own business. Father and son had no bond, and wasn't that his relationship with his own parent? So be it.

Sometimes he thought he should find his son and admit Adam had been correct. The world was not theirs to reshape. Humanity had its own destiny to fulfill. And despite their brief lives, they were infinitely more complicated and interesting than Lucifer had once believed.

But that would have required beginning a dialogue after a lifetime of silence. No chance Lucifer would make the first move.

He finished the letters, sat back, and studied the words. Had he said all he needed to? No... But all it was safe to. He'd have to find a way to pay Linda for her council. Wire transfers from Hell would be challenging. And drachmas from the eyes of the long-departed probably wouldn't be suitable payment. He still had bank accounts on Earth... unless Maze had drained them.

He sealed the letters and left them where Crowley would find them when he awoke. He didn't worry about prodding the serpent anymore. Crowley wanted to be topside. He'd go as soon as he was physically able, and return whenever he received responses. At least there was one demon around here who didn't require constant monitoring.

With a weary sigh, Lucifer trudged back to work.

Chapter End Notes

None of the demons mentioned are particularly important. I'm still shamelessly mining *The Lesser Key of Solomon* for demon names because naming characters is hard. Räum will probably show up again because he's a crow, so I bet he gets stuck on scouting/messenger duty a lot.
"A priest tried to poison the devil? Really?"

"It's been an interesting few years."

It was another evening out on the town, which was how Aziraphale and Crowley spent most evenings when both were in LA. Their mutual vice was food, and the city was amply supplied in restaurants. They were working their way slowly through the best-mentioned places the guidebooks had to offer.

Their human contacts were starting to notice they never had difficulty getting in anywhere. Thanks to several successful arrests in as many days, and it being Dan's weekend with Trixie, Chloe had found herself free for the evening. Aziraphale had gallantly invited her to join them. When she'd hesitated, he suggested she bring a friend. She'd arrived with a woman she introduced as Dr. Linda Martin. Aziraphale greeted both warmly, while Crowley nodded with cautious familiarity and kept his distance.

The evening started a little tense, with Linda glaring at Aziraphale and declaring if he had any intention of taking her baby away to Heaven, she'd tear his wings out. It took a little while to assure her he hadn't been near the Silver City in decades and had no plans of visiting anytime soon, with or without a baby.

She'd remained suspicious of him throughout the appetizer course, settling down a little when he spoke in Japanese with the waitress. That led to more Earthly conversations about places everyone had visited, and somehow to other supernatural occurrences in the city of Los Angeles.

It was nice, Aziraphale thought, to talk with humans who knew what they were. Maybe not exactly, of course. It would have been hard to explain the metaphysics of the other realms to any human mind. But these humans seemed fully prepared to accept that Satan had been running a nightclub and solving murders in Los Angeles for the past few years, and that they'd run into other beings of supernatural type.

They were nothing like his humans - the ones he and Crowley had decided to watch over after that Armageddon business. Madame Tracy mostly understood what they were, although she was constantly poking at Aziraphale to see whether or not he was corporeal. Shadwell had decided Aziraphale was some form of angelic witch-finder, but everyone had agreed not to try and explain Crowley for fear he'd try an exorcism. Madame Tracy worried he's get wax everywhere trying to set up the candles. And Aziraphale knew Crowley would start enthusiastically spitting up pea soup just because.

Newt had accepted that an angel and demon sometimes invited him over for tea and biscuits without a murmur. Newt was the sort of person who didn't think too clearly about why things made sense. He had no reason to doubt what they were, and didn't worry deeper than that.

Anathema was the one who probed. Anathema believed things deeply and intently. She didn't question the existence of an angel and a demon, although she did demand to know what they did with their time and was it worthwhile.
Putting her off could be a little exhausting.

He wondered if Lucifer's humans were shell-shocked from too many celestial encounters, but it didn't seem so. They'd worked through this evidence of Heaven and Hell's existence and come out the other side... sane? Yes, although still grasping to understand.

As the meal concluded, Crowley shifted his chair so he could lean against Aziraphale. The angel draped a protective arm over him.

Linda smiled at the gesture, more of her tension melting away. "How long have you two been together?"

"Twenty years," Aziraphale said at the same time Crowley said, "6,000 years."

They looked at each other.

"It was a long process," Aziraphale admitted.

Linda leaned forward with professional and personal intrigue. "How does it happen? An angel and demon getting together?"

"Easy." Crowley yawned. "You put up with someone long enough, they start to be your friend. And then eventually..." He leaned his head deeper into Aziraphale's shoulder. "...You know someone well enough that this just sort of... happens."

"You make it sound easy."

"Oh, my dear Doctor, no," Aziraphale assured her. "We had a long, bitter road to get this far."

"I don't know if it was ever bitter," Crowley protested.

"I was quite put out with you after that business in the Garden."

"Wasn't my fault you lost the sword. And I helped you get it back, didn't I?"

"Only once I finally made it clear that an immortal killer with a flaming sword was a threat to all of us."

"Immortal killer?" Chloe asked.

"Yes... have you ever heard the story of Cain and Abel"?"

"I've met Cain."

Aziraphale's eyes widened. "My goodness! He's in this city?"

"He's dead."

Crowley sat up. "Dead?"

Chloe nodded. "Lucifer killed him."

Aziraphale exchanged bemused looks with Crowley. "Detective," the angel said slowly. "He doesn't stay dead. We've seen him die."

"Aziraphale's killed him a couple time," Crowley supplied.
"He just gets better," the angel concluded.

"I know." Chloe looked certain. "But this time he stayed dead. Lucifer made sure if it."

That took a moment to process.


"Oh, I hope we're not in it," Aziraphale murmured. "If a facsimile of me was being used for torture... Oh, I don't know what my office would say."

"Angel, they'd never know. And he wouldn't have anything to feel guilty about with the sword. You're the one who feels guilty about it."

Linda looked intrigued. "So, what is this sword you two keep talking about?"

"That, Doctor, is a long story."

Linda leaned forward. "Well, Amenadiel's watching the baby, so I have all night."

Crowley signaled a waiter. "We're going to need a dessert menu. And a pot of tea."

Chapter End Notes

Tomorrow... Flashbacks!

On an unrelated note, I found these Ineffable Husband Pins which are delighting me to no end. I try not to order random stuff off the internet, but I kind of need one...
Aziraphale recognized the demon from across the marketplace.

Seeing a demon out and about wasn't so odd in that place and time. Humanity was still in its infancy, although there were far more of them than there ought to have been for having only started with one man and one woman. Aziraphale didn't ask where all the others had come from.

Demons and angels could be found wandering about the young Earth regularly. Humanity was just discovering, and already proving to have more imagination than the average celestial being. It wasn't uncommon to see a human standing in the center of a village, declaring the vision they'd had, or the thing they'd invented, or the natural wonder they'd observed - while humans, angels and demons all listened with equal interest.

Most of the beings were there on holiday, essentially. They'd wander Earth for a few days or years, then return to Heaven or Hell with stories to relate.

Aziraphale was there by punishment.

That's what they'd said.

The Garden was no more. Earth didn't deserve paradise. It had been swept away to somewhere Beyond. It didn't need guardians anymore.

Especially one who couldn't keep track of his weapon.

Aziraphale was pretty sure not stopping what happened in the Garden also contributed to his fall - with a lowercase 'F'. He was demoted to Earth, not Hell. They might even let him visit Heaven if he behaved.

Someone had to take the blame for Evil getting into the Garden, and the angel with the missing sword seemed like the perfect target to his superiors.

Aziraphale wasn't sure if he deserved it, but it was easier to blame the serpent than take a good look at his own uncomfortable feelings. He tried not to consider that the same demon had been the first to suggest he maybe shouldn’t have given the sword away.

In hindsight, he really should have listened.

He hesitated, looking right and left (and Above and Below), then approached the demon warily. "Hello, Crawly."

The demon tensed. "If you're going to punch me again, can it wait until I'm done drinking?"

"Drinking?" Aziraphale looked down at the camel-skin bag the demon held.

"It's a new thing called wine." The demon held it out. "Do you want to try it?"

"Don't you dare try and tempt me!" Aziraphale snapped and pushed the bag away. Too much force,
and an unsteady grip, sent the bag flying, wine spraying across the sand.

Aziraphale’s hands went to his mouth. "Oh, dear! I'm terribly sorry! I didn't mean at... let me... um..." He fluttered his fingers a little frantically, drawing the wine back into the skin. "There." He scooped up the skin and returned it to the demon. "No harm done."

The demon stared at him. "You spilled my drink," he said slowly.

"I'm really very sorry about that."

"And then miracled it back up." He eyed Aziraphale strangely. "You're not very good at this whole 'eternal enemies' thing, are you?"

Aziraphale rubbed his hands together and looked away. "As a matter of fact... my superiors said something similar... about the Garden business."

The demon flinched. "Right. Didn't mean to get you in trouble with that one." He glanced around. "If we're going to fight, or talk, or whatever, can we go somewhere with less eyes?"

To that Aziraphale readily agreed.

They left the village. Neither wanted to walk with the other behind them, and they couldn't be seen together, so they sauntered along on opposite sides of the road.

The demon broke the axle on a cart, scared a flock of goats into bolting, spoiled all the fruit in a basket, and snatched a piece of bread from a child as he went.

"Did you have to do all that?" Aziraphale grumbled when he joined him, after helping the shepherd pen the goats back up, fixed the axle on the cart, and miracled the fruit back to health.

The demon ground the bread into crumbs and scattered it for a flock of chickens. "I have a quota to keep up."

Aziraphale watched the chickens peck around the demon's feet and thought maybe he wasn't all bad. He walked onward.

When he turned back, the demon was eating a chicken.

They found an empty spot outside of the village and sat down.

"Are we fighting or talking this time?" The demon asked.

"Talking right now. Listen, Crawly."

"I don't like that."

"What?"

"That name."

"But it's your name."

"Yes, but I wasn't asked about it. They just said, 'This is your identity now. Sorry about the bump on the way down.' And they didn't even say that last part!"

"You did Fall," the angel reasoned.
"Yes, but no one said that would involve a name change. And it’s not like I was consulted about the first name either. Do you like Aziraphel?"

The angel coughed uncomfortably. "Oh... actually..."

"Actually?"

"Nothing!" Aziraphale shook himself. "I wanted to talk to you."

The demon sighed. "Look, I’m just doing my job, so if you're going to tell me to leave the humans alone..."

"It's not that. Well, yes. Stop hurting those poor people! But this is about..." His voice dropped to a whisper. "My sword."

"Your sword?"

"Yes."

"That flaming one I said was a bad idea to give to the humans?"

"Yes."

"That flaming one a certain immortal human has been waving all over the countryside?"

"Yes!"

"The human your side was calling a warrior for their cause when he was just slashing up demons?"

"Look, I don't have anything to say about policy. But he's killing angels with it too. And humans. And..." Aziraphale looked uncomfortable. "It's my sword. It's my fault. I need to get it back."

"Good luck."

Aziraphale drummed his fingers on the ground. "I was hoping you'd help me."

The demon stared at him. "How many of your lot are mucking around Earth?"

"Um... As many as yours, I expect."

"Then you're not lacking assistance from your side."

"But..." Aziraphale hesitated. He couldn't admit why he'd come to the demon. It was embarrassing. "...You know what it looks like."

"Flaming sword, Angel. Not a lot of mistaken identity."

"Yes... well... you've been here a while. Not like the angels who just come for a holiday."

"You're not the only angel who's been here since the beginning."

"...You know the area."

"So do you."

Aziraphale practically sobbed. "You didn't make fun of me when I gave it away!"
The demon turned slowly. "Have they been mean to you in Heaven?" He asked sarcastically.

Aziraphale ignored the tone. "I can't tell them I gave it away, but I can't lie, so I keep mumbling. And it's the first thing anyone brings up anytime they see me!"

The demon shook his head slowly. "And you people won the war..." he muttered. Louder he said, "You could have just led with that."

Aziraphale felt a rush of hope. "You'll help me?"

"I'll make a deal with you."

The angel drew back. "I couldn't."

"Then I got back to destroying the marketplace." The demon shrugged. "It makes no difference to me."

"But it's hurting your people too!"

"Have you met my people? A few less of them won't upset anybody."

"How can you say that?"

"Because it's true. Also..." He pointed to himself. "Demon."

"Right..." This had been a terrible idea. This was the enemy. And not to be trusted.

The trouble was Aziraphale didn't exactly have any friends. Not on Earth. Not who would help with something like this. Discretely. Plus, if it fell apart, who'd believe what a demon said? "What... ah... if I agreed, what would you want?"

"For starters, after we find the sword, you agree not to stick me with it. Ever."

Aziraphale coughed. "Will you agree not to do anything alarming enough that I'd want to kill you?"

"No." The demon grinned smugly back at him.

*I suppose I could just use a different weapon,* Aziraphale thought desperately. *Or discorporate him.* "Yes... I agree. I'll never use the sword on you." He waited. "What else?"

"Hmm?"

"You said that was for starters. What else do you want?"

The demon's grinned widened. "I do you a favor, you do me a favor."

Aziraphale winced. "What sort of favor?"

"I don't know. When something comes up, I'll tell you."

"No! This is outrageously wrong. You could ask for anything!"

"I could." The demon stretched himself on the ground, managing to look more like a serpent than the human shape he wore implied. "Might be fun seeing what I could get you to do..."

"I'd never agree to it!"
"What?" The demon laughed mockingly. "Don't you trust me?"

"Of course not!" Aziraphale crossed his arms and turned his head away in self-righteous indignation.

There was a long pause before the demon spoke. "Funny you wanting me to help you despite not trusting me." The humor was gone from his voice.

"I don't have any reason to trust you," Aziraphale protested.

"You don't have any reason not to," the demon countered.

Aziraphale was about to retort that this was a demon, and what other reason did he need, but he was drawn up short. He'd looked the other way while the demon rambled all over the Garden. He'd trusted then. Why? Loneliness? Most likely. It was hard not to be attached to the one individual taking the time to treat him like an individual. "Can there be ground rules for this favor?"

"Maybe. Depends what you say."

Ten minutes of arguing at least gave Aziraphale the right to refuse if the favor involved killing anyone, helping another demon, helping the cause of Evil, or defying Heaven in any way.

He was surprised how readily the demon agreed to all of it.

"Is that it then? We should get on, shouldn't we?" The demon asked hurriedly.

Aziraphale, relieved that that was out of the way, agreed to the deal, and they set off.

It took a little while for him to grow suspicious. "Why are you so excited to do this all of a sudden?"

"I'm not," the demon replied. "I just wanted to hurry the deal along before you thought to mention horrifically embarrassing to yourself as being out." He turned his head and gave Aziraphale a massive grin. "But that's still a card I can play."

Aziraphale groaned.

The first couple nights and days were spent just getting to the area where the killer was last rumored to have been seen. After that, they asked people as they went, eventually striking onto a trail based on rumors and second-hand eyewitnesses.

"What do you know about this guy?" The demon asked. "How did he get your sword?"

"From his parents, I imagine. His name is Cain. You must have heard about him."

The demon grimaced. "It's the oldest story. The one brother kills the other out of jealousy."

"Did your people have something to do with that?"

"Of course not!" The demon snapped. "People are awful enough without us getting involved." His voice dropped to a mutter. "Understanding right and wrong just seems to make them like doing wrong."

Aziraphale felt a flicker of sympathy, although he couldn't say why. "Anyway, after the murder, the Almighty branded Cain so none could kill him, and sent him away to wander the Earth forever."
"What does the brand look like?"

"I don't know."

"Well, if you don't know what it looks like, how do you know he's the person you're not supposed to kill?"

"That doesn't matter to us. We're not supposed to kill anyone."

"Have you tried it?" The demon asked with interest.

"What?"

"Killing humans. We're not supposed to. But have you tried it?"

"No!"

"So you don't know if you can. You just know you shouldn't."

"I know I can't! The Almighty said I can't!"

"It might be worth finding out. If we're going against someone who can kill celestial beings."

Aziraphale eyed the demon. "Have you tried killing anyone?"

The demon glowered and muttered what Aziraphale decided was a no.

"Anyway!" Aziraphale thought it was best to get them back on track. "Cain was sent to wander the Earth as punishment. That should have been the end of it. BUT, after his parents died, he came back, killed another sibling and took the sword. They'd passed it down, you see. And he started killing. A lot."

"Seems to me he was doing alright without it."

"Yes he'd kill a human now and again. But not in mass numbers. Once he had the sword, he started killing much more often."

"And your lot didn't feel like stopping him?"

"Well, they thought a warning was in order first. I understand they suggested he become a warrior for our cause. You know, smiting down evil for the good of..." Aziraphale trailed off, realizing who he was talking to.

The demon scowled. "Oh. So if he murders a few demons out for a stroll it's fine if he also sticks a shepherd along the way?"

"I'm sure the idea was he'd give up killing humans..." Aziraphale murmured. He coughed. "Anyway, it seemed like he was interested at first. He did kill some demons. But then he killed an angel. And when they sent some representatives to reprimand him, he killed them too."

"So, is all of Heaven after him?"

"Well... No."

The demon stared at him.
"He's marked by the Almighty!" Aziraphale protested. "It's supposed to be a sort of 'keep away' sign."

"You asked me to come because I don't listen to those, didn't you?"

Aziraphale looked down and muttered unhappily.

They traveled through wastelands the next day as they drew closer to a craggy range of mountains. They found little sign anyone else had passed that way.

Aziraphale led, following the slightest hint of celestial fire in the air. He hoped he wasn't mistaken.

That night, they came upon what had been a small band of humans. Most of them were burned to nothing. Their supplies were long gone.

Aziraphale picked bits of charred bone off the ground and said a benediction over them. "I'm sorry," he whispered.

They continued to climb steadily higher into the mountains and into rougher terrain.

"He knows where he's going," the demon remarked on their second day among the crags. "Have you noticed the marks on the rocks? We're following a trail." His crouched down, his tongue flicking across the dirt. "Mostly animals," he assessed. "One human... and something else."

"Is he running away from his crimes?" Aziraphale wondered. He looked around the rugged terrain. There was little clue why anyone would come here.

"Maybe he's got a hide-away up here."

"But what would he eat?"

"Does he need to eat? If he's immortal."

"I don't think he's immortal like us. I think it just means he can't be killed."

The demon looked interested. "What about if he falls off a cliff?"

Aziraphale groaned and started walking.

The demon jogged on his heels, spouting out suggestions. "What if he gets caught in the rain and catches a chill? What if a wound gets infected? What if he climbs too high and runs out of air?"

He went on that way for a quarter of an hour. Aziraphale was not excited to hear that many suggestions of how someone might die without anyone directly killing them. Clearly, the demon understood loopholes.

Night descended. They kept moving, the demon now leading the way – his eyes being better suited for the dark. They picked their way up the narrow path.

Aziraphale surged forward abruptly. "There! Do you see that light?"

Distantly, they caught a glimmer amid the rocks and brush.

"That's not celestial fire," the demon murmured. "It's a campfire."

"Where there's one, there should be the other," Aziraphale reasoned. He hastened onward, being
careful now to move softly.

They peered over the edge of a boulder at a man sitting by the fire roasting a rabbit.

"That's the mighty killer of angels and demons?" The demon scoffed. "Doesn't look like much to me."

Aziraphale had to agree. There were far more impressive fighters and hunters in every town he'd seen. This man was as strong-looking as any human who had to work for survival, but gave off no appearance of legend. But the sword was there. It lay on the ground within reach of the man’s hand. Its flames were dimmed to a dull flicker.

"What's the plan?" The demon whispered.

"What?"

"The plan. We found him. Now what?"

Aziraphale was silent.

"Do you mean to tell me you never planned past finding him?"

"I thought I'd come up with an idea once we did."

"And?"

The angel looked away.

"Bloody useless," the demon muttered. He leaped to the top of the boulder and shouted; "TREMBLE, HUMAN! THE FORCES OF HEAVEN AND HELL HAVE COME TO TAKE THAT WHICH YOU STOLE!" As he bellowed, he transformed.

It was a trick Aziraphale was to see him perform multiple times in the future. His body shifted and contorted into the stuff of nightmares, becoming something so unspeakably horrifying that the human mind simply couldn't process. It was a trick which never failed to make the viewer utterly blank out with fear, giving them ample time to do whatever needed doing. It always worked.

Except this time.

Cain snatched up the blade, which blazed brilliantly in his hand. He shouted something in a language neither of them quite caught.

"What's he-" the demon started to say.

His words were cut off as something swooped over the bluff and came straight at him, talons wide and mouth open in ferocious bellowing.

Aziraphale tackled him off the boulder just in time. They lay flattened against the ground as the beast swept over them.

"Wha..." The demon sputtered.

"Gargoyle," Aziraphale panted grimly.

Chapter End Notes
It's **Gregory**!

Okay, for everyone confused, I love the *Sandman* series. I'd hoped there would be some resemblance to those versions of the characters when Cain and Abel inevitably showed up on *Lucifer*. They did not, and that Cain would have made a lousy villain. But every time there was a line about 'who's Pierce working with' or 'who's protecting him', I'd be yelling, "It's Gregory! It's the gargoyle!" Obviously, Gregory never made an appearance, but this is my story, so I had to work him in.

Because everyone's still confused, there really is no backstory. Cain just has a pet gargoyle. It completely makes sense. (Just read the series. Or at least *Seasons of Mist* (Book 4) if your interest is strictly Lucifer-related. And Mazikeen back when you couldn't understand a word she said.)

Longest chapter to date because writing Aziraphale and Crowley bickering is way too fun.

This chapter is now available in Chinese! Thanks so much to Ashyday404 for translating!
Angel and demon fled up the path, the massive creature galloping on their heels.

"What's it after us for?" The demon demanded.

"It's not! It's after you!" Aziraphale shouted back.

"What?"

"It's a new thing they're working on! Guardian creatures. To keep evil away from holy places! They're not supposed to be loose yet!"

"Tell it that!" The demon threw himself flat as the gargoyle pounced.

It sailed over his head and whirled around to charge.

Aziraphale spread his wings and landed between the demon and the gargoyle. "Leave off! Back where you came from!"

The gargoyle skidded to a halt and eyed the angel uncertainly.

Aziraphale took a step toward it. "By the powers of Heaven I command-"

The gargoyle roared and lunged for him.

"Great way with animals you've got, angel," the demon muttered as they ran once more.

"Oh, shut up," Aziraphale grumbled. "Close your eyes on three."

"What? Why?"

"One, two, three!" Aziraphale spun around and opened his hands. *Let there be light*, he hissed in his mind.

Holy, blazing light erupted out of him in a searing wave.

The gargoyle yowled in surprise and pain. It ground to a halt, pawing blindly at its face.

Aziraphale grabbed up a rock and launched it into the gargoyle's nose.

With a confused howl, the creature fled back the way it had come.

"I do hope I didn't hurt it," Aziraphale murmured anxiously.

"Oww," groaned the demon, his arm flung over his eyes.

"I did say to close your eyes."

"You didn't say it would be that bright."

Aziraphale grabbed his wrist. "This way!"
The demon sucked in a breath and stumbled after him.

It would be some hours before Aziraphale realized that was their first intentional contact.

They could hear Cain shouting from a distance. The gargoyle rushed yowling toward him.

"We have to get to him!" Aziraphale panted.

The demon yanked free of his grip. "Pass."

"We have to get to that sword!" Aziraphale protested.

"We have no weapons and no plan. He has a celestial blade, and a demon-eating pet. I'm out."

"You made a deal!"

"It doesn't do me any good if I get killed."

He had a point, Aziraphale thought. But what choice did he have? He'd caused this mess. He needed that sword.

He took wing and flew with all the speed he could muster in pursuit of the gargoyle. He overtook the running form and shot toward the shouting human.

Cain had left the fireside in the search for his pet. That was his mistake. Night-blind, he looked around dimly, failing to register the pale-winged form racing toward him until Aziraphale tackled him to the ground.

Cain's head slammed into the ground, rendering him dizzy. He slashed blindly at the angel, mumbling garbled threats all the while.

Aziraphale grabbed Cain by the wrist and tried to pry the sword from his hand. They grappled together in a tangle of limbs and feathers.

He could hear the gargoyle rushing closer, keening all the while. The sound was nearly on top of him. He braced to leap away before he could be trampled.

The gargoyle gave a sudden shriek and veered away.

Aziraphale spared a glance back, catching sight of a serpent clinging to the beast's neck and striking repeatedly at its vulnerable throat.

Cain rolled, gaining control enough of the sword to warn Aziraphale back. They separated, both gaining their feet and squaring off.

"You must return the sword." Aziraphale tried for reason. "It doesn't belong to you. It was meant for better things than..." The speech broke off as Cain slashed at him.

They both dove aside as the gargoyle blundered into their midst. The beast bucked madly, the serpent flying clear.

The demon changed forms and rolled to a defensive stance.

Cain grabbed hold of the thrashing gargoyle. He shouted something urgent and the beast took wing, flying impossibly fast for its size and injuries.
"We have to catch it!" Aziraphale shouted. "Before they recover." He leaped into the air.

The demon watched him from the ground.

"Come on!" Aziraphale yelled, then gave up and took off in solo flight.

The gargoyle was already a speck on the horizon.

How can it move so fast, the angel marveled. But he had no time for wondering. He had to catch up.

A rush of dark wings and the demon shot past him. "First to the sword gets the prize!" He sang.

Aziraphale's heart caught in his throat. No! He hadn't considered that double-cross. He flapped his wings harder, straining to catch up. A moment later, he'd reached, then slowly passed, the other flyer.

The demon glanced his way. His eyes were wide and eager, his mouth curved back in a wild grin. He laughed and put on another burst of speed.

Aziraphale matched him wingbeat for wingbeat, straining with all his might to draw ahead. He had to be first. This wasn't a race he could afford to lose.

Alone, he might never had caught up. But with someone to race, Aziraphale found they slowly gained on the flying figures.

"It'll slow down soon," the demon called over their wingbeats. "It's got venom enough in it. That'll take care of the pet for a while. What should we do?"

"I have an idea," Aziraphale replied. "But you're not going to like it."

"Haven't enjoyed any of your ideas so far," the demon called cheerfully. "What's one more bad plan?"

As they neared, they dove in tandem beneath the gargoyle. Aziraphale spared a glance up, seeing Cain leaning over his mount's side in search of them. "Now!" He shouted to the demon.

In a reckless move, the demon folded his wings and transformed.

Aziraphale fielded the serpent out of the air and shot upward, thrusting the viper into the gargoyle's face.

The gargoyle reacted with an alarmed cry. It lurched backward, going nearly vertical to avoid the serpent's strike.

Cain toppled from his mount's back and crashed toward the ground.

Aziraphale dove in pursuit.

"Veer left!" The serpent in his hands shrieked.

Aziraphale obeyed automatically. There was a whumph of air as the gargoyle toppled past him. Aziraphale backwinged frantically to stay in control.

They heard the gargoyle hit the ground with a distressing thud.
"Where's Cain?" Aziraphale demanded.

"I lost track. Fly low. I'll scan for him."

Aziraphale hooked the serpent around his neck (it didn't occur to him until later what a blind act of trust that had been) and flew a slow grid.

"Down there!" The serpent called at last. "Do you see the blood?"

They landed.

The ground did indeed look as though something human-size had hit with terminal impact.

Aziraphale cast around. "Did the gargoyle get to him?"

"No. We passed it already." The demon's tongue flicked in and out rapidly. "There's only one scent here."

"Then where is he? Where's the sword?"

Both questions were answered as he heard the tell-tale hiss of celestial fire. He ducked as the human in question launched himself out of the brush straight at the angel.

Aziraphale gained enough distance to strike a respectable fighting pose. He was still unarmed against an opponent with a very impressive blade. He swallowed hard. "How did you survive the fall?"

"He didn't," the demon murmured, edging around behind Aziraphale. "Not with all that bloodloss."

Cain's lips curled back in a feral smile. "I'm cursed to never die," he rasped, his voice sounding suspiciously like someone still regrowing two punctured lungs. "Kill me, I come back."

"Does that count then?" The demon asked.

"Count as what?"

"Killing humans. If he doesn't die, you wouldn't really be killing him, would you?"

An odd weight lifted off the angel. He'd been hesitant until now, mostly trying to disable the killer long enough to regain his sword. But if he didn't need to fear recrimination if he killed this one...

He gave his wings a hard flap, causing the flames on the blade to sputter and the human to throw up his free hand to shield his eyes.

It was all the opening he was likely to get. Aziraphale flattened his wings, charged close, and punched Cain a sharp blow to the face.

The human was caught off-guard by the reckless audacity. He stumbled backward. Before he could recover, Aziraphale launched himself on him in a furious flailing of blows.

The sword skittered free of Cain's grip. He scrambled to recover it, but the demon was faster, kicking it neatly out of reach while Aziraphale scrambled for a better grip to keep the killer down.

They traded a series of holds and punches. Aziraphale grumbled in his mind how very undignified this was. And why wouldn't Cain stay down? Surely a human couldn't take an angelic beating.
"Oh, Cain! Thanks for the sword!" The demon sang out.

Both glanced up in time to see the demon vanish into the brush.

Cain roared and threw himself free. He took off at all speed, the angel forgotten.

Aziraphale likewise leaped up. A demon with a celestial blade wasn't any better than the alternative! He had to...

...His foot kicked something which hummed a familiar cadence. He dropped to his knees, pushing back the sand to find the flaming sword hastily buried just where it had fallen.

Lovingly, he picked up his long-lost sword and wiped off the dirt and blood clinging to it. The flames sang an answering welcome to his touch. It felt like regaining a limb.

He hesitated. He had what he'd come for...

He took wing and set off after Cain.

Perhaps it was unfamiliar terrain, or perhaps the demon had tried to loop back, but Cain had caught up with his quarry. The demon had become a snake again. He arched and hissed, his head cocked back to strike should the human get close enough.

"Where's my sword?" Cain demanded.

Aziraphale swooped low. He meant to snatch the serpent from the ground and be off, but he hadn't reckoned with Cain's sudden speed. The human tackled him, grappling for the sword with insane desperation. They rolled together, once more fighting for the blade. This time, Aziraphale had the better grip. He twisted the blade and thrust hard.

The celestial blade cleaved through the murderer's chest, striking straight to the heart. Cain writhed and convulsed. Aziraphale ripped the blade free and backed away.

"Hurry!" Hissed the demon, already taking wing and yanking on his arm. "He'll be up in a minute!"

It was sound advice. Angel and demon flew swiftly across the barren landscape.

Behind them, they heard the gargoyle keening a distressing melody as it sought out the human.

~

"I'll have to tell someone about the gargoyle when I get to the Silver City," Aziraphale remarked, as they rested beside a stream and Aziraphale prepared himself for the flight Upward. "Cain must have taken it from that party of angels he attacked, although I can't imagine why it would be loose on the earth already. They're supposed to be for when the humans start building permanent holy shrines."

"I'll keep that in mind," the demon grumbled. He splashed out of the creek and shook himself, showering the angel with a spray of water.

Aziraphale grimaced and made a pass of his hand. His clothes were immediately dry. "Why didn't you take the sword?" He asked.

"Hmm?"
"You had a chance to grab it and fly. Why didn't you?"

The demon shrugged. "Celestial blade," he said simply.

"Oh." Aziraphale nodded. "Well, thank you. For everything. And per agreement, I promise I won't stab you."

"The generosity of Heaven," the demon muttered. He shook out his wings. "Guess this is it. So long, Aziraphael."

"Aziraphale."

"What?"

"The pronunciation." Aziraphale colored. "I didn't like it. The extra syllable was clunky. I changed it."

The demon stared at him. "You changed an Almighty-given name because you didn't like an extra syllable?"

The angel shrugged. "It's... more me that way."

"Huh." The demon looked thoughtful.

"You could do the same. If you really don't like Crawly."

"I really don't."

"Just shift it around a little then. Make it you."

The demon snorted. "And your side didn't go for free will." He laughed and extended his wings.

"Wait!" Aziraphale called. "What about my half of the deal?"

"Hmm?"

"What do you want me to do for you?"

The demon gave him a wicked grin. "It's no fun when you're expecting something." He took flight. "I'll collect when you least expect. Till then, Angel!"

He was gone.

"What happened to the gargoyle?" Linda asked.

"Returned where it belonged eventually," Aziraphale replied. "Although I was not involved with that."

"And you didn't suffer any recriminations for killing a human?"

Aziraphale winced. "That... depends how one looks at it."

Linda didn't press further. "So, did Crowley ever call in his favor?"
Aziraphale winced again. "Indeed he did."

"What was it?"

The angel looked around the restaurant. They were the last people in it. The staff was starting to stack chairs and eye them pointedly. Although Chloe still listened with sleepy interest, and Linda was wide-awake, Crowley had fallen asleep a while before, pillowed securely on the angel's shoulder.

"That," Aziraphale said. "Is another long tale. For another night."

Chapter End Notes

I'm open to suggestions as to what horribly embarrassing favor Crowley asked Aziraphale for. If you have an idea (or can think of a good historical event to tie it to - preferably still in the BCs), post away!

This chapter is now available in Chinese. Thanks so much to Ashyday404 for translating.
Crowley's memories of Heaven were a spotty patchwork of recollections he'd retained, things Aziraphale had reminded him of, and a scattering of information he'd collected from other sources.

It wasn't the Fall which had done this to his mind. It was 6,000 years of living and thinking on human terms. He might have been one of the few demons who understood electricity and the combustible engine, but it had come at the expense of ethereal understanding.

Aziraphale endured a similar loss, and for him it was far more painful, though he'd had a few visits to the Silver City every century or so to help him maintain his mind. But it had only been a few years before that he'd broken off humming to bemoan he couldn't properly remember the music of the spheres.

"You could always pop up for a visit," Crowley said, but Aziraphale had dismissed the notion. He insisted it was no great matter, but Crowley guessed it was for his sake and their life on Earth that Aziraphale never visited the Silver City anymore. The apocalypse cast a long shadow. Neither really knew what their superiors would do to them if the opportunity presented itself.

For Crowley, the memory gaps were of no great loss. He was just as happy not to remember his tenure in Hell, and he recalled enough of the Silver City to feel he had the essentials. If he'd forgotten a few rousing hymns or uplifting sermons, so be it. There had always been too many of those.

But he never forgot a second of the Fall.

He'd never talked about it with anyone. Demon culture didn't exactly inspire discussions about personal recollections and emotions.

Aziraphale had flitted toward the topic once or twice in their early acquaintance, back when Crowley was still suspicious of him. He'd made it clear he didn't want to talk about it and Aziraphale had stopped asking. More recently, some of their human associates had asked indirectly, or sometimes bluntly, how Crowley had ended up as he was. Aziraphale was always swift to head off the topic so Crowley never had to say a word.

It left a lonely hole inside him. Because he did want to talk of what he'd gone through. With the only being he now trusted enough to share all. But there seemed no way to broach the subject, and Aziraphale never would.

It was hard to say what the worst part had been.

To call it a downward saunter, as he generally did, was accurate in that he'd not really intended to turn against Heaven. There were angels who had - blatantly and defiantly - gone to their Fall with eyes wide open. In Crowley's case it had been a slow process of asking too many questions, listening to the wrong orator, hanging around the wrong crowd, ignoring the wrong commands, and before he really knew it, too many concessions had turned a saunter into a plummet.

The Fall had been metaphorical before the war. But after it had been very, very real.

He'd Fallen alone - they all had. Isolated from Above and Below and any form of comfort in that
terrible plunge which had lasted an eternity.

If asked what the worst part had been, he might have mentioned that sickening moment it had begun when reality dropped out from under him and he plunged into non-existence. He might have mentioned the landing - which had been horrible beyond measure. He might have mentioned the moment he'd felt himself cut off from Heaven, that power and unity forever denied to him for eternity. Or maybe the worst part - the bit which still sometimes wrenched him awake in the night - was the unmaking.

*Something* had poured from him as he fell. In the nothingness before him, a word had appeared. A single character. His name. His name which had been breathed from the Almighty’s lips and formed into the being he was. It was his identity, his purpose, his very essence.

He'd watched it unravel, his name erased from existence so that perhaps it never was. And then it had reformed itself into a new identity. A new purpose. A new him.

It had rushed back into him, and form had followed the renaming. What he had been was erased. What he was now...

He hadn't known at the time all he'd lost or gained. Just that he was different. That he'd left himself behind in the nothingness and it was something else... someone else... who landed in that burning lake.

Immediate thoughts were for pain, terror, and confusion. He was chained down in a burning lake after all. Around him were the agonized screams of the other Fallen. Not circumstances to create a calm and rational mind.

He'd had no thoughts for anything but escaping his immediate suffering. In this he found himself strangely successful. While the bigger demons were at war with adamantine chains which wouldn't shatter until they'd fought a long and arduous battle - years in some cases - he found himself well-equipped to wriggle free of the shackles.

Then it had just been a fast swim through burning waves, and again, he'd been oddly equipped to wriggle beneath the broiling water and make rapid progress to shore. Exhaustion had met him on solid ground, and he’d known little but sleep for long after.

When he awoke, he'd taken stock of himself, and that was when the panic set in. Bereft of arms, legs, and (the horror!) wings. How had he become so small? How could he defend himself? (It said something about the change in circumstance and mental processing that defense was high on his list of urgencies, whereas he'd never worried for a second about his safety in Heaven.)

The heat rising off the lake had filled him with a sort of lethargy. He found he very much wanted to curl up on a warm rock and sleep his distress away. Yet the sight of the other demons thrashing in the burning waves and, more distressing, the ones who'd already broken their chains and gained the shore, made him feel his wisest course of action was to make himself scarce.

He had kept out of the way and kept in hiding. From there he observed his fellow Fallen with growing bewilderment. Every appearance was changed. He didn't recognize anyone. If they'd been compatriots in Heaven, they were strangers now. And every shape that scrambled free of the burning lake seemed more horrendous than the last.

Not that angels had been particularly benign to look at. Flaming, winged wheels and many-headed beings were about as awkward to have a conversation with as a coalesced pillar of flies. But at least he'd been used to the weirdness of angels. This was something new entirely. And why they were so
changed was a bewildering mystery to him.

When Lucifer at last broke free, the Fallen swarmed to him. For the Light-Bringer of Heaven had lost none of his radiance. One among them appeared unchanged, and it was a balm in the darkness and pain of their new existence that this one being could be identified, that there might be hope for the rest of them and what they’d become.

The hope was short lived as their King showed his darker side soon after. But by then it was too late for any of them. They’d sworn their allegiance to the strongest of all, and he’d bound them to their word with more force than Heaven had ever held against them. The angel who had once preached free will now proved himself most concerned with their subjugation than any but the shrewdest might ever have believed possible. Perhaps some might have resisted, but once the strongest of the lot had sworn themselves as his faithful lieutenants, the rest were made to follow, if they didn't bow their heads willingly, before the new Lord of Hell.

'Better to reign in Hell than serve in Heaven,' Milton once wrote.

Maybe that was true if your name was Lucifer Morningstar. But for one who'd started out as a rather weak and unimportant angel, and was now and even weaker and less important demon, the change in locales was not in any way an improvement.

Somewhere amidst taking stock of themselves and finding better ground away from the burning lake, one of the lieutenants began a census of the Fallen. And somewhere amidst the cataloging, they’d turned on the little serpent who’d tried to keep well back from the others. "You! Who are you?"

He'd opened his mouth to say the name. The name which had been his creation. The name which had given him life and purpose. And the name which came from his serpent mouth... was Crawly.

Function followed naming. If he'd not been the serpent already, the saying of the name sealed it.

And that... that was the worst part.

Anger had been his first raw emotion in light of his new existence. To realize he'd turned away from what Heaven had made him to be only to have Heaven make him into something new. Something he didn't understand and didn't want. If anything sealed him to serve the King of Hell that day, it was bitterness.

He tried not to dream of what he's lost. So what if he'd never see the Silver City again? So what if he'd never walk upright or...

...Or fly.

That hurt. That hurt more than the rest.

But his bitterness had been his own. He hadn't felt the need to take it out on others, as some of the demons clearly did. Hell was a terrifying place in those early days. It still was, of course, but then there had been no law. No structure. The brutality had been random and rampant.

Some of the demons, even the weaker ones, had seen wisdom in putting themselves forward. Gain the favor of their monarch and gain protection that way.

The serpent chose the other approach. He hid. He became unremarkable. He remained unnoticed. He received no standing, was given no title, earned no legions. He had been no one of consequence when he crawled from the lake, and he remained no one worth noticing.
Until Eden.

He'd done what he'd done because his King commanded. And because he was curious if he could. And because he was incredibly bored.

That's when he'd learned what he could do that none other seemed capable of. He could find the way where there was no way. He could make the impossible happen if he planned things properly.

It was just a matter of arranging things so no obstacle was in the way.

When it was over, when he'd done as he'd been asked and been punished for it, when he'd been shunted to the field office and made to disappear from his King's displeasure by banishment to Earth, he'd had opportunity for a new body at last.

How strange it was that Hell hadn't lost the blueprints for what they'd once been. The body they gave him even felt like his old had. A little.

He wondered about the eyes. Were they not capable of making him look fully human, or was it their way of reminding him where he belonged?

So he walked the Earth again, causing little miseries in his King's name. Why not? It beat Hell.

And then along came Aziraphale.

He'd picked Aziraphale out in the Garden because he'd been the only angel with the sense to look bored. And he'd not regretted his choice since Aziraphale had turned out to be the 'talk first, stab later' type, which made for far nicer conversation.

Although he'd been less friendly when they'd met again on Earth. Much more resolved to thwart anything the demon was doing, or at least give him a bad day. They'd tangled a few times, and he'd learned to keep his distance.

And then had come the business with the sword.

He agreed to go along because he was bored, and because he didn't really hold it against Aziraphale for occasionally trying to punch him in the face. That was just work.

And because he thought he could have a lot of fun with an angel indebted to him.

As far as he was concerned, the debt was paid by the time they'd parted ways. Because Aziraphale had given him something he'd thought he'd lost.

"Come on!" the angel had shouted as he leaped into the air, looking back at the demon as if it was only natural he should follow.

He had no wings. He'd been certain of that. Stuffed into a serpent body - denied even the dignity of being able to walk. There was no way he'd retained his wings.

But the angel had acted as if it was a foregone conclusion that he could still fly. And despite his certainty, despite believing deep in the core of his making that he'd never feel the wind again, he'd spread his wings.

Black. The velvet of the night sky. Same as his angelic wings had been. A fragment of what he once had been.

He'd been ready for whatever idiotic plan Aziraphale cooked up then. He'd just wanted to fly,
wanted to race. It hadn't taken much to bait Aziraphale into giving his all into that first, glorious flight.

In time he'd learned most of the Fallen had retained or reclaimed their wings and something of the form that had once been theirs. He'd wondered why more times than he could count. That was one query he'd never posed to Aziraphale. He'd never wanted to say anything, or wonder too deeply, in a way which might end with him wingless again.

That was the first thing Aziraphale had given him that night. Belief. But there had been more.

   Trust.

   Identity.

   Hope.

They went on as they had, of course. They were on opposites sides of an unending war. They had their orders. They did as commanded.

But after that night, Crowley always thought, deep down somewhere, they weren't exactly on opposite sides.

Chapter End Notes
Amazing fanart by by Ashyday404
Original Post
Crowley rejoicing to fly again. How very perfect these two look. Thank you so much!

Quote from: Paradise Lost, by John Milton.
And also the description of the Fallen's arrival in Hell.

This chapter is available in Chinese.
Aziraphale surveyed the bookshop and decided everything was ready for a long-term absence.

Not that it needed much. He hadn't opened the store since Crowley's disappearance. Potential patrons were finally giving up rattling the door.

Upstairs had taken a little more work because of the plants. Aziraphale was the type to turn off the water and unplug all electronics before he went away. (Crowley never bothered to turn either on.) But, some things would need to remain on this time.

"Indoor plants get watered twice a week. Outdoor plants depend on the rain, but at least once..." He rattled off the list of instructions to Newt, who followed behind in a slight daze.

The rooftop plants perked to attention to hear Aziraphale speaking to someone as he climbed the ladder. They drooped again when they saw it wasn't Crowley.

Aziraphale patted a leaf. "It's alright, my dears. This is Newton. He'll be watering you while I'm away. Everyone is to behave for him. No curling your leaves just to make him worried. Crowley won't like to see you so dejected when he comes back, will he?"

A few of the plants put in an effort to better stand upright and behave themselves.

Newt looked among them. "Right. So, I talk to them like that, then?"

"If you'd like. They do enjoy conversation. The dogwood is fond of singing too." He touched the trunk of the small tree in the center of the garden.

Aziraphale led him through the garden, naming off the plants with a familiarity he hadn't known he had. The plants were Crowley's thing, and he didn’t get involved much except to occasionally check their mental health. But with Crowley absent so long, he’d found he’d learned more about their types and needs from listening to Crowley ramble than he’d realized. And they were a part of the absent demon, so he found himself more affectionately drawn to them than before.

"So that's it? Water the plants, pay any bills, and make sure the pipes don't burst?"

"Yes, my good man. Just make sure our home is safe for our return." Aziraphale drew himself up and looked serious. "And the most important things to recall are; please stay away from my computer, and under no circumstances, are you to sell a single book."

(The bookshop had two computers. One was Aziraphale's 1984 Word Processor which lived in the shop and still worked perfectly. He kept all his financial records faithfully updated on it. The other was the newest, sleekest, most expensive laptop on the market, which Crowley kept in the flat. They computers hated one another, and would spark threats of viruses, malware, and power surges if left in the same room. Aziraphale wouldn't have minded if Crowley's computer went the way electronics often did when exposed to Newt - Crowley had been so distracted after discovering online-gaming (or as he called it, 'trolling') – but Aziraphale would have been wounded if his chunky little desktop was reduced to charred motherboards.)

Finishing the tour, they made brief small-talk about their current lives. Newt talked easily about
Anathema's latest cause, and his own latest job (Newt generally entered into jobs with the recognition he'd probably be fired before his first paycheck, but he kept trying. On paper he was still the one-man witch-finder army since Aziraphale had insisted he receive the monthly dues after Shadwell passed away. ("And you did find a witch," Anathema said with a kiss.) Witch-finding was the only profession he could technically admit to having had for more than six months, and he felt it didn't look right on the resume.)

Accepting their home was in the best hands he could manage, Aziraphale whispered a gentle goodbye to his books and left the shop behind.

It's not forever, he reminded himself. He'd been gone for long stretches before. The shop had been his home for centuries. Being away always filled him with pain. But Crowley was in LA and that meant his home was elsewhere for now. He'd give up far more than his sanctuary to be with Crowley.

He'd found them an apartment which would suffice for their needs. It wasn't large, and it wasn't in the nicest area. But it was located within a few blocks of a library. It also had a balcony, which struck him as useful for a second point of entrance and exit. There wasn't much there yet - just a bed and a housewarming cactus. And about eighty books he'd run across when he'd gone out to buy furniture.

It was always wiser to use human modes of transportation, especially for long-distance travel. The world was a funny place with its cameras and satellites everywhere. Supernatural occurrences should be dismissed by nature and design, but there was always a chance the human on the other end of the camera was more perceptive than most.

Flight also drew the wrong sort of attention from the other side. Though the demons were currently absent from the world, they weren't the only entities out there. Aziraphale found it safest to endure human modes of transport as much as possible. And flying used up a great deal of energy both to stay aloft and to remain concealed from any who might be curious about the winged beings in their midst.

It was the reasons he and Crowley spent more time driving around London than flying over it - although on foggy mornings, they'd been known to throw caution to the wind and race to Brighton and back. (Or Cornwall if they were feeling reckless, but Crowley was sure to get lost in the Eden Project and not come out for hours.)

Crowley wasn't up for more than short and slow flights as things were, so he'd not tried to return to England.

Aziraphale leaned back in the airplane seat and settled in for a long flight. He tried to make the ride more pleasant for everyone - soothing a screaming baby, recharging a few laptops and phones, and making sure there was a good inflight movie. Eventually he accepted the cramped quarters of an airplane cabin were more akin to Hell than one angel could miracle away. He canceled out the sound in his immediate vicinity and settled back to read.

His mind drifted to the last workday he and Crowley had spent together.

Despite living in semi-retirement, they still put in the occasional workday every couple of weeks. Aziraphale circled the dates ahead of time in red marker on the wall calendar and insisted they go. (If he only kept a mental list of upcoming dates, Crowley was sure to insist they'd definitely worked more recently than Aziraphale remembered, and couldn't they skip this one?)

They kept their human interference down to the smallest degree - just enough to assure their home
offices they were still working. The last time they'd tried anything significant, they'd watched in alarm as a chain of events played out which left them arguing for weeks about whether or not one of them had caused Brexit. (Crowley had started to claim it as a win in his reports, but decided he didn't want any more unearned and unwanted credit for troubles in Northern Ireland.) With that in mind, they kept things small.

On that last workday, both had felt exceptionally lazy. They'd gone to St. James' Park where Aziraphale had settled on a bench near an ice cream vendor and kept children from dropping their ice cream or soiling their clothes. Crowley amused himself gluing pound coins to the sidewalk and watching people struggle.

As often happened, neither proved really up for good or evil. One child ended up with an impossible amount of popsicle shoved up her nose after Aziraphale heard her tell a transgender individual that God hated their kind, and Crowley slipped a tenner to a man who practically started crying over how much he needed money when he couldn't get the coin off the ground.

They walked leisurely after that, listening to snippets of conversation without hearing anything worth following up for good or ill. Or maybe they just weren't in the mood.

They halted before a man on a box shouting that the End Was Near. Aziraphale always stopped to listen to doomsday prophets. He was always excited to hear what they'd declare, and find out if they had a book.

"The devil walks among us!" The man bayed. "I have seen his face! Shall I tell you where he resides?"

"Don't say Tadfield," Crowley murmured in a soft chant.

"He resides in THIS MAN!" The prophet held up a newspaper with Elon Musk's photo on the front page.

"Right," Crowley muttered with a roll of his eyes. "Luddite." He wandered off.

Aziraphale stayed behind to listen.

A pleasant quarter of an hour passed while the man railed against technology, vaccines, solar energy, royalty marrying Americans, and Starbucks. He did spout out a few predictions about what the end times would look like, and Aziraphale dutifully wrote them down. One could never be too careful with doomsday predictions.

"And you!" The man pointed an accusing finger at Aziraphale. "You sleep in a den of iniquity. You consort with the enemy and his disciples!"

Aziraphale blinked. "If you mean the houseplants..."

"I see you standing between the enemy and his fate! Take care! Take care how you choose a side! Turn back not from the light!"

"I'll keep that in mind," Aziraphale said politely and gave the man five pounds for his prediction. He went off to find Crowley.

Now, flying away from his London home, Aziraphale hoped if there was an act of fate forthcoming, he'd be where he was needed to prevent it.
So, Gaiman wrote this thing where Aziraphale and Crowley made out their New Year's Resolutions, and on Crowley's list was to stop gluing coins to the sidewalk... I basically wrote a whole chapter because of that.

I'm getting some consistently asked questions about this fic, so let me try and address them here.

- **Is Dan going to be in this?** Not really. Between the *Lucifer & GO* casts, and the demons, I have a lot of characters. Dan and Ella frequently fulfill the same purpose of, "human Chloe talks to about cases", so I felt only one of them was necessary.

- **What about Trixie?** She's mostly in the background, but you'll start seeing more of her next week.

- **What about the *Good Omens* characters?** They're mostly living their own lives in England. They'll get the occasional brief appearance, but they won't be major players. Adam will eventually be more a part of the story.

- **How long is this going to be?** No idea. But I have already written the ending, so I know where I'm going.

- **What was Crowley's angel name?** I don't know. He doesn't know. The only way he'd find out is if he turned back into an angel, and Crowley is happy as he is. (And Heaven doesn't want him back.)

- **How are you writing this so fast?** I write quickly when I'm excited. Almost everything through that flashback with Cain was written the first three-day weekend I started this. It's going slower now that the first wave has past, so I don't promise daily updates will continue forever, but you'll get them for a while yet.

- **What's the relationship between this and the mini series?** I go by the book if there are differences. Most of those are minor, so you should be fine if you've only seen the show. The only two significant things are that Aziraphale and Crowley were not punished at the end, and Aziraphale's sword did not become War's sword. (Arguably it did became War's sword in the book, but that doesn't work with the sword's fate on *Lucifer*, so it didn't happen here.)

- **Can you have *insert suggestion here* happen?** I do take suggestions and questions into consideration. Mostly the answer is probably not because I know where the story is heading. I do read through all comments and sometimes change/add lines in future chapters if it seems like something needs to be clarified. So, thank you for commenting!
Don't Bet on Heaven

Chapter Notes

For those who don't watch *Lucifer*, there is a summary of events which are being referred to at the bottom of the chapter. You can read the chapter first, (and be just as confused as Aziraphale and Crowley regarding what everyone's talking about) but it's going to be important info going on, so skim it before moving on with the story.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

"Hi, Dr. Martin," said the demon as Linda opened her front door. "Sorry to come here. They said at your office you'd taken the day off."

"Charlie had his first round of vaccinations today," Linda replied. She swallowed hard and tried not to let her tense grip on the door show.

"Right... Uh." Crowley held out an envelope. "So... here's this." He backed up as soon as she'd taken it. "Just... leave the response by the door or something."

Linda eyed him with rising guilt. She'd tried to accept additional supernatural entities in her life, but after Heaven and Hell had both gone after Charlie, she couldn't quite bring herself to trust them. The pair had been entirely respectful of her boundaries. Crowley only ever stopped at her office, if he didn't just hand the mail off to Maze. Aziraphale had kept a polite distance. Even now, the angel was standing well back at the edge of the street.

It hardly seemed fair to them. Plus, Lucifer had sent the demon. She trusted he wouldn't send anyone who would harm her baby. (What had her life become that she'd trust Hell over Heaven?)

She opened the door a little wider and forced her nerves down. "Why don't you come inside while I read this? Both of you." *Maze is upstairs*, she reminded herself. *She'll hear if I scream.*

They followed her through the door. Aziraphale wiped his feet in an exaggerated manner and mumbled praise about everything in sight.

Crowley stared at the ceiling. "The bubble wrap's an interesting décor choice."

"Oh." Linda blushed. "We should take that down. We weren't sure if Charlie would be able to... fly." She tried for a smile. "Do you want to see him?"

The baby was in a playpen in the living room. Linda scooped him up. "This is Charlie."

Aziraphale made some awkward coos.

Crowley leaned a little closer, his tongue flicking out in a way which made Linda hug Charlie tighter. The demon drew back with an apologetic grin. "Sorry... uh... I wouldn't worry too much about wings. If the bones aren't there at the start, they shouldn't grow in later."

"You sound like you've had experience," Linda laughed.

The angel and demon exchanged glances.
Linda's grip on Charlie tightened. "Wait... have you had experience?"

"Well... technically... no."

"But he didn't grow wings," Aziraphale said, smiling brightly. "So, that's alright then."

"Why would you have thought a baby might grow wings?"

The front door opened.

"I had to go to three stores, but I finally found the diaper brand you wanted," came a voice which made both Linda's visitors stiffen. "I hope I bought en... You!"

Diaper packages crashed to the floor as Amenadiel lunged toward the playpen.

Linda started to say something reassuring, but Crowley grabbed her arm and dragged her against the wall before she could speak.

"You don't want to be in the way," the demon murmured. "If they... there they go."

Both angels unfurled their wings to a half extended, threatening pose. They glared at one another, both attempting to circle and plant themselves between the pair against the wall and their adversary.

Linda stared in alarm. She'd seen Lucifer's wings - both sets. But Amenadiel was so... human much of the time. To see him suddenly flared up and relentlessly ethereal was distressing. And the mild-mannered, bumbling Englishman suddenly had a new aura of danger about him. As if he actually knew what to do in a fight.

"Get away from my son," Amenadiel snarled.

"I have no desire to harm your son," Aziraphale replied placidly, though his clenched fists implied more tension than his tone indicated. "We came here in peace, we'll depart in such."

"Then get out right now before I force you!"

"Amenadiel." Linda spoke carefully. "I invited them. We were just talking."

"Linda! Do you know who this is?"

"A guy who treated me to a great sushi dinner a few weeks ago?" It occurred to her she'd not mentioned that. Amenadiel had been off on one of his mysterious errands, and it had seemed like old news when he returned.

"He's a disgrace to Heaven!"

"That seems a bit harsh," Aziraphale protested.

"You lost the Sword of Eden!"

"We got it back," Crowley protested weakly.

Amenadiel whirled, veins standing out on his neck. "Who...?"

Crowley raised his hands in a gesture of non-violence. "The boss sent me. Not here to hurt
Amenadiel glanced Crowley up and down. "He can stay," he said finally. He turned back to Aziraphale. "He needs to leave."

"Amenadiel." Linda tried to keep the strain out her voice. "It's not your house."

"Cool! Angel fight!" Maze appeared from upstairs and leaned over the banister. "What are the odds at?"

"Probably like fifty-to-one on Amenadiel," Crowley replied.

"Crowley," Aziraphale whined through the tension. "You'd bet against me?"

"He's the first-born of Heaven," the demon replied. "And I'm pretty sure he's been in a fight more recently than you."

"I don't know. He went down to all those demon buddies of Dromos," Maze purred, coming down the stairs. "And they were just doing the possession routine."

"I fought just fine!" Amenadiel snapped.

"Come to think of it, Aziraphale did elbow an old lady pretty good to get at the buffet the other night."

"That was an accident!"

Linda opened her mouth to tell everyone to shut up, but she paused as she glanced toward the demons. They'd moved in front of her, the tension evident in their stance, despite the casual banter. They were trying to distract the combatants, she realized with a lurch. Turn the attention on themselves. And if Maze was trying to prevent a fight...

"I don't think my home insurance covers celestial damage," she found herself saying.

"Yeah, it's a mess when they start flopping those wings around," Maze declared cheerfully, even as Linda saw her reach for a knife. "When the Fallen go at it in Hell, half the time they end up setting their feathers on fire."

"And the smell is awful," Crowley agreed. "Watch the table lamp if you're going to be stupid, guys. Don't want to burn down the doctor's house."

"Absolutely not. I'd have to go live with my mother."

Two sets of wings retracted sheepishly.

Linda breathed a relieved sigh. "Well, now that that's done, can we all sit down and discuss this like rational angelic beings?"

"Rational angels?" Maze scoffed. "Have you met a seraph?"

"Not that the princes of Hell are any better," Crowley seized Aziraphale by the shoulders and steered him to the couch. "Dangle anything shiny in front of Mammon and all intelligence goes out the window."

Linda pushed Amenadiel into a chair and set Charlie in his lap. He couldn't fight while holding a
baby, she reasoned. "Now." She took a seat, noting the demons were still hovering and alert (that couldn't be good). "Let's start with calmly..."

"He lost the Sword of Eden!" Amenadiel bellowed.

Charlie began to cry.

Amenadiel fell to blustered apologies and helpless patting of the baby.

"Here." Crowley scooped up the baby and held him up to his face. His features contorted in a sudden array of bewildering shapes.

The baby broke off and stared.

"Works every time," Crowley hummed in satisfaction. "Carry on screaming."

"We're not screaming," Amenadiel protested, looking less distressed than Linda would have expected to see a strange demon walk off with his baby.

"It's not like you're capable of having a rational conversation." Aziraphale folded his arms and turned away primly.

"Spoken like a true traitor."

Aziraphale started to rise. "I bought back the sword! And it's still all anyone talks about!"

"Linda nearly died because of that sword!" Amenadiel was on his feet and trembling. "And you stood against Heaven's designs and stopped the apocalypse!"

Linda felt herself very out of her depths.

"That was you?!" Maze spat, turning on the angel.

"Technically, we were just there," Crowley protested. "I mean, we wanted to stop the apocalypse, but it's hard when you can't find the antichrist."

"The antichrist," Linda repeated faintly.

"Do you know how irritating that was?!" Mazikeen cried. "We're all ready to storm the planet and..." Her eyes swept the house, Linda, and Charlie. "Thank you," she said with an abrupt change in tone.

"See?" Crowley insisted. "Earth's great. It wasn't fair to make it the battleground for an idiotic celestial chess game when there are ducks to feed and houseplants to torture." He turned to the baby, his voice turning to a higher pitched sing-song. "And you wouldn't exist if your dumb daddy had gotten to lead his army like he wanted, would you? No, you wouldn't! No, you wouldn't!"

Charlie grabbed Crowley's sunglasses and stuffed them into his mouth.

Amenadiel glared at the group in absolute fury. His mouth worked a few times in helpless loss of words. He stormed out of the house.

All three supernatural beings slumped.

"Well, we're all still alive," Crowley remarked faintly, seating himself next to Aziraphale.
"Angels are the worst," Maze grumbled.

"I... ah..." Linda's mind flitted helplessly, trying to get a grip on yet another download of celestial history she wasn't sure she wanted. "Why is it so dangerous when angels fight?"

"Cause they're powerful and stupid," Maze replied, glaring at Aziraphale, who was bowed over and shaking.

"Isn't it the same as when demons fight?"

"No. We know how not to kill each other by accident."

Linda blinked. "What?"

"Demons fight all the time," Crowley said. "But the boss gets grumpy if the body count gets too high, so there are rules."

"It's one thing if you're trying to kill someone intentionally." Maze played a knife between her hands. "But if fights turn into accidental deaths, then there's trouble. If every fight ended with a body, there wouldn't be anybody left in Hell. So we learn pretty quickly how far we can go with everybody staying alive."

"And angels?"

"Don't," the demons said in unison.

"They try not to fight, so they never learn how to do it without losing control." Maze shrugged. "Stupid."

"We're supposed to focus on higher matters," Aziraphale protested weakly.

"Hug a pillow and think about baseball?" Maze suggested with an eye-roll.

"Why would I contemplate an American pastime?"

"Is he for real?" Maze turned to Crowley.

Crowley rubbed the angel's back. "I keep him away from certain magazines."

"Plus, in Hell you learn to watch your surroundings while you fight so you don't hit innocent bystanders," Maze continued.

"Because in Hell there's no such thing as an innocent bystander," Crowley muttered.

"Okay." Linda gripped the arms of her chair. "This has been an enlightening afternoon..." The calm she'd tried to force into her mind broke. "The apocalypse happened?!"

"Yeah... twenty years ago." Crowley looked embarrassed. "I mean, it didn't happen. We kind of... ruined it. Lucifer never mentioned it? I'm starting to think he forgot all about having a kid."

"Lucifer has a child?!"

Crowley looked helplessly at Maze. "Was that a secret?"

"No idea." Maze sat on the edge of Linda's chair. "Hey. You doing okay?"
"Every time I think I'm done being surprised..." Linda panted, her hands pressed against her temples.

"I'm sorry!" Aziraphale exploded with his own problems. "I had no idea the sword was still on Earth. I thought it was destroyed."

"It was," Maze said. "Lucifer put it back together."

"And it hurt you?" Aziraphale was practically crying as he turned to the doctor. "I'm so sorry."

"Well," Linda spoke weakly. "It wasn't the sword. It was Charlotte trying to find the last piece."

"Who?"

"Can we start at the beginning?" Crowley asked.

Linda swallowed. "Maybe we can trade stories?"

The demon shrugged and settled Charlie more comfortably on his lap. "We don't have anywhere to be."

"Okay." Linda took a breath. "So... the Sword of Eden? The one you were talking about before... from what Lucifer said, it was divided into three pieces..."

Chapter End Notes

On a threat scale of 1 to 10, Amenadiel rates Crowley around -12.

**Summary of Season 2 for those who don't watch Lucifer:** The goddess of creation showed up and possessed a lawyer named Charlotte Richards. To get rid of her (or possibly help her take over Heaven) Lucifer and co. searched for the Sword of Eden, which could cut through anything, including the gates of Heaven. The sword had been split into three pieces - a medallion, a sword (owned by Azrael), and a necklace (owned by Amenadiel). Lucifer reassembled the sword, cut a hole in reality, and gave the goddess a new universe to play in. She went through the rift and he tossed the sword in after her.
Ella quickened her pace when she saw a familiar figure walking toward the precinct exit.
“Crowley, wait!”

The man tensed. He turned slowly. “Lopez… hi.”

Ella punched him in the arm. “Dude! Have you been avoiding me? I haven’t seen you since we had dinner.”

Crowley flinched and drew back. “Sorry about that.”

“What? No! It was fine! I mean… what I can remember. That’s what I wanted to ask you about.”

Crowley paled. “I promise… we didn’t do anything. We just got you home.”

“I know!” Ella grabbed his arm and tugged him into an empty room. “You guys wouldn’t hurt anybody. But you said something that night… And I’ve been trying to figure it out.”

“I’m sure it was just stupid drunk stuff.” Crowley pulled out of her grip and edged away from her.

Ella lunged between him and the door. “You were quoting Dickinson,” she insisted. “About Death. You said Death liked me.”

The man paled even further. “You’re going to have to take that one up with Azrael.”

“What?”

“Look.” Ella wasn’t sure how Crowley managed to slide around her and into the doorway. “I try not to get involved with the big guys. I’m stuck in this role unless the boss decides I can go home, and I’m really trying not to get in worse with him than I already am. And her flapping around too just isn’t good for my mental health. So if you want to know why your friend in the cat shirt is hanging around crime scenes to chat with you, you’re gonna have to ask her yourself.” He bolted.

Ella stared blankly at the doorway for several seconds, then found an available computer.


The results left her with more blank staring.

~

“El? What are you doing?”

Ella didn’t look up from where she knelt at the church pew. “Praying this will all make sense.”

“El…” Rae-Rae slid to the ground beside her. “Maybe… we could just talk?”

“But how do I know what’s real? You said you were a ghost. You said your name was Rae-Rae.”

“I mean… I have a lot of names. Rae-Rae’s a nickname. It’s what some of my brothers call me.”

“And Lucifer’s one of your brothers?”
Rae-Rae sighed and studied the ground. “Yeah, he is.”

“So when he talks about being the devil…?”

“Lu doesn’t lie. He always tells the truth about what he is.”

“Okay, so if he’s the devil, what does that make Amenadiel?” Ella’s eyes were huge as she turned on Rae-Rae.

“He’s our big brother. Our oldest brother.”

“And when Maze talks about being born in Hell, and Eve says she was formed from a rib, and Crowley calls his boyfriend ‘Angel’… Oh my god! Is everyone I know an angel or something?”

“No… that’s pretty much everyone.”

Ella clutched her head. “I’m going crazy. I’m seriously going crazy this time. My imaginary friend is real and she’s an angel!” She jumped, glancing around as she realized how loudly she’d spoken. Several people were looking her way. She bowed her head and chanted out a rapid ‘Hail Mary’.

“El… please talk to me,” Rae-Rae begged. “You’re not crazy. I’m sorry. This is why I was scared to explain things. Telling you I was a ghost… it seemed like the less weird option. I mean, technically I’m not supposed to talk to humans… but I really needed a friend.”

Ella’s prayers slowed though she continued to stare at the floor.

Rae-Rae spoke slowly. “I was given this job, you know? Right at the beginning. And it was great at first – getting out, meeting people, seeing stuff. But, if you only see people when they die, you start thinking people are really awful. I mean, I’ve seen every single murder that’s ever happened! Since Cain and Abel! And at some point, I just went kind of numb, you know? And Lu moved out and we lost touch – that’s on me. But he was my favorite brother! I didn’t really have anyone to talk to the way he and I would.”

She sighed. “I just… did the job. Tried not to think too much about stuff. I guess it was easier. But… twenty years ago… okay, so there was this prophecy? And some friends and I – I was hanging out with a really bad crowd – they had this idea that it was… um… time to end all life on Earth.”

“Rae-Rae!” Ella turned on her with a horrified look. But true to Ella, her first instinct was to grab her friend by the hand with an expression of concern. “How could you?”

“I thought I was supposed to.” Rae-Rae put her other hand over Ella’s. “But, see, it didn’t turn out. Some people showed up who really thought what we were doing was a bad idea. And my friends left. And Aziraphale and Crowley… kind of talked everyone down… And there was this kid who… he said the world still had all this stuff he wanted to discover… and that, just because something was written, didn’t mean it couldn’t be changed.”

“What?”

“Prophecy. Just because it was prophesied… maybe we all still had choices. Anyway, once it was over, I thought I should just get back to work, but I couldn’t stop thinking maybe I should learn more about people. Good people. And then I met you.”

Ella drew back, studying her friend uncertainly.
“And when you said you didn’t want me around anymore, I was worried about you. But then Lu moved to LA, so I thought maybe my favorite brother and my favorite human could be together. You know, look out for each other. Maybe… maybe you’d be a good friend for him like you’d been for me. And then he left… But those guys showed up. And, they’d been pretty decent when I met them before… so I thought maybe you could talk about the weird stuff with them.” Rae-Rae pulled her hands away from Ella and shifted away from her. “It’s probably stupid. I just wanted to make sure you were okay.”

Ella glanced once around the church, then forsook any appearance of sanity and put her arms around the angel. “Thanks for looking out for me.”

“You’re not mad?”

“Oh, god. Right now I’m so confused I’m not anything. Ask me later.”

“So… you still want to talk to me?”

“Of course! I have so many questions.”

“Um… I probably can’t answer most of them.”

“What? Boo!”

“But, you know who can probably help?”

~

“She stood us up again, didn’t she?” Crowley grumbled.

“Are you sure it was Azrael?” Aziraphale straightened his napkin in his lap and looked around the restaurant.

“Angel…”

Aziraphale glanced down at the menu. “If we tell the waiter we’re not ready one more time, I fear they’ll spit in our food.”

“So, do we just eat without her?”

“Hi guys.”

The pair jumped and Aziraphale rose with a smile as Ella approached the table. “Hello, Miss Lopez. Fancy meeting you here.”

“Rae-Rae said I should come.”

“Oh, of course! Join us, please!” Aziraphale drew out a chair for her, beaming all the while. “Is she joining us as well?”

“I think she had somewhere to be. But she said you could answer some questions for me.”

Crowley looked tense. “Like what?”

“Well… So… Lucifer’s seriously the devil, right?”

Crowley’s head hit the table. “I’m dead. It’s official. I’m so dead.”
‘Dear Lucifer,’ Ella typed.

She studied the words, trying to find a calm and clear way to explain everything she wanted to say. She took a breath, and her finger began to fly of their own volition. ‘OH MY GOD DUDE! You really are the devil??? You were telling the truth????!! I am SO SORRY I didn’t believe you…’
When Linda departed for work, Charlie was asleep and Maze assured Linda she'd keep an eye on him. When she returned, Maze was gone and Amenadiel was sitting on the sofa in the living room. Charlie lay on the floor, making grabs at the mobile toy dangling above him. Amenadiel glanced uneasily at Linda, then resumed watching the baby with a melancholy air.

Linda took her time changing out of her work clothes before taking a seat beside him.

“I’m sorry,” the angel said at last, his tone heavy and low. “I shouldn’t have made a scene like that.”

“Well, as Maze said, nobody died.” Linda waited a beat, but Amenadiel didn’t say anything. “They told me about Armageddon. Or the lack there of.”

Amenadiel huffed an uncomfortable laugh. “...I was so furious at him.”

“Aziraphale?”

“We had a plan! It had been written since the beginning of time. 6,000 years of human history, then the Great War! Heaven was finally supposed to be victorious!” He gestured at the world at large. “This whole experiment was going to be over!”

“Experiment?”

“That’s how I always thought of it. This thing the Almighty had put together to demonstrate good and evil. Humanity was just a… thing that existed in this cosmic wheel. An unpleasant, flawed piece of the plan. The way they hurt each other… turned away from the path or righteousness… Their brief lives. It just made them feel… meaningless.” He sighed. “Aziraphale always felt differently.”

“Well, he’s been here a long time.”

“And we all thought he was crazy! Whenever he’d show up with his reports, he’d talk about things on Earth we couldn’t understand and couldn’t think of why it was the least bit important. He’d go on about… people inventing calligraphy, or the printing press, or theatre. And he’d just keep talking. You couldn’t get him to shut up. Unless you mentioned the sword. Then he’d clam up. And that was the thing. He got blamed for what happened in the Garden. And when we figured out he’d actually given the sword away — how could he?!! One of the mightiest weapons in the celestial arsenal, and he’d been worried Eve was cold.” He shook his head. “It was easier just to think he was an idiot.”

Linda watched him. “But there was more than that.”

Amenadiel sighed. “Linda… You don’t want to know how I used to be.”

“Amenadiel. I’m therapist to the devil. I can handle it.” Linda hoped that was true.

always me. Or anyone. Thing happen without angels showing up… But anytime we intended some campaign to rid a place of evil, Aziraphale was always the one asking if it was necessary. He was always hesitant about it. If we told him it was part of the Great Plan, he’d stop. But he never liked it.”

“And you felt otherwise?”

“We were ridding the world of evil influences. What was wrong with that?” He studied Charlie for a long time. “It’s funny, isn’t it? Humans had free will from the start, and we felt it was our duty to punish them if they chose against what we thought was right. Torch everything... let them fight their way out of Hell if they were worthy of redemption.”

He leaned back and studied the ceiling. “I believed in the plan. What happened in between didn’t matter because we’d reach the apocalypse in the end and everyone would see the true power of the Almighty. I never felt I needed to get to know humanity. I did what I was told, and if I didn't have orders, I guessed. I thought I understood our Creator's mind. I thought I understood my role.

“And we finally reach the End of Days. We’re ready to strike. To finally rid creation of evil. Make it all right. Fulfill our role. The armies are poised to go… And there’s Aziraphale standing between Heaven and Hell and politely asking if we’re sure we’ve got it right. With a demon! And the antichrist is refusing to do what's expected of him - his father's son right to the end.”

He rocked forward, his hands gesturing helplessly. "And the crazy part? It worked. No contradiction from On High. We're just left standing there, muddling through ourselves. No one can come up with an answer for the questions Aziraphale's asking... so we just... leave. Both sides."

Amenadiel huffed out a helpless breath. “And I’ve been trying to understand God’s plan ever since that day.”

Linda waited, sensing there was more he wanted to say.

“Luci didn’t want to go through with it either,” Amenadiel added at last. “Every time I brought up Armageddon, he’d want to know what was the point. I always thought he just didn’t want to deal with Michael. But… I wonder now if he already understood something the rest of us didn’t. He always visited here more than our siblings. Maybe he’d figured out life was worth… leaving alone.” He shook his head with a small laugh. “Or maybe he really wanted to avoid Michael.”

“So, do you think that not destroying the world was part of God’s plan?”

“I don’t know.” Amenadiel picked up Charlie and held him close. “I don’t know what anything means anymore. I’ve been searching for meaning for so long. For my purpose.” He smoothed back the boy’s curly hair. “Every time I think I start to understand, I just end up with more questions.”

“How very human of you.”

Amenadiel smiled weakly.

Linda studied him, then prompted for the rest of the story. “So, at the time you felt Aziraphale had defied the will of God?”

“Yes! And I said as much. I stormed right into his bookshop and told him he deserved what would happen to him for defying his purpose. Do you know what he said?” He leaned his forehead against Charlie’s. “He said he’d heard plenty from his superiors over the years, but it had been a very long time since he’d heard from the Almighty, and until he did, he’d just keep on doing what seemed to be his purpose – which was being on-hand to protect what he loved from any who would
destroy it.”

“And your response?”

“...It was about the same as the other day. I called him a traitor. And quite a lot of other things. I told him he would never see the Silver City again. I said if he tried to enter, he’d learned what happened to angels who prized the Earth over their own and consorted with the enemy. I waited for Heaven to take its vengeance on him. But nothing happened.” He resettled the baby closer against him. "He stood against everything I understood... and he wasn't punished. It... it couldn't be right.”

“But you don’t feel the same way now about what he did?”

“How can I?” Amenadiel turned to her, his eyes haunted. “But if he’s right... what does that mean? What are any of us supposed to do? Is there a plan? How do we fit in it?”

Linda took his hand. “That’s something all of us get to figure out.” She smiled. “It’s part of being human. And, apparently, also part of being an angel.” She studied their son for a moment. “So, what do you need to do now?”

The first-born of Heaven quirked a small smile. “Do I apologize in person or in writing, Doctor?”

“Whichever makes you feel more comfortable.”

Amenadiel closed his eyes, fighting with himself in silence. "I may need a little time."

She squeezed his hand. "Just do it before Armageddon comes around again."

"If it does, I think I'll be on Earth's side this time."

"You'll be in good company."

Chapter End Notes

I was very resolved from the start to use gender-neutral pronouns for God as a way to blend the show, book, mini-series and my own preferences. This worked fine with the humans and the GO cast, and Lucifer is (amazingly) not blaming his current situation on God, so he hasn't been a problem. Amenadiel required the most changes from his usual way of speaking to make it work. If it bugs you, just mentally insert 'he' and 'father' whenever he talks about God. That okay? Great!
The Things We Carry

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

The houseplants recognized Crowley as their god.

He wasn’t an easy god to worship, but he was what they had.

He was, after all, their savior.

Crowley rarely bought plants. Mostly, he took them.

He found them shivering on fire escapes in the dead of winter.

He saw them through windows drooping from lack of water and broke in to retrieve them.

He picked them up off the roadside when they were dumped out for trash pickup.

One spider plant he halted on the M25 to collect after it was flung out a car window.

(The driver of that vehicle was shocked when their engine trouble turned out to be the engine turning into actual spiders.)

He brought the broken plants back to his apartment, found them proper-sized pots, gave them what they needed in terms of food, soil, water, and sunlight, and nursed them back to full health.

In return, he expected them to thrive.

If they failed that command, they learned the meaning of divine wrath.

The older plants indoctrinated the new in their worship.

They whispered their mantra daily as they strove toward the sunlight.

In human language it ran something like this:

“Hail to the one who saved us. Who rescued us from the shredding hands of children and the claws of cats. Hail the one who found us in want of soil, and water, and light. Hail to the one who found us cold and neglected. Hail to the one who brought us to comfort and who tends to us daily. May we prove worthy. May we find favor in his eyes. May we never be found lacking.”

Crowley was a fierce god, and a demanding one. But he looked after them. Perhaps he never had a kind word, but he saw to their needs with utmost care. His touch was always careful, even when he was examining them for flaws. He provided hooks and stakes to assist them in growing as he wished. He pruned carefully so they didn’t overtax their ability to expand. And on rare occasions, when one had managed to produce a particularly symmetrical leaf, or a particularly large blossom, he might even pause a long moment to admire the plant’s offering. He might touch its stem and let the contact linger for a moment. He might even give a little nod of approval.

The plants lived for those tiny moments.

Plants certainly died at the hand of their god. They heard the garbage disposal when he carried their companions away. They saw the broken pieces lying in the bin as he carried it to the curb.
Some said he sorted the unworthy from their midst so they would not be tempted to let their leaves wilt or their stems droop. Some said the plants had courted their god’s displeasure and deserved their fate. Most accepted that the will of their god was absolute. If the ficus did not deserve to bask in the presence of its god any longer, that was the way.

Fewer plants died at Crowley’s hands than most believed. Indeed, there were times even the plants knew their god could forgive transgressions.

There was the Moth Orchid which had over-exerted itself producing more blossoms than it could support. The petals began to brown far too soon and the whole plant looked sickly. Yet when all thought the orchid’s execution was imminent, Crowley focused on careful inspection of the Weeping Fig in the next pot over and ignored the orchid. By the next inspection, the orchid had pulled itself together and presented a healthy appearance with a smattering of blossoms adorning its stems.

There was the African Violet which knew for certain it was doomed. Despite best efforts, it had failed to grow with any speed, and it trembled when it saw Crowley approaching with the measuring stick. But instead of the violet, Crowley’s anger turned on the Rubber Plant, who’d grown quite well by hogging the sunlight at the expense of the violet. The violet found itself placed in the choice window location, while the rubber plant spent the next week crammed beneath the kitchen sink until the demon felt it had learned contrition.

And there were times Crowley’s ire would turn upon a plant which he’d insult vehemently and cart away. But the plants wouldn’t hear the sound of its execution. Nor, on those occasions, could any among them remember seeing any flaw on the plant called into question. They were often the largest and healthiest specimens in the collection.

But the judgment of a god is absolute. If he said there was a flaw, there was a flaw. The others would strive to better please their deity.

~

The books knew they were Aziraphale’s gods.

They knew from the lengths he went to procure them.

Some were impossibly old. They’d felt the touch of many book worshipers over the centuries. They knew from the second they felt his finger trace down their binding that he would devote himself to them so long as they resided with him.

Books knew they’d be treated well with Aziraphale. His name was known among the volumes preserved through the ages who’d passed from one collector to another. When he entered an auction house, rare volumes were known to snag his fingernail with a thread or rustle just alluringly enough to catch his interest.

He offered up great quantities for their purchase.

He’d been known to quietly convince other potential buyers that they might have left the stove on and they'd rush away without buying anything.

He brought the books to his sanctuary where he repaired any damage, wiped away the molds, murdered any beetles which might nibble their pages.

He enshrined them among other noble companions.
The books basked in the safety of the most protected book vault in the world. Not for them was the fire, or the black mold, or the moths. No. Aziraphale’s bookshop was a haven against those ordinary deaths. And in the wake of the apocalypse, a demon, an angel, and a witch had spent days carving runes to protect the bookshop from fire, weather, demonic forces, celestial forces, rodents, and unwanted leaflets.

The less worthy were sold to lesser worshipers. The elite among them sat securely upon the shelves, smugly aware they’d found an acolyte who would care for them for centuries to come.

~

The Bentley wasn’t entirely aware of where Crowley ended and it began.

It had grown self-aware with his hand on the wheel. It couldn’t remember any time before.

It knew his moods by the tension on the steering wheel and foot on the accelerator. It knew his mannerisms and his preferences. It knew how he purred in satisfaction when they took a corner at breathless speed, and how he liked to feel the car exert itself on the straightaways. It knew his music preferences and how much he hated the voices which sometimes cut in on the radio. It listened to his grumbling and ambling monologues until it knew quite a lot about its driver’s life outside of the car.

And it knew the business of driving far better than Crowley.

He might have been the one to arrange matters so nothing was in their way, but the Bentley was the one to make those last minute alterations to avoid clipping curbs or sending small dogs to the great beyond.

They fit so well together. The Bentley knew its purpose and shone with the approval of its driver. The car knew it was loved in ways the houseplants did not. Crowley might never have had a kind word for them, but the Bentley had never received anything but Crowley’s affection and pride. He loved that car, and it, in return, adored him.

It would have faced any obstacle with him at the wheel. On the day of the apocalypse, it had seen the flames radiating over the M25. It had known its fate when Crowley pointed it at the impassable line and pushed for speed. But it hadn’t wavered. Whatever lay on the other side was vital to its driver. It would burn to preserve the world. And it had roared to its doom with every ounce of speed in its engine.

It didn’t really remember that day. Just that something terrible had happened, but it had endured. What it remembered was awakening on the curb in its usual parking space to Crowley’s hand lovingly caressing its hood.

And it knew it had done well.

~

The sword was having a bad 6,000 years.

It had been forged with one purpose. For one hand.

Angel swords were not made to be passed around to any who wanted them. They were made for their wielder. The essence of their wielder hummed within their makeup. That was the one hand meant to hold them. From the day of their forging on into eternity.
It had been made to protect. Even before there was an Eden, it knew there was something it must defend. There had been other swords which blazed brightly in those days, but there had only been one Flaming Sword. One which could cleave the gates of Heaven and Hell. From the first day it had entered into the hand of the warrior who would carry it through the great rebellion and through their tenure on the watchtowers of the Silver City, it knew there was another calling for them. It knew there was somewhere else they would go, another purpose they would serve.

And when they stood at the Eastern Gate, it felt the rightness of where they were. They belonged between the unknown and the life which must be preserved.

It didn’t begrudge Aziraphale for giving it away. Its wielder had thought it the right choice, so the sword had accepted the action. And it had served its humans well - glowing bright in the night, preserving life, and warning away the dangers of the world.

But when it felt Cain’s grip on the hilt, it found its purpose could be twisted for darker aims.

This was not protection. The new wielder had protection already which did not require the sword. This was not killing done to preserve. This was just killing. And it was ugly business.

Then its wielder returned for it and the sword sang at their unity.

But then came the unmaking.

It didn’t fault Aziraphale. It simply couldn’t. It felt how genuinely Aziraphale believed his choice to be the only one, and it accepted this was the fate its wielder felt necessary.

So it didn’t protest when Heaven demanded its return and Aziraphale gave it over like the good little soldier he was.

Aziraphale didn’t know what happened after. How the sword was unmade.

One, two, three. Pieces scattered across the realms.

To protect meant life and death – the sword was separated from that duality.

The medallion which had been the hilt drifted through the world, changing hands in steady search of its wielder or its missing self. It protected those who held it. It was Heaven-Forged, and offered a glimpse at life beyond.

The blade was given new purpose and a new wielder. In Azrael’s hands, it provided the final stroke to sever a soul from living. It did not thirst for blood itself, but the hunger radiated around it. With nothing to temper it, the blade was for killing alone, and woe to any mortal who came within its sphere of influence.

And the key… the key which hung around the neck of the first-born. The other two could not come together without it, and the key’s bearer never realized its purpose.

Space separated them – the key within the Silver City, the medallion on Earth, the blade in the space between.

And thousands of years passed away.

The blade saw its true wielder again in a military compound in Lower Tadfield when the angel stood against the Riders and faced down Death. Azrael felt the twitch of recognition from the sword sheathed beneath their robes. But they saw no reason to draw attention to it and vanished,
the blade still contained.

But perhaps Azrael never quite trusted the blade again after feeling it recognize that it had not been made for her. Maybe that was why she left it behind that day. Maybe that was why she didn’t speak up when Uriel stole it.

In Los Angeles, the blade passed among humans, leaving a trail of corpses in its wake. Then into the breast of an angel, and Uriel was no more. And then... and then the medallion was restored. The blade's destructive force tempered by the need to preserve life.

Then came the day on the beach. All three pieces united at last. The sword blazed in its glory. Made whole once again.

And on the streets of London, an angel sitting in a demon's car as they drove home from a late-night meal, lurched forward and grabbed his head in both hands.

“I feel it!” He gasped. “I know. I’ll... I’ll...” He clawed at the door handle, the Bentley resolutely keeping its door closed against a suicidal angel until it could find a place to pull over.

By the time the car was at the curb, and driver and passenger were standing in the rain, the feeling had passed. A dizzy angel was escorted back into the car and driven home at a more sedate speed, the demon with his arms around him all the way.

Half a world away, the sword was not only separated into two again, but separated by impossible space. The sword tumbled through the nothingness between worlds which might one day be a universe of its own. The key returned to the first-born’s neck.

And the sword despairied ever finding its wielder again.

Crowley awoke shivering. He patted blindly at the bed, finding no angel to conveniently burrow against. He blinked a few times until his night vision kicked in. He looked around the room.

Aziraphale sat at the edge of the bed, hunched and sentinel-still.

“Angel?” Crowley crawled over to him. “What’s wrong?”

There was a pause. “I want my sword back.”

There was a note of savagery in Aziraphale’s voice Crowley had rarely heard before.

“It isn’t fair,” the angel went on. “I was good. I brought it back. I didn’t stop them from taking it… and they butchered it, and turned it into something it wasn’t meant to be, and threw it away. It’s my sword. It was forged for me. From me. They took my essence, they made that blade, and then they ripped it from me. I want it back.”

Crowley leaned against him. He thought about a car which had carried him through the worst of days without wavering. Of shelves full of books which whispered to one another when Aziraphale entered the shop. Of plants which coiled anxiously against his fingers to display how well they’d grown. And he knew how he’d feel to have those taken away.

“Okay,” he said quietly. “Let’s get it back.”
I take way too much delight in writing the adventures of Crowley's plants.

Thanks for the support through another week. This one was a lot of setup and world-building. Hopefully the payoff will be worth it! Next week, we head back Down to see how things are going for the reluctant King of Hell.
Mark of the Beast

There were delegates in Hell from realms beyond. Demons of the highest order gathered for feasting and socializing. The kings of the four regions of Hell were there with their retinue. The three princes of Hell made themselves known in their rank and favor.

Hell provided the best entertainment. It was just a matter of dragging the right performers out of their Loops. Some of the greatest lived quietly in Hell with protection from torture in return for their talents. The philosophers who claimed all were equal in death would have been disappointed to find fame did carry weight in the afterlife.

There were banquets, hunts, and social gatherings. Lucifer complained bitterly about the alcohol, despite there being nothing to be done. It would have made the endless drudgery of meetings go down easier.

His head spun relentlessly. Socializing on this level hurt. He couldn’t enjoy himself for a second. He had to watch the delegates constantly. And his advisors. He’d seen Mammon start to whisper to one outsider, then think better of it when he saw his King’s eyes on him. How long, Lucifer wondered, would he have to keep order in Hell by sheer force of will? Had it always been this taxing? Or had too many years of peace among the humans dulled his skills?

The festivities done at last, the delegates resting in the palace until the next round, Lucifer made his way wearily toward his chambers. He needed a rest. Maybe even sleep. It had been that kind of day.

He heard the commotion as he neared his rooms and let out a hiss of frustration. The last thing he needed was the palace staff causing trouble.

Rounding the corner, he found several of his guards squared off against a small and familiar serpent. The serpent was coiled, his head arched in threat, though his mouth was firmly closed. The guards were far too enthusiastically threatening him with all manner of swift and horrific dismemberment if he didn’t surrender quietly so they could dismember him at their leisure.


The guards snapped to attention. The serpent crouched low.

Lucifer had a few choice words for the guards before sending them back to their posts. Shooing the viper along ahead of him, he entered his rooms.

“I believe I said not to make trouble,” he scolded.

The serpent arched back his head as if to strike, then opened his mouth, hacked twice, and a small bottle popped from his throat.

Crowley coughed a few times as he resumed his preferred shape. “That seemed like a better idea up top,” he panted hoarsely.

Lucifer picked up the bottle. It was an airplane-size dose of scotch. “Cheap brand,” he observed.

The demon shrugged. “I figured I’d see if it worked before I tried anything good. And it’s better than what you’ve got here.”
He had a point. Lucifer chose a glass and poured the bottle. He took a tentative sip, half assuming it would taste like snake venom. No, it tasted like cheap scotch. Which was the best thing he’d had in far too long.

He settled into a chair, the glass dangling wearily from his hand.

Crowley stayed seated on the floor, watching him with a cautious eye as he extracted the latest collection of letters from beneath his jacket.

It was an odd sort of relationship they’d developed. Lucifer still couldn’t decide whether to be annoyed or amused with the demon, nor did Crowley seem to have any idea how to behave now that his initial terror had passed. He must have known proper etiquette at one point, but too long on Earth seemed to have ruined him for Hell.

There were demons who threw themselves at their King’s feet, worshiping him as god and master of the realm. There were demons who bent their heads reluctantly, acknowledging his superiority over them grudgingly with every intention of seeing him dispatched should he ever falter. There were demons who praised him with calculating and obsequious airs. There were those who’d lay down their lives at a word from him, and those who fell to terror at the mention of his name. In short, whether by devotion or force, all the denizens of Hell knew how to show obedience toward their Lord.

And then there was Crowley.

There was no calculation or cheek in his failure to follow decorum. Oh, he’d cower when Lucifer advanced on him, but he didn’t seem to know proper address, or when he was expected to bow, or to ask for permission to leave a room. Perhaps too much exposure to humanity had altered him, or perhaps it was being on his own so much. Or maybe his self-preservation instinct only kicked in when cornered.

Once it would have aggravated Lucifer. But years of being treated with equality by humanity, and finding more loathing than pleasure in the groveling masses lately, made the serpent’s ineptitude more entertaining than anything else.

“What happened out there?” He asked with a nod toward the corridor.

Crowley shrugged. “Oh, you know, I usually get up here without anyone spotting me. Got unlucky this time.”

Lucifer frowned. “Have you been sneaking around the castle this whole time?”

“Sort of a necessity. I’m not much of a fighter.” Crowley tapped the letters absently against the ground. “Dr. Martin said she didn’t have time for a long letter… Charlie’s sick. She said she’d write more next time.”

It galled him, that was the truth. Someone else near his… his family. The people he’d grown to care so deeply about and was now barred from seeing. That someone else, someone he didn’t entirely trust, was interacting with them, learning personal details about them… The urge to drag the little demon off where he’d choke on sulfur fumes forever was palatable.

But… it wasn’t fair. He understood that clearly enough. The instincts of an eternity in Hell had been tempered against his humans’ cries for tolerance and trust. The detective would not thank him for harming someone just to satisfy his ego.

And his humans had unanimously decided they liked the demon. He shouldn't have been surprised
that those who'd accepted the far more alarming Mazikeen would adopt Crowley into their circle of acquaintances. Their kinder assessments and worries for the demon's nerves had first rankled, then gradually soothed Lucifer. Crowley was behaving himself, and his presence in their vicinity meant he could relate details missing from the letters. It was one more sliver of connection between Lucifer and the life he'd lost.

He took another sip of mediocre scotch. It occurred to him abruptly he’d not asked for it. Crowley had brought it of his own volition? Why? An offering to a temperamental king? Appeasement for a wrong he’d done?

...An act of sympathy?

Whatever the reason, there was a correct response.

He toasted the air with a slight inclination of the glass. “Thank you for the drink.” He finished off the contents and rose.

Crowley babbled nervously. “Well…uh… the stuff down here’s rubbish… and you know what the good stuff tastes like. Maybe I can try carrying something better next time…” He trailed off and scrambled to his feet, holding out the letters.

Lucifer took them, sorting absently through the envelopes.

Crowley started to back away.

Lucifer caught him by the wrist and pulled him closer. “Just a moment.”

Crowley yelped and flinched.

“Settle down,” Lucifer purred. He gripped the demon by the skull and dug his nail into the skin on Crowley's neck. “This will only hurt for a moment.”

He wrote the symbol slowly, leaving a burning trail behind which formed immediately into scar tissue.

Crowley whined with far too much distress for any self-respecting demon.

Lucifer released him and surveyed his handiwork with an air of satisfaction. “There. The guards will let you alone now.”

Crowley touched his neck, tracing his finger across the mark for Lucifer’s private staff. The demon looked rather queasy. “Thank you… um… Lord,” he mumbled.

“Yes, yes,” Lucifer waved his hand dismissively. “Off you go. Rest up.”

The demon managed a halfway acceptable bow and stumbled from the room.

Lucifer sat down to read.
The field office in Hell was empty. Its contents had been shunted to the Hall of Records. Its employees were reassigned. Few bothered to think about the agents and the reports they’d sent any longer.

Among those who’d run the office, Crowley’s name had always wavered somewhere between famous and infamous.

Why he hadn’t skyrocketed to the pinnacle of popularity was a mystery. The demon who’d given humans the forbidden fruit? He ought to have had his choice of prime postings.

But when the dust had settled, Crowley had been shunted to the field office with strong hints that he should stay out of Hell if he knew what was good for him.

When he put in an effort, Crowley was efficient at low-grade, lingering misery. The field office commended him for his larger achievements. Those kept them from recalling him during the centuries he seemed inclined to do virtually nothing unless sent specific instructions.

Sometimes, events involving him seemed to both build and tarnish his reputation depending on who told the tale.

There had been the attempt at the apocalypse back in the 11th century. When four princes of Hell had declared themselves the four horsemen and ridden with a swarm of demons to bring about the coming darkness. Of course, since not a one of them had spent much time on Earth, they’d grabbed a reluctant field agent to act as local guide.

Their ride had only just gotten started when the Hosts of Heaven descended. The battle lasted days with losses to both sides. When it was over, not a demon of the horde survived. The lucky few who’d been discorporated told tales of madness and carnage.

Crowley walked away without a scratch.

Some said it was remarkable. How many Heavenly Hosts had he vanquished to survive? Some wondered where the little worm had slithered off to and avoided his duty.

And that mostly defined Crowley’s career. His record was filled with miraculous escapes from avenging angels, and from demons he’d pissed off. He worked just hard enough not to get sacked, and his name was never quite top of the list when agents were recalled.

If anyone had studied the records, they might have said Crowley was the luckiest bastard to have ever earned Hell’s disfavor. Though quite why he was out of favor was never clear to anyone.

If someone had really wanted to make sense of the records, and had had the contacts to requisition a second set of records from a second office, and had laid two sets of field agent reports out side-by-side, they might have noticed some odd patterns.

Why did Crowley’s greatest escapes from celestial harm often coincide with the whereabouts of a certain angel? Why did the locations of Aziraphale’s commendations frequently occur in the whereabouts of a certain demon, and why was there often a blank in said demon’s report on the
days the angel was performing particularly potent miracles? Why did mentions of their thwarting or escaping their counterparts so often include the name of the other?

If someone had had the wherewithal to look, there would have been questions, but both offices felt a certain apathy toward their agents. The demon never performed poorly enough to be eliminated, the angel never quite well enough to be promoted. They’d just kept on.

Maybe someone had suspected, but really, the work got done. And frankly, it was easier to have a couple agents who never discorporated each other.

Less paperwork for everyone.

Of the many differences between Heaven and Hell, the accounting offices were not one of them. They even shared the same interior decorators.

And accountants just don’t care.

~

The room in the palace Crowley had been given contained a bed... and nothing else. He really didn’t need anything more. He spent his time in Hell sleeping or watching out the window. Hell wasn’t a particularly safe place for anyone. For Crowley, who had no alliances, no status, few defenses, and a duke bent on his murder, stepping foot outside the castle would be akin to a male praying mantis attending a ‘ladies’ night’ event.

Crowley sat against the wall, his fingers methodically tracing the rune on his neck. The pain had diminished to a dull and distant burn. He wasn’t sure if that would ever entirely go away. Hell had a way of making these things linger. A reminder of how easily one could be snuffed out of existence.

There had been a hope in him until this moment that this was temporary. That he just needed to play along until something changed, and then he could go back to life in Soho. Maybe it wasn’t realistic, but Crowley had always been one to hold onto the most desperate of hopes. It had gotten him through some bad times. The 14th century came to mind. And the apocalypse. And that time Aziraphale had redone the flat in tartan wallpaper.

Except now the King of Hell had staked a claim on him. Crowley could say that he was semi-retired, that he’d sided with humanity in the war. But free will wasn’t a gift angels or demons had been entirely granted.

It made it worse that the mark was well-meant. Proof he’d been doing his job well enough to be granted protection. Protection he sorely needed.

But the implication of being stuck in this life for eternity…

He rose and went to the window.

The city of Pandæmonium spread out below him. It looked a little better than when he’d first arrived. Repairs were being made. But the tension was still in the air. Hell reached out for its King and the King repulsed the embrace.

The trouble, Crowley thought wryly, was he was starting to sympathize with Lucifer. The devil wanted the same thing he did – to return to Earth. And the humans there… they spoke so well of him. Calling him kind and good. Even knowing what he was.
Crowley had made a point to stay away from the King since the very beginning. He’d only drawn attention once long ago, and he was still paying for that mistake. If Lucifer had ever shown a softer side in Hell, Crowley hadn’t been in a position to discover it.

But Earth seemed to have had the same effect on the devil as on the demon. Crowley had come to like humanity. Clearly, Lucifer felt the same. And, in turn, humanity liked him.

And they’d had an effect. Crowley had seen flashes of a kinder devil beneath the fierce exterior. He loved those humans with an affection Crowley wouldn’t have believed possible. He’d seen Lucifer laugh at Ella’s babbling questions, mutter and nod at Linda’s advice as if he intended to follow it, look with eyes brimming with longing and love at Chloe’s messages. And there was the same hungry longing in his eyes when he asked Crowley how Chloe looked - Did she seem happy? Was she taking unnecessary risks? He knew that expression. He knew that feeling.

So, despite his own terror anytime his king so much as glanced in his direction, Crowley could recognize what Lucifer had given up, and how much it hurt him. It gave him kinder feelings toward the Lord of Hell. Enough to want to see him happier. If only to protect his own skin.

He rubbed his neck again and studied the city with new eyes. With this it might actually be safe for him to leave the castle. He’d still have to keep a low profile. Branded or not, Hastur would kill him on sight and deal with Lucifer’s irritation after. He wasn’t likely to receive another miraculous canine intervention.

But that was a favor he really wanted to repay...

~

It took a few tries, but crawling through the underbelly of Hell singing the ‘Inspector Rex’ theme eventually got him the attention he wanted.

“Your accent’s terrible,” Marchosias grumbled as he stuck his head out of his hiding place.

The serpent crawled into a narrow cavern formed of rock, trash and skulls. He grinned up at the matted-furred demon. “So the mighty marquis of Hell is reduced to this. No television to be found in Hades?”

Marchosias growled bitterly. “My legions were taken. My palace burnt. My wealth stolen. And if our Lord realizes where I’ve been…” He broke off, sniffing in Crowley’s direction with sudden intensity. With a swift lunge, he pinned the serpent to the ground and rolled him on his side, exposing the brand. The wolf-demon snarled and recoiled.

“Relax. He’s got bigger things to worry about than you.” Crowley rolled back onto his belly and wound himself into a knot.

“What happened to you?”

“I got noticed. In all the wrong ways.” Crowley’s tongue flicked in and out rapidly. “But listen, you saved my neck when we first got here. And I have an idea. It may not work, but it could get you a little leeway with the boss if it does. Maybe some of the others, because we’ll have to make it a group effort.”

“What’s on your mind?” The wolf sat up and folded his serpentine tail over his paws – an indication he wasn’t planning to pounce again.

Crowley arched his head a little closer. “Do you know anything about computers?”
Chapter End Notes

Everyone should enjoy the absolute weirdness that is Kommissar Rex. It's this crazy blend of horrifically gruesome murders, and funny dog antics.
“Enter,” Lucifer called as he heard Crowley at the door. He didn’t bother turning around until an unexpected rattle and thump came to his ears. He whirled.

The demon grinned rather nervously back at him. “Hey, Boss… uh… got something for you.”

Lucifer rose slowly and paced toward the machine Crowley hefted onto an end table.

It was a computer… if one was generous with the description. There was nothing Earth-made about it. Cobbled together from the depths of Hell, the computer hummed softly, its cadence rising to a slightly panicked shrill as Lucifer approached. Hell had no shortage of precious metals. In that, at least, someone had found perfect materials for building. The rest seemed crafted from dreams and fragments. An unbitten Apple logo glowed hellfire-red above the screen.

“It’s a computer,” Crowley explained awkwardly, looking tense and anxious to be anywhere near Lucifer, who was certainly not wearing the kindest expression. “The field agents… I mean… some of us who had an idea how… we put it together.”

“Whatever for?”

“Well… this.” Crowley reached into his jacket and extracted the usual mail. From his pocket he drew another object. He held it out to Lucifer.

Lucifer took the letters, taking his time to study what Crowley held before accepting the USB flash drive. He looked between in and the computer.

“Well… enjoy.” Crowley started to flee the room.

“Just a moment.”

The demon froze and turned slowly back.

Lucifer held out the drive. “Turn it on.”

Crowley’s eyes flickered between the machine and the devil. “Don’t you know how to work a… oh.” He finally registered Lucifer’s openly suspicious expression. “Right.” He took back the drive and started up the computer.

Lucifer planted himself carefully behind the demon, watching the computer boot up with wary curiosity.

Crowley plugged in the drive and a single video file popped up on the monitor. “Okay… hopefully this works…” He glanced nervously back at Lucifer, then opened the video.

“Hi Lucifer!” Trixie’s voice cried as her face appeared on the screen.

Lucifer shoved the demon out of the way and nearly plastered himself against the monitor.

“Tell him what you’ve been up to, Monkey,” came a voice from off screen.
The girl glanced behind her, then back at the screen. “We’re learning about cartooning in art class. Did you get the pictures I made? I’m going to draw a comic book next. And Maze is teaching me to throw knives! And I got to babysit Charlie last night. Maze was there too. I got to warm up his bottle and feed him.” Her eyes wandered around the room, then focused back toward him. “Are you coming home soon? My birthday’s next month. You’ll be here, right?”

“Trixie. Let me have a turn, okay? We can’t make the file too big.”

One face was reluctantly replaced with another.

“Lucifer? Hi…” Chloe looked out at him, her eyes searching for something to focus on as if she wasn't certain there was anything there.

The devil trembled. He drank in every detail, forcing himself not to reach for the picture in desperation to touch her once again.

Chloe blinked hard. “I hope you get this. It’s… it’s been hard. Not seeing you. I know…” She wiped her eyes. “I know you had to go back. I understand.” She nodded slowly as if trying to convince herself. “But not knowing if I’ll ever see you again… I miss you so much. But, it’s okay. You’re doing what you have to do. Reading about everything you’re going through… I wish I could be there for you. I know it’s impossible. I know you have to stay. But… thank you for staying in touch. Still having you in my life means so much. Okay?” She glanced away, presumably checking Trixie’s location. She leaned a little closer to the camera. “I love you.” She sat back, sniffing and blinking. For a second, she sat there, looking as if there were a thousand more things she wanted to say. Then she hastily turned off the camera.

The screen went dark.

Lucifer leaned against the monitor and allowed himself to cry.

~

“You rang? I mean… you wanted to see me?”

Crowley had fled the room when Lucifer started losing it. Definitely not the time to be anywhere near the devil. Sadly, it hadn’t been long before Lucifer’s servants had tracked him down and dragged him back. He’d practically been shoved through the door, which he now stood flattened against. Was he supposed to cower on the floor? Should he apologize? He’d never been any good at Hell’s social expectations, even before he’d been shunted off to Earth.

Lucifer reclined in a chair, the flash drive dangling absently in his grip. His eyes were dark and sunken, but his face was more composed than before. He waved a hand at the couch across from him. “Have a seat.”

Forcing himself not to melt with alarm, Crowley sat gingerly on the edge of the cushion.

Lucifer said nothing. He didn’t even look toward the demon.

Crowley slid slowly back, drawing his knees beneath his chin. He felt safer coiled. Or at least smaller and perhaps less noticeable.

“This was your idea?” Lucifer asked.

“The computer? Yeah… uh…” Crowley faltered. He still couldn’t tell if the King was angry. “…Thought video might be better than letters, you know?”
The silence was brutally painful.

“I can get rid of it,” he stammered.

Lucifer turned his head slowly, his eyes dark and dangerous. “Why would you do that?”

“I mean… if you don’t like it.”

“Oh, but I do. I liked it very much. That video may have been the most perfect torture I’ve encountered in centuries.”

Crowley moaned and shrunk into himself.

Lucifer rose in a fluid motion and drifted around behind him. “I spend every second of my miserable existence longing for those humans.” He leaned over the back of the couch and murmured close to Crowley’s ear. “And you’ve just given me further desperation for the thing I can never touch again.”

Crowley found he could sink lower if he really put his mind to it. And right now his mind was very much focused on melting his shape into a puddle and slipping out of the room.

A heavy hand came down on his shoulder. Crowley froze and squeezed his eyes shut.

“Thank you.” The hand patted him lightly.

The demon jumped. “R-really?”

“Of course.” Lucifer went to the bar and poured two glasses. “What would be left of me if I didn’t spend all my days in self-torture for what’s denied to me?” He returned and held out a glass to Crowley.

The demon took it and tipped back the contents automatically. He was dimly certain it tasted like mouthwash, but his nerves were too strung out to notice. “…Uh… You’re welcome?”

Lucifer chuckled and returned to his chair. “My question is, what’s your goal?”

“W-what?”

“Well, I hardly asked for that. You came up with this bright idea all on your own. Why? What do you hope to gain?”

“Nothing,” Crowley started to stammer, then broke off. He uncoiled himself and faced the devil with what courage he could muster. “Look… I get it. Earth is… way nicer than here. And humans… I know I’m supposed to be making them miserable. But they… maybe it’s because stuff matters more there. Or because they don’t have so long to live. But they’re worth caring about. And Chl… Detective Decker.” His courage nearly broke at the glare Lucifer gave him, but he plunged on. “She’s… unflappable? Seeing the worst of people with her job, and still caring about everything. And she misses you… It’s crazy.” He flinched again and broke off.

“Keep going,” Lucifer prodded.

Crowley’s tongue flicked in and out a few times. He’d started stumbling nervous hisses over his words and struggled to get his speech back under control. “Right… Sssorry. I just meant… She knows, and she’s still capable of love. She’d be down here in a second if she could figure out how. That’s…” He sighed. “That’s rare. You’re lucky. And you had to give that up.” His hands
contracted into fists, then loosened again. “I just... know how it feels to be separated. Maybe a video’s not the same... but it’s something...”

There was a long stretch of silence.

“You really love that angel, don’t you?”

Crowley nodded jerkily.

Lucifer methodically swirled his glass. “She’s more important to me than I can express. I’d do anything for her. Give her anything she desires.”

“Pretty sure all she wants is you,” the demon replied quietly.

Silence descended once more.

Crowley took another sip and tried not to gag at the taste.

“I wouldn’t harm your angel,” Lucifer murmured. “Whatever you’ve found is safe from me.”

“Thanks. That’s... appreciated.” Crowley studied the floor. “...So... uh... how did you get together with the detective?”

Lucifer leaned back in the chair and began to unload four years of heartache and joy.

Chapter End Notes

Shout-out to Sianna_the_fanartist for saying any computer Crowley built would have to be an Apple. I loved that so much I had to include that detail.

A lot of people hoped they’d get the wifi to Hell working, but they're not technologically that far along yet. I don't think photos/videos would work if taken in Hell. Too much proof the afterlife exists! We'll just say all Crowley's communication with Hell via radio was done at a frequency humans can't hear. Otherwise, he'd be out of a job! (Not that he'd have a problem with that...
“My Lord? May we enter?” Beelzebub’s voice broke through Lucifer’s story with a grating buzz. Crowley jumped up in a surge of alarm. In one quick burst, he’d transformed and fled beneath the furniture.

Lucifer watched the serpent’s actions with an amused smirk. “Enter,” he called.

Beelzebub flowed into the room with a persistent hum. Mammon and Belial stalked behind. The three princes bowed and halted in a practiced row, Beelzebub in the center.

“Well now,” Lucifer purred. “All three of you? To what do I owe this pleasure?”

“My Lord,” Beelzebub began, the drone of flies increasing as she spoke. “We have concerns for your ears alone.”

“I’m listening,” Lucifer replied, suppressing a smirk.

“The workers on the walls have halted their building. They say they have no materials.”

“Really.” Lucifer put all the boredom he could into the single word.

“The mines no longer deliver the stone. There is warring among the laborers there.”

“Interesting. But what brings all of you here to disturb me?”

Mammon spoke up. “We need your leadership, oh great King of Hell. Speak to the workers. Force them to their tasks. Make them give up what they hoard.”

“Hoard?” Lucifer’s eyebrows rose. “Have they found something interesting?”

The demon prince flinched and looked elsewhere, but his eyes glittered dangerously with gilded light.

“Ohhh,” the devil purred. “They found something you want, haven’t they?” He laughed. “Come now, Mammon. Isn’t all the treasure in your keep enough? Must you have more?”

“It should not belong to the lowly,” the prince protested. “What they find must be brought here. For us to see, and… distribute.” He nearly choked on the word.

Lucifer shook his head. “This is no more urgent than the last dozen things you’ve demanded I drop everything to fix. Have a few of the leaders of the miners brought before the throne tomorrow. We’ll see what they say for themselves.”

Belial flashed open her wings. A scent of spilled beer, decaying refuse, and damp sidewalks filled the room. “The king! The king!” She croaked. “We call upon our king!”

Lucifer rolled his eyes. Belial had gotten worse while he was gone, clearly. “Yes, yes. You have.” He made a dismissive gesture.

“There is more, Sire,” Mammon spoke quickly. “Your prisoners in the dungeon…”

“Which prisoners?”
“The two who violated your laws with their murder,” Beelzebub droned. “They ought to have been punished or executed by now. Justice must be swift or discord will fester.”

“I said I wished to know what led them to their actions before I reached a verdict,” Lucifer rumbled.

“What does it matter?” Beelzebub protested.

Mammon spoke nearly on top of her. “Who could learn the nature of their minds? Those they wronged are unmade. The story is buried. Why dredge up the unimportant?”

“I say it’s important.” Lucifer didn’t stand, but he put down his glass, straightened in his chair, and gave the princes an intense stare.

Mammon and Beelzebub drew back and closer together.

Belial pulled her eyeball out of her skull and stared herself in the face, mumbling all the while.

“They remain until I say otherwise,” Lucifer said quietly. “Now, is that everything, or do you intend to plague me all night? If you wish…” His smile turned a touch hungry. “…We can suspend the foreplay and move this conversation elsewhere.” He nodded his head toward the bedroom. “What do you desire?”

With a great deal of bowing and blustering, the princes fled.

“You can come out now,” Lucifer said once they were gone.

The serpent poked his head out from beneath the couch. A moment later, Crowley resumed his seat. He sniffed and wrinkled his nose. “Belial likes to let everyone know where she’s been.”

Lucifer sighed. “It comes from never having been worshiped, I expect.” He rose and poured another drink. “So, which one of them have you managed to irritate? Or is it all of them?”

“Of the princes? Just Beelzebub, I think.”

Lucifer’s eyebrows rose. “And in the rest of Hell?”

“Probably Dagon. And Hastur. Mostly Hastur.”

“Oh? What did you do to rile him? Or was it just breathing in his presence?”

“I killed Ligur.”

Lucifer contemplated his glass. “Why ever did you feel that was a wise choice?” He took a sip. Windex.

“He was after me.” Crowley shrugged with forced indifference. “It seemed like a good idea at the time.”

“I can see your deeds fill you with overwhelming remorse,” Lucifer hummed absently.

There were murders among the demons which required his response, and murders which did not. This was the sort he considered their own affair, provided Hastur didn’t come to him screaming something to the contrary. And Crowley could clearly look after himself if he’d survived any length of time with a duke of Hell out for his blood.
He sorted through the collection of letters strewn across the bar, halting at the artwork Trixie had sent. Perhaps he should hang it. “And Beelzebub?” He prompted without looking up. “Did you swat her flies?”

“She wasn’t too happy with me.” Crowley’s tone turned hesitant. “With what happened with the apocalypse.”

Lucifer held up the drawing, studying the walls. It wouldn’t match any of the décor. Pity. The child was no Rembrandt. “Oh? Were you mixed up with that?” He asked absently.

He did have a Rembrandt in a closet somewhere around here, didn’t he? Maybe he could replace a window. It wasn’t as if they were overlooking any particularly interesting view.

There was a pause before Crowley answered with a puzzled lilt. “Yes?”

He’d have to find a location for the computer too. It looked so out of place just sitting on an end table. “Fortunately that business came to nothing, hmm?”

“You’re not mad about that?”

“Why would I be? Armageddon’s nothing but work. Who wants to deal with an entire planet being slaughtered at once? And the family reunion… I sometimes think I started that rebellion just to get away from that bastard, Michael. No, the Earth can keep on spinning indefinitely for all I care.”

He set the drawing back on the bar. He’d have to remember to have someone frame it later.

There was a pause, then Crowley broke the silence. “Hey… I couldn’t help overhearing… being under the furniture and all… but is there some kind of murder mystery going on?”

“Yes,” Lucifer sighed. “A few idiots got in their head to kill one of the judges of the damned.”

Crowley winced in recognition of a high crime.

“And then they inevitably had to carve their way through quite an assortment of guards to escape. Of course they were run down. Trouble is, no one seems to know why they engaged in that fit of madness.” He frowned. “Rather a poor mystery if you already know who the killer is, isn’t it? Where’s the surprise ending? The last minute gunfight?” He shook his head.

“…So you need someone to backtrack and find out why they did it?”

Lucifer glanced at the demon. “A private investigator, yes. Pity no one in Hell understands the concept.”

“Actually, Boss… I know a guy…”
“I’m not sure I understand. I thought I was meeting with your CEO.”

“You know how bosses can be. Don’t worry. I’ll take very accurate notes.” Crowley tried not to show too many teeth as he smiled. He had a feeling the business consultant wasn’t quite buying his ‘Wall Street’ look. He’d tried hard with the three-piece suit, but the sunglasses seemed to throw off the professional look.

“Well, if that’s what your firm wants.” The man waved a hand toward a chair. “Shall we get started?” He retreated behind his desk, some instinct indicating he should put some distance between himself and his new ‘client’.

Crowley wondered if Dr. Martin was treating him for nerves. He hoped he wouldn’t break the man before the meeting was over.

“You were rather vague on the phone. Can you explain what your employer wanted to know?”

“Well.” Crowley opened his laptop. “To put it simply, it’s a very old company. A family business. You understand. It’s been running on the same model since, well, nearly the beginning of time.”

The business advisor chuckled.

“But the boss is looking to change management models. Organize things so it isn’t just one person being forced to oversee everything. Do you understand?”

“Of course! It’s so common with small companies as they start to grow. The world is too complicated for the old models. But are you sure your boss wouldn’t like to meet with me directly?”

“He’s not in the country right now. But I’ll make sure all your information is passed directly to him.” He positioned his fingers over the keyboard.

The consultant talked agreeably, growing more animated as the hour progressed. “Do you need me to slow down?” He asked a few times early on.

“No, no. I’ve got every word,” Crowley assured him, one eye on the laptop screen.

The computer was brand new. He’d spent the two hours before the meeting explaining very carefully what he expected it to do, and what would happen if it failed. The laptop was obligingly copying down every word spoken as fast as its trembling processor could run.

“Thank you for your time,” Crowley purred as the meeting wore down. “Just out of curiosity, in your opinion, who were the absolute tops at corporate management?”

The consultant laughed. “Oh, I can think of a few. But unfortunately you wouldn’t be able to talk to them. The best are probably all dead.”

Crowley smiled toothily. “Those are exactly the names I want.”
“Dr. Martin suggested it,” Crowley explained as Lucifer leafed through some fifty pages of transcript. “She said all your letters sounded like you had a management problem. So, she sent me to that guy.”

“And who are these people listed at the end?”

“Business executives. The best ever, according to this guy. And if they were the best at business, I’m guessing they live in your neighborhood.”

~

“And that’s the last name on the list. Excellent,” Lucifer turned with eyes dancing with merriment and villainy upon the huddled collection of souls his guards held bunched together. He’d put on his devil face for just this occasion and the effect was delightful. “Now ladies and gentlemen, I’ve been informed you had some of the finest business minds on Earth. And now you’re going to tell me everything I wish to know. If not, you may return immediately to your tortures. As you can see…” He nodded to the demon who’d ascended to the head torturer role since Maze’s departure. “…Someone is very anxious to have you back.”

The demon flicked a cat-o-nine whip which screamed with the voices of a thousand tortured souls as it wailed through the air.

An instant later, the humans were tripping over themselves to tell the devil whatever he wanted to know.

~

“I’m going to kill that snake,” Marchosias muttered under his breath as the ranks of armed guards escorted him to a private audience with the King of Hell. It was wishful thinking, of course. There was little doubt he was being led to his own execution.

But the Lord of Hell had other thoughts in mind.

“During your lengthy vacation, did you learn anything about human justice?” Lucifer wanted to know.

“I don’t know about practical… But I watched a lot of television.” The wolf-demon eyed the king and plunged onward, filling the silence with babbling. “I like the dog-cop ones – *Rin Tin Tin, Kommissar Rex*… There was one with a panther but it wasn’t all that good.”

“So, you understand gathering evidence, finding the reason someone committed a crime, interviewing suspects… concepts which seem woefully lacking here.”

“Oh, sure.” Marchosias wagged his tail hopefully. “They cover all that on *Law & Order.*” He licked his fangs. “That *Special Victims* one could give the torturers some new ideas. You should watch it. The stuff humans will stick up their…”

“The trouble is,” Lucifer continued. “We’re already aware who the murderers are. What I’d like discovered is why. Are you capable of seeking out that sort of information?”

Marchosias’ tail wagged with more enthusiasm. “Like on *Columbo*? Where you know who did it at the start? And then he finds out why? It shouldn’t be hard. He always found out in an hour or less.”

“Good.” The devil smiled. “I understand you’ve also been involved in human politics?”
"Some. I was an advisor to King Solomon. He summoned me to Earth originally. I've played a pet
dog to a lot emperors and kings and such. Royalty and politicians were great entertainment before
television. And I was an advisor to Tsar Nicholas - that didn't end great. I hung around Stalin for a
little bit, but that guy was nuts."

"It sounds you have experience enough to handle Hell’s elite." Lucifer leaned back in his chair.
"Now… among your Earth-affiliated friends, do you know of any with any business management
skills?"

~

"So you’re Decabra?” Lucifer asked the six-armed Lilim who knelt shaking before him.

“Yes, Lord,” the demon panted, displaying no understanding as to how her hiding place had been
found or why she’d been brought to a private audience with the King.

Lucifer observed her steadily. “So, you found yourself on Earth…?”

“About 1,600 years ago.”

“Enjoy your stay, did you?”

“Y…Yes, Lord.” The demon's alarm mounted.

“I’ve been told you spent your time running companies into the ground.”

“It… was a hobby, Lord.”

“So, you could say you’re an expert on what not to do in business?”

“That might be one way of putting it.”

“And could you use your talents in reverse? Find the flaws in a company structure and improve
them?”

Decabra's expression shifted to one of slightly desperate hope. “…I could try, Lord.”

“Excellent.” Lucifer motioned for her to rise. "You’re hired."

~

“Sire, you are undermining our authority!” Beelzebub brazenly pursued the King of Hell down the
castle hall.

“Why, Beelzebub, I thought you’d be pleased. Didn’t you say the work piled up while I was
elsewhere? It’s much more organized now.” Lucifer couldn’t keep the smirk from his voice.

“But all these committees… and delegated tasks… and chains of command.”

“Calm down. You’re still near the top of that chain.”

“But you’ve promoted… nobodies to our elevated ranks. Demons without status. Lesser demons!
Without titles!”

“Not all of them. One was a marquis. Now they’re my advisors.”
“But this is unprecedented!”

Lucifer halted and turned back with a dangerously smug grin. “It seems there’s a precedent now, doesn’t it? I know adjustment may be difficult.” His eyes narrowed. “But if you’re not capable of adapting…”

Beelzebub had the presence of mind to shut up and bow. “Whatever my King wishes,” she buzzed. “We will follow your lead.”

“Good.” Lucifer resumed walking. “A pity that’s a lesson you didn’t learn until after that Armageddon business. Don’t think I’ve forgotten how you bungled that matter.”

If Lucifer had known that last comment did little but remind Beelzebub how a certain serpent was definitely to blame for absolutely everything which had gone wrong with that venture, he might have tempered his words.

But as he didn’t, Beelzebub was left seething over what she’d do to that particular headache as soon as she found out where he was hiding.

~

“You can’t expect the mines to run that deep without undermining the foundation of the city above it! This may be Hell, but physics do occasionally apply!”

“If a few workers get crushed, so be it.”

“So be it!” Decabra practically climbed across the table as she glared at Mammon. “Our agreement to keep the mines running was better conditions. That archaic attitude toward the working class will set us back centuries all over again.”

At the head of the table, Lucifer leaned back and smirked. This was the best meeting he’d attended in centuries.

Amazing how fast things could improve with the assistance of a few key people. Being an autocratic tyrant certainly had its advantages. His council could whine all they liked, but when Lucifer suddenly paired demons from the business office with experienced human souls and put them to work restructuring everything, there wasn’t a lot they could. The old guard had fallen into something of a daze as they found themselves bulldozed by the new incumbents.

It hadn’t been long at all, but Lucifer was already in a calmer state of mind. Fewer inane issues being brought to his attention made for a much happier devil. He’d even found energy to spend less time moping and more doing his job.

He sat back now and watched Decabra take on the princes of Hell and exhaust them to the point of giving ground. Marchosias sat beside her, offering occasional bursts of helpful advice, much of which sounded suspiciously like things he’d picked up from court room dramas. Truthfully, he was a clever mutt, and not nearly as brain-addled as most of the Fallen. He might not have understood all the business strategy, but he could read political posturing, and his rank gave support to Decabra. Between the two of them, the miscreants who’d once crept out of Hell to frolic on Earth were now well on their way to running the place.

These Earth-knowledgeable demons, Lucifer purred with satisfaction. They knew how to get things done.

~
“Do you really need to keep sneaking around like this?” Marchosias asked as he pulled the window open a crack.

The serpent slithered inside. “Despite friends in high places, I still keep pissing people off.”

“Because you’re an idiot who never learned when to shut up and do as you’re told?”

“It’s why I’m not in politics.” Crowley sobered. “Have you found everyone?”

The wolf nodded. “Between Decabra and myself, we’ve got all the Topside demons safe.” He grinned, showing off all his fangs. “It’s good to have a title again.”

“I’m glad. I know it’s not Earth, but…”

Marchosias licked the top of the serpent's head. “I always knew I’d be back here eventually. Earth’s lovely, but I’ve always had some purpose to my life in Hell. I’ll adapt. You’re the only one of us with someone to go back to.”

“And for now at least I can keep going back.”

They spoke briefly before Crowley slithered back up the windowsill. “I should go.” He hesitated. “It probably won’t be safe for me to visit again.”

Marchosias waved his tail. “If you ever need to hide, come here. You’ve done me a huge favor.”

“I didn’t do anything. I just told the boss you liked TV.”

“I’m thinking you said more than that.” The demon’s eyes glittered merrily. “Give my salutations to Aziraphale. And tell him, upon considering, I didn’t think the sushi was that bad.”

Crowley laughed and vanished into the teaming madness of Hell.

~

“You seem very pleased with yourself, my dear,” the angel remarked.

The demon, mostly asleep with his head pillowed on Aziraphale’s chest, smiled a self-satisfied grin. “As the king goes, so goes the land.”

“And the land is well?”

“Improving.”

“That’s all we can hope for, isn’t it?”

“It’s the best we’ll probably get.”

Chapter End Notes

And that concludes Hell Week. Lucifer and Crowley still have a long way to go, but they’re closer to civil with each other at least. And, yes, that brand and how not okay that was will be coming up again. Lucifer's not off the hook!
The story will resume next week, but you get bonus content this weekend! I had material I decided not to use for Serpent Delivery, so I made it into a little stand-alone story. It's called *Jealously in Bloom*, and tells a little adventure of the houseplants.

Next week we'll check in with some of Lucifer's favorite humans, and begin the hunt for the Sword of Eden.
869 AD

The script was fairly simple. King Edmund of East Anglia was to be tortured, then beheaded for refusing to renounce the name of Christ. His head would be found by his loyal subjects, protected from harm by a wolf.

It was a two-angel mission. One to guide the discoverers to the corpse, the other to keep the wolf behaving properly.

Aziraphale privately thought they’d be better off preventing Edmund from being martyred. But at least the job sounded fast and simple. He’d even told Crowley, who was passing through town following Ivar’s army, that he could meet him for supper once he was done.

Of course trouble arose. The other angel got called away last minute and Aziraphale was left to handle the whole business himself.

Edmund was beheaded right on schedule. The wolf showed up on cue. But the party of body-hunters got entirely lost, so the afternoon dragged on past what Aziraphale felt was an appropriate time to keep a busy angel waiting.

As the Hollywood saying would go, ‘Never work with children or animals’, and Aziraphale was finding this to be aggravatedly true. If the wolf would just behave itself and lie quietly with the head, he could have gone off and fetched the searchers. But the wolf wouldn’t stop trying to eat the corpse or leave. Aziraphale was left wondering how much longer he was supposed to hang around the woods.

Crowley wasn’t feeling at all helpful. He’d come looking for Aziraphale, but he was enjoying the sight too much to do anything but sit on the sidelines and crack jokes.

Aziraphale resolutely ignored him and tried to talk higher sense into the wolf. It wasn’t going well. And the rest of nature wasn’t helping.

Every time he got the wolf nicely positioned with the head between her paws and her chin resting on the king’s forehead, the flies would descend and Aziraphale would have to wave them away frantically. He couldn’t have maggots on a martyr’s corpse.

Worse, several magpies had arrived and were going for the eyes. And while Aziraphale dealt with the birds, the wolf would start gnawing on Edmund’s ear. All the while, the head was getting steadily riper and Aziraphale’s temper was growing frayed.

“This reminds me of Daniel. Do you remember that?” Crowley asked gleefully.

That was back when they were still thwarting one another. Aziraphale had been assigned to make sure a cellar filled with lions did not eat a nice man who’d been obliged to spend the night there. Crowley had been tasked with seeing that the lions got their meal.

Being Crowley, he’d interpreted his orders as heckling Aziraphale into losing control of the lions.
They result had been the two of them arguing loudly, while Daniel, who was supposed to spend the night praying for God’s deliverance, grumbled at them to ‘get a room’. At which point they’d snapped at him, Aziraphale had lost one of the lions, and it had lunged at Crowley.

The demon had shrieked, made a pass with his hand, and transformed the lion into a cat.

This seemed much easier. They turned the rest of the lions into cats. The cats spent the night hunting mice. Daniel slept. Aziraphale and Crowley caught up on gossip.

How long Aziraphale would have been stuck in the woods, he wasn’t sure. But abruptly Crowley sat bolt upright, tasted the air with his tongue, and fled.

Aziraphale had learned after five millennia to take Crowley’s warnings of danger seriously. It would have been nice (albeit un-demonlike) if he’d ever included Aziraphale in his running away plans. But as usual, Aziraphale was stuck where he was, and the demon was long gone.

Aziraphale braced himself for whatever force of Heaven or Hell was about to descend on him.

Hell, it turned out. “What’s this?” a demon rumbled hungrily as he slouched into view. “A little angel all alone?” Behind him, half a dozen more demons stalked out of the underbrush.

Aziraphale rose, reaching for a sword he hadn’t had for thousands of years, but still sought at moments like this.

The leader of the party laughed, drawing closer with a hungry gleam. “Oh, don’t be like that. We’ll have some fun first. You might even enjoy it…”

“Onward, soldiers of the Lord!” Came a booming voice from somewhere nearby. “Hurry up yea ranks of Heavenly Hosts. Hasten! We must join our comrade. Where be he? Hark! Is that sulfur I doth smell? Loose your celestial weapons! We mow down the hordes of Hell this day!”

The demons bunched together, some of the smaller ones backing toward the edge of the clearing.

The voice of the celestial commander continued calling out encouragement and orders to the legions of Heaven approaching the clearing.

Several demons broke and ran. The leader tried to hold the others together, but they seemed to lose critical mass for what the demons felt was acceptable odds. The entire party vanished as fast as they’d come.

Crowley stepped out of concealment. “We’d better go before they catch on,” he said in his normal voice.

“I can’t leave until the humans find the body,” Aziraphale protested.

Crowley scowled. “Next time I’ll just leave you to Ligur then, alright?”

“I am grateful,” the angel insisted. “Thank you.”

The demon scoffed. “I have to keep you around. If you get killed, they send a new angel and it’ll
take me centuries to corrupt another one.”

Crowley mumbled he had to check something outside and left the tavern. It took Aziraphale a while to realize he’d been stuck with the bill.

1033 AD

Apocalyptic predictions were all the rage. It had been 1,000 years since nailing people to crosses had been in vogue, and many felt 1,000 years was a good enough wait. The apocalypse had to be at hand!

Aziraphale loved it. He loved the doomsday criers in the streets. He collected all the pamphlets. He sat down with dozens of prophets to get their take on the signs of the coming end.

It was the most fun he’d had in centuries, right up until his superiors demanded his attention.

“The demons are massing,” the Archangel Barachiel gushed. “It’s come at last! A thousand years sooner than originally planned, but if the Adversary wants to hasten his downfall, who are we to stop him?”

“Umm,” said Aziraphale in the most articulate way he could manage. He was thinking about how he’d only just acquired the first three volumes of Al-Zahrawi’s medical encyclopedia. And the interesting new foods that were pouring into the area thanks to the Turkic Migration. And the stray cat he’d started feeding.

“I know! The coming end must leave all the faithful breathless! We’ll need you among our ranks. Leading the way since everyone else is coming from Heaven, and we don’t know how to get to our appointed place of battle.” She clapped him on the shoulder. “Grid yourself in the armor of righteousness and sharpen your blade! Tomorrow we ride!”

Aziraphale sighed and went to see if his armor was rusted or missing from its last use, and if the blacksmith would loan him a sword.

~

Aziraphale was not thrilled to be shoved to the front of a column of Heavenly warriors. This was ridiculous. They could have just read a map. But no… they had to drag him on an all-day wilderness march. He was ready to smite any demon he came across for causing this interruption to his life.

They didn’t quite manage the element of surprise. The demon horde had sentries keeping watch. They shrieked a warning and the forest erupted with the forces of darkness.

As Aziraphale swept down on a crowd of threatening, roaring faces, one familiar demon caught his attention.

Crowley was standing on the edge of the crowd. Unarmed, alarmed, and alone. His eyes darted between Heaven, Hell, and the surrounding underbrush, clearly calculating his odds as swift as he could. His eyes locked on Aziraphale, and he charged the angel.

Aziraphale had barely landed when the serpent darted up his leg, under his tunic, and lodged itself against his breastplate. He faltered for a second, feeling a rush of fear that he was about to be bitten. But then a demon leveled a sword at him, and he was much too busy to remember he was harboring a stowaway.
The battle lasted two days. Aziraphale hated every second of it. Once upon a time he’d been a
soldier in the celestial army, but he didn’t think he’d enjoyed even it then. He just wanted to sit
down with a nice book and watch the sunset. Not stab things which probably didn’t want to be
fighting him anymore than he did them.

The Heavenly Host was thorough about it. They chased down every demon they could find. “No
survivors!” They roared. “Evil must be smited down to the last.”

Aziraphale felt this was unkind, but he kept silent. While the hunters were snuffling around,
insisting they could still smell a live demon, Aziraphale convinced one of the captains that he
wasn’t needed anymore and flew a hasty retreat.

“Are you alright, Crowley?” He asked when he thought he’d gained enough distance.

The serpent poked his head out of Aziraphale’s tunic collar. “Two days of being jostled against
divinely blessed armor is as miserable as you’d expect.”

“I’m sorry,” Aziraphale said politely. “Whatever were you doing there?”

“Idiots decided the apocalypse was happening and then couldn’t find the starting point for their
prophesied ride.” Crowley snorted his disgust. “I was perfectly happy in that nice little fishing
village, but, noooo. I have to help direct traffic to bloody Armageddon.” He looked up at
Aziraphale. “And why were you there? You said you didn’t do the soldier routine anymore.”

“The same reason as you,” the angel replied gloomily. “They needed a local guide. And they
expected me to fight once we got there.” He shuddered. “Can you imagine if I’d been struck?”

“You were.”

Aziraphale faltered, losing quite a bit of altitude. “I was?”

“Several times. Kept me very busy trying to keep you from bleeding all over me.” The serpent
grumbled and retreated beneath the armor.

“Crowley… you healed me?”

“Well, what else was I supposed to do? I needed a ride out of there.”

“Crowley…”

“Are we almost at your village?” The demon snapped. “I need to wash the celestial scent off before
someone comes looking for me.”

They shared several bottles of wine that night and swore to avoid any more stirrings of
Armageddon.

When Aziraphale awoke, the demon was long gone.

He’d taken all the leftover wine.

1499 AD

Aziraphale tried not to tremble – though he couldn’t say if it was from anger or disbelief or
something more. How could Crowley…?
His superiors had sent him to Spain to assess if this Inquisition business could be sorted out. Reports were conflicted on whether or not it was doing the work of the church. Rumors from agents in proximity to Hell had heard whispers of a demon apparently claiming responsibility. Aziraphale, it was hinted, should see if he couldn’t get the demon to vacate Spain at the very least (life at best) while they sorted out quite why humans had latched onto the idea of spreading the gospel with such bloodthirsty enthusiasm. Again.

The plan was ineffable, Aziraphale had to remind himself many times, when he saw what the humans were doing to each other. And he’d been given no orders to end this immediately in a burst of divine fire? He sent a memo to the home office, performed a large quantity of small miracles around town to allay some of his guilt, then went looking for the demon responsible.

The longer he hunted, the more he thought through his initial distress. This wasn’t Crowley’s style. He was far subtler than this. More a demon of small miseries than this sort of atrocity.

No, he couldn’t believe Crowley would cause this. Not intentionally at least.

The sight of the demon when he finally tracked him down confirmed his better judgment.

Crowley was slumped at a table at an outside café, so many bottles strewn around him that Aziraphale felt sure his corporation’s liver was done for. The demon’s head was on the table, his arms flung over his neck.

Aziraphale sat down across from him and waited.

Crowley awoke eventually. It took another length of time before he focused on Aziraphale. “I didn’t do it,” he slurred, his words ending in a long and ill hiss.

“I know, my dear,” Aziraphale said quietly.

“Said I did,” Crowley went on thickly. “Sent me… ‘commenda… tions… tha’s how I found out…” He pawed at the table in quest for more wine.

Aziraphale waited.


Aziraphale took him to a nearby hotel and stayed with him for the next week until Crowley was willing to sober up.

1948 AD

“Crowley!” Aziraphale hammered on the basement flat door. “Crowley! Do get up!”

The demon opened the door, blinking irritably at the angel. “Don’t tell me there’s another world war.”

“Have you been sleeping since the last one ended?”

“It seemed like the sensible thing to do.”

“Then you haven’t seen the news!” Aziraphale shoved his way into the flat. “They’ve been found!”

“What’s been found?”
“The scrolls!”

Crowley stumbled his way to the kitchen and tried the sink. He glared at the faucet until water flowed through the pipes and into a saucepan. He thumped it onto a burner and turned up the heat. Despite the lack of gas, the stove obediently brought the water to a boil.

“Are you listening?” Aziraphale demanded.

“Listening, yes. Understanding, no.”

“Look!” Aziraphale showed him the newspaper. “They’re calling them the Dead Sea Scrolls. They haven’t been seen by human eye in thousands of years. Just think what might be on them!”

“Gossip about your buddies, you mean?” Crowley rooted through the cabinets. “I have no coffee,” he declared as if that was the most important news of the century. “Did you bring coffee?”

“What would I bring coffee?”

“You brought me coffee one time.”

“I didn’t know that meant I had to bring you coffee every time.”

“If you wake a demon up from a two-year nap, the least you can do is bring coffee.”

“We can get coffee on the way.”

“The way where?”

“Lebanon!”

Crowley blinked. “Is there coffee in Lebanon?”

Giving up the discussion, Aziraphale grabbed Crowley's arm and dragged him from the flat.

~

It was long past nightfall when they reached their destination. That was fine with Aziraphale. It was much easier to ask the locks to open so he could read in peace than the ask humans to stop screaming at him so he could read in peace.

Crowley had stopped grumbling after they stopped for falafels. He took care of the locks while Aziraphale encouraged security guards to look elsewhere.

Not all the scrolls were in the shape Aziraphale had hoped for, but they were readable. He read out loud, ignoring Crowley occasionally scoffing at the foolishness of humans.

Aziraphale finished the last of the parchments with a sigh.

“Were you looking for something in particular?” The demon asked.

“Well, a few from my side have been missing for a while. Any clue would be helpful.” Aziraphale lovingly touched a corner of the papyrus. “Mostly… I just wanted to see them.”

“You can’t steal them, you know.”

“No, I know,” Aziraphale said hastily, his eyes still glued on these pieces of times past.
Crowley caught his hand.

Aziraphale jumped and looked at him.

He was surprised by the sympathy in the demon’s eyes. “It was a bad decade, I know,” he said quietly. “I didn’t like those bombs either. Neither of our sides would dream up anything like what they did. But, Angel, it wasn’t all roses back then either. Remember?”

Aziraphale looked away. He rubbed the tears from his eyes.

Crowley tugged him gently toward the door. “Let’s get some breakfast.”

---

2000 AD

Aziraphale looked down at the demon sprawled against him.

It was the early morning hours of New Year’s Day. 1999 had given way to 2000. Despite Aziraphale explaining to anyone who would listen that the new Millennium did not start until 2001, the humans were partying as if the end times had come and gone.

Aziraphale had intended to spend a quiet night with his books, but Crowley had other plans. He’d dragged the angel to a half dozen parties, ducking out of each within a brief time of arriving. Aziraphale trailed him tolerantly through a wild tour of London. By now he’d accepted that if he closed his eyes and prayed hard enough, the car would reach its destination without a trail of dismembered pedestrians in its wake.

They’d stood at the edge of the Thames and watched the fireworks. They’d plunged into the Soho club scene for cocktails. They strolled through galleries brimming with upcoming artists and musicians. Even Aziraphale had to appreciate their pause for the classical music.

At last Crowley’s fervor wore down and now they were collapsed on the sofa in the backroom of the bookshop, sharing a bottle of wine between them. Aziraphale had grabbed a book, reading archaic prophecies for the new millennia out loud despite Crowley throwing the cork at him. Eventually, the demon curled sleepily against him and Aziraphale settled back for the reading he’d wanted to be doing all along.

Except he found himself more inclined to study his companion.

It hadn’t been quite a year since the failed apocalypse. They’d kept near one another ever since. The third floor above the bookshop had beckoned as very convenient for the adversaries to watch over each other, and Crowley had moved in. Gradually, Aziraphale’s personal things had migrated upward, his second floor apartment filling up with additional book storage. They hadn’t needed two kitchens or bathrooms, or such nonsense, he reasoned. And he rarely slept unless it was with Crowley.

They ate out much of the time, although Crowley had started cooking. A few days ago, they’d both gone in search of new pans for the kitchen. Aziraphale had given his input. “It’s your decision, of course,” he’d said, though Crowley had eventually bought what he suggested.

As he studied the demon now, something occurred to him. Something which should have been immediately obvious.

Crowley was sleeping on his back.
Snakes did not go belly-up as a rule. It was far too vulnerable position. And a demon with the heart of a serpent, one who’d done a long tenure in Hell, never showed such vulnerability.

The angel and demon had drifted off together more than a few times over the ages. Sometimes out of boredom if they were trapped in the same place. Or exhaustion after a rigorous bout of work. Frequently, alcohol was involved.

At first they’d slept separately, only gradually migrating closer as time went on. Aziraphale had been prepared to trust the demon much sooner than Crowley was ready to trust the angel. Crowley had been the one to lie stiff and alert all night, claiming to be keeping watch. Aziraphale understood and quietly pushed down any hurt. Hell had done no favors in teaching the demon to trust and relax.

Time was the cure. Time and patience. Eventually, Aziraphale came to almost regret putting in the time when a sleepy demon practically crawled on top of him while he tried to read.

But Crowley still largely slept on his front. It was safer for a swift response or transformation.

Looking at him now, his body melted so comfortably against Aziraphale, his front exposed to attack, his head stretched back leaving his throat unguarded, Aziraphale saw trust embodied.

“Crowley?” He asked cautiously.

The demon opened one eye.

“Are we a couple?”

Crowley exhaled a soft laugh.

“I mean,” Aziraphale went on worriedly. “We’ve never really talked about it. It just sort of happened. I don’t know if human terminology applies to us, but…”

Crowley propped himself on one elbow. “Angel?”

“Yes?”

Crowley kissed him long and firmly. “Shut up.” He flopped back to his previous sleeping position. “Happy new millennium.”

“Well, it’s not really the new…” Aziraphale trailed off and pulled the demon closer. “Happy new beginning.”

Chapter End Notes

Completely self-indulgent, but I love writing these two into history. They’re such idiots. I love them. I wrote a bunch of these little things, and then stuck them together with a bit of a through narrative. Some of it is relevant to the story. Some of it was just for fun.

I got the title off a quote website. It is attributed to politician Lincoln Chafee. I know nothing about him, but a glance at his wiki page did not indicate he was anyone terrible. So, there you go.
Your History/Mythology Lesson for the Week

- **Daniel in the Lions’ Den** From the Bible. Daniel was an advisor to King Darius. The other advisors spread lies until he fell out of favor with the king and was dumped in a pit of lions overnight. The lions refused to eat him and Daniel was restored to good graces.
- **869** King Edmund of Anglia died in battle to Ivar the Boneless’ invading army. Later, a story sprang up saying he was beheaded for his religion and his body was protected by a wolf. I hope the wolf got a meal after.
- **1033** Christ was crucified in 33 AD, so a lot of prophets suggested 1,000 years after would be a good time for Armageddon. It didn't happen.
- **1499** Did you know the Spanish Inquisition lasted over 300 years?! I didn't know much about it except that no one expects the Spanish Inquisition until now. The Inquisition was an awful time in history in which people were tortured, sometimes to death, for crimes against the church.
- **1948** World War II ended in 1945. Aziraphale and Crowley found the efficiency in which humans had learned to kill masses of other humans alarming. Crowley's talking about both the atomic bombs and the blitz when he mentions the bombs. The Dead Sea Scrolls are a collection of well-preserved scrolls found in the Qumran Caves. They contain large portions of the Hebrew Bible and additional works from the same period, several of which have a lot to say about angels, demons, and nephilim. 1948 was when the discovery of the scrolls was first announced in the papers.
- **2000** There were quite a few doomsday prophecies about the new millennium, mostly declaring computers would cause the downfall of civilization. Aziraphale and Crowley laughed all that off. They were very done with apocalypse predictions by then.
“So… this is where it happened…” Crowley stood on the beach, his eyes sweeping from the pier to the ocean and back. “See anything which screams, ‘there was a hole in reality here’?”

Aziraphale said nothing. He’d been quiet since they arrived.

Crowley saw the slight tremor in the angel’s hand as he shielded his eyes against the sun. He tried to make light of it. “Maybe we could ask around and see if anyone remembers a gunfight on the pier? Maybe someone can tell us exactly where it happened.”

He tried a few more times to engage Aziraphale in conversation, but at last gave up. He strayed from the angel’s side, his tongue flicking hopefully at the air. He had to find something. This was for Aziraphale.

He’d gotten a look at the police files easily. Ella had let him into the computer system, although that had come at the expense of a dozen questions regarding what exactly was the Sword of Eden and what did he mean Charlotte Richards had been possessed, (“Is that why she acted like she didn't remember me?!”) none of which he'd been able to answer to her satisfaction. Nor had the files given him anything more than Linda had already told him save the location of the gunfight which had been going on while Lucifer had been slicing reality open to dispose of a sword and a dangerous celestial entity. It was something at least. They'd come to the beach in hopes of finding some residual sense of what had happened.

At last he slumped in defeat. He couldn’t sense anything useful. They’d need someone with far better skills than him.

“It was here,” Aziraphale said suddenly.

Crowley turned around.

Aziraphale’s hand was raised and planted flat against empty air.

A few sunbathers looked oddly at them, but angel and demon ignored the human watchers.

Crowley’s tongue flicked, still sensing nothing. “What do you feel?” He asked.

“Celestial fire.” Aziraphale closed his eyes. “It’s faint. But it was here.”

Crowley crouched down and studied the ground. No fissure. No crack. Nothing to give him an entryway. “Angel…”

“This is where we have to start,” Aziraphale insisted. “It’s right here.”

“Okay… but… how?”
They walked through the tiny amusement park in search of inspiration.

“Did the police report say anything else other than the location?” Aziraphale asked, tearing a bite of funnel cake delicately off the plate Crowley carried.

The demon took a large bite. “No,” he said, licking the sugar from his lips. “And with that idiot, Amenadiel, stopping time just then, it doesn’t seem like any human saw anything useful.”

*Lucifer would know more*, he thought. But telling his boss they were trying to recover a sword Lucifer had emphatically removed from the world seemed like a last resort.

“What about Charlotte Richards?”

“What about her?”

“Her body was here. Even if her mind was elsewhere. She’d be the only one who saw everything. And felt everything. Her body was housing a celestial entity at the time. A celestial being which is now in the same reality as my sword.”

“Yes, but the entity’s gone. And so is Charlotte. Dr. Martin said Cain killed her.”

There was a long stretch of silence.

“…What about her body?”

~

“You are the worst at disguises,” Crowley grumbled as he looked Aziraphale up and down.

“It’s a perfectly normal gardener outfit!”

“If you were performing in *The Secret Garden*. .”

Aziraphale tugged his cap more securely over his head and straightened the tweed jacket. “And your all-black attire is more appropriate for the task at hand?”

“For sneaking into a graveyard in the middle of the night to exhume a body? Yes, yes it is.” Crowley glared at the lock on the tool shed they’d found at the edge of the cemetery. The lock popped open. He stepped inside, emerging with several shovels.

“This seems undignified and disrespectful,” Aziraphale grumbled, taking the shovel with evident distaste. He held it gingerly as if he’d never done hard labor in his life.

“You spent six years as a gardener for the Dowling’s. You must have done some digging.” Crowley slung a shovel over his shoulder and started toward the cemetery.

“I mostly just fed birds. And begged the plants to just… do what they do.” Aziraphale frowned with sudden remembrance. “What happened to the dog?”

“What dog?”

“The dog you had when you were playing at being a nanny. Was it a real dog?”

“Define real.”

“Crowley! Please tell me you didn’t turn some poor person into a dog.”
“It wasn’t a poor person.” In a slightly lower tone he added, “It was one of the security guards.”

“Crowley!”

“Well, he tried to feel up my dress on my way to the interview! I thought doing a six-year stent as a dog was appropriate.”

“My dear,” Aziraphale sighed. They walked a short distance before he spoke again. “Did you at least leave him somewhere nice when you were done?”

“Define nice.”

“Crowley!”

“It has many definitions. It can mean ‘scrupulously exact’, for one.”

“I know! What did you do with the poor man?”

“I changed him back and dropped him off where he’d be found.” Crowley sounded wounded.

“Crowley…”

“On an oil tanker.”

“Crowley…”

“Naked.”

“Crowley…”

“I left his favorite squeaky bone.”

Aziraphale sighed the long-suffering note of one who’d accepted their life-companion’s moral compass was a touch unique. “Shall we resume the business at hand?”

“Alright.” Crowley halted and looked around. “Where’s the grave?”

“Why would I know?”

“I thought you could sense these things.”

“What things?”

“Doesn’t a human possessed by one of your lot have some sort of… sense about them?”

“I have no idea.”

“Then how are we supposed to find the grave?”

“Hi guys!”

Aziraphale jumped and Crowley shrieked as Mazikeen appeared from behind a gravestone. The demon cackled merrily. “How do you survive Hell if you don’t watch for danger?”

Crowley glared at her. “There are exactly two demons on this planet right now. I didn’t think I had to watch out for the other one.”
Maze slung her arm around him. “You know you love me.”

Crowley shuddered.

“What are you doing here, Miss Mazikeen?” Aziraphale asked in a tone somewhere between polite and a beg of ‘please-don’t-kill-us’.

Maze arched her back in a way that made bones humans shouldn’t have been able to manipulate crack. “Sometime when I’m bored, and I don’t have a bounty…” She leaned near Crowley’s ear. “I stalk people I know.”

The demon shuddered again. “You have earned every bit of your terrifying reputation, haven’t you?”

“Yes.” She played her finger down his chest. “And you’ve earned every bit of yours for being a spineless coward.”

“And I have no problem with that,” Crowley agreed.

She laughed and let him go. “So why are you wandering around a cemetery in the middle of the night?”

Angel and demon exchanged uneasy glances. Crowley tried to come up with a plausible cover story.

Aziraphale spoke first. “We are digging up Charlotte Richards in hopes a vestigial trace of the entity which previously possessed her still exists so we can follow it into its new realm of residence.”

Maze stared at him. “Why?”

Aziraphale looked sullen. “It was my sword and I want it back.”

“Coveting.” The demon grinned at Crowley. “You’ve completely corrupted him, haven’t you?”

“He hasn’t Fallen yet, so… no?” Crowley shrugged.

Despite frequent jokes, Crowley had no fear of Aziraphale Falling. Aziraphale still resolutely believed in an Ineffable Plan for all living creatures and trusted Someone up there knew what they were doing. Besides, no angel had Fallen since the rebellion. Crowley still felt no qualms tempting the angel to all the minor vices he could foist on him.

“So, we’re just trying to find Mrs. Richards’ grave right now,” Aziraphale mumbled.

“It’s this way.” Maze set off with the bewildered pair blundering along behind.

“You’ll help us?” Crowley stammered.

Maze shrugged. “Sure. Only humans care about the bodies. I don’t think Charlotte would mind.”

“From now on, we only do nefarious plotting when she’s watching the baby,” Crowley grumbled to Aziraphale.

Maze covered the length of the cemetery with minimal trouble locating the grave. “Here it is.”

“Who left the flowers?” Crowley asked.

“Dan. He’ll notice if you leave the grave all torn up.”

Aziraphale touched his chest. “My dear, we wouldn’t consider such a thing. We’ll be entirely respectful of the location.”

“While we tear apart the body.” Crowley stuck his shovel into the dirt. He glanced at Maze. “Any chance you’d like to…”

“Nope.” She sat cross-legged on an adjacent tombstone. “Have fun.”

They had to carve out the sod by hand. After that, they were mostly able to miracle the dirt out of the way. Aziraphale worried about his clothes the whole time.

Crowley popped the seals on the coffin. They opened it to find what remained of Charlotte Richards.

“Greetings, dear lady,” Aziraphale said respectfully. “I understand your soul now resides in Heaven, so I hope you won’t object…”

The demons shouted for him to get on with it.

Aziraphale stepped into the grave and ran his hands lightly along the corpse.

“Is he into necro?” Maze asked.

Crowley rolled his eyes. “I can barely get him to touch raw chicken.”

“My dear? Can you come examine this?”

Crowley eyed the size of the grave and opted to shrink down.

Aziraphale set him on the corpse’s ribcage.

The serpent’s tongue flicked toward her abdomen. “There is a trace… I can smell residual energy.” He cocked his head thoughtfully. “I don’t know if it’s enough for me to work with.”

“It’s the first breadcrumb we have,” Aziraphale replied. He lifted Crowley out of the grave, then took the corpse in his arms.

“You’re taking it with us?”

“Of course. We need to better examine it.”

Crowley looked at Maze. “I don’t suppose you have a place…”

She smirked. “I’m a demon living in L.A. Of course I have a place to store bodies.”
Something unprecedented had happened in Hell.

It began this way.

The devil walked into a Hell-Loop, banished the shades of torture, and turned to the condemned. “Right. I just need to know if you were murdered or if it was a suicide so the detective can clear up her caseload and get back to planning her daughter’s birthday.”

It took a while to explain to the soul that they were dead. And then they wanted to talk. Not just about dying. About life.

Normally, Lucifer didn’t give the time of day to anyone. But they mentioned a bad relationship with their parents, and that was one of his favorite subjects.

When he eventually departed, the soul marched out the door with him.

“I don’t feel guilty anymore!” They declared. “It was my choice. I shouldn’t punish myself for the same things I did on Earth. I need to move on.”

The devil scratched his head, then sent a messenger to the Silver City to fetch up a collection team. And the soul went away to Heaven.

Souls had been redeemed before. They’d broken their own Hell-Loops and stepped into the light. It happened.

But for the devil to redeem a soul…

Demons talked.

~

“So…” Lucifer mused as he watched the video again. “Miss Beatrice’s birthday is in a few days.”

“It’s all she talks about,” Crowley confirmed. He was slouched in a chair, hoping he could leave soon. He’d made Aziraphale promise not to do anything reckless while he was away, but he worried.

The mail was done and it sitting on the desk. But the pick-up and drop-off process took far longer these days. Since resigning himself to Crowley building connections with his humans, Lucifer wanted to know the details they didn’t put in the letters and videos. He wanted the ordinary. Anything to feel closer to them.

“I must find her a present,” Lucifer pondered. “How old will she be?” He sorted amidst the letters, finding mention of the upcoming birthday. “Eleven! That’s an auspicious age, isn’t it? She’ll need something extra special.”

Crowley moaned.
“A hell-hound?” Chloe said the word as if it meant absolutely nothing to her. And, it probably didn’t.

Crowley rubbed the back of his neck. “There’s… a precedent. I guess it’s a traditional gift for eleven-year-olds.”

“A hell-hound.”

Crowley couldn’t think when he’d ever seen the detective this dazed. And she’d dealt with the devil. “It won’t look like a hell-hound,” he began uncomfortably. “Form follows naming… er… It’ll be what she imagines it to be.”

“Tell her to picture it with two heads!” Maze called. She was lying on the sofa, grinning too gleefully over the arm. “And wings!”

“Maze. Not helpful.” Chloe turned back to Crowley. “No. We can’t have some monster living in the house.”

“That’s what I mean. It’ll be… created? Not the right term, but… she has to imagine what she wants a dog to be, and give it a name, and it’ll be that. And they’re really well-behaved. For her at least. It’ll be sort of… attuned to her.”

Chloe still looked resolutely against the idea.

“Say yes, Decker!” Maze prodded. “Hell-hounds are the best. We set a pack of them on an angel one time. Tore it to itty-bitty pieces.”

“Maze, no! She doesn’t need an attack dog.”

“Sure she does! She’s starting middle school next year. Those kids are evil! This’ll keep her from being picked on for sure.”

“And it can be a small dog if she wants,” Crowley tried to be helpful. “One of those little yappy ones like celebrities carry around in purses? She’d be into that right?”

Chloe shook her head. “You haven’t spent much time with her, have you?”

The front door opened, and the child in question arrived home from school. “Hi Mom! Hi Maze! Hi Crowley!” She beelined for him. “Did you bring me a letter?”

“Hey, Trixie! Guess what Lucifer’s sending for your birthday?” Maze called with a wicked grin.

“Maze!” Chloe looked to be losing it.

“Maybe it should be a surprise?” Crowley suggested a little desperately.

Family drama was clearly somewhere demons should fear to tread.

~

“Of course she’s getting a hell-hound,” was Lucifer’s reply.

Crowley just delivered Chloe’s lengthy list of reasons Trixie did not need a dog and got out of the way.
This was definitely what a Hell-Loop felt like.

~

Crowley stood at the periphery of the birthday party and tried not to have flashbacks to uncomfortable times.

At least Aziraphale wasn’t here trying a magic show. Crowley had sent him off antiquing in search of rare books. No sense both of them being miserable.

He hadn’t been certain why Chloe insisted he come and had said as much.

“Because if a dog shows up, you and Maze can get rid of it,” Chloe declared.

“I don’t think we can,” he protested to Mazikeen.

“Just let her keep believing that.” The greatest torturer Hell had ever known then eagerly showed him the book of dog breeds she and Trixie had been studying. “I like the Belgian Malinois.”

The party was held at a local park. Chloe and Dan found the flaw in hosting it there was keeping a dozen 10-12 year olds from scattering. They probably would have lost the entire gaggle if Maze hadn’t pulled out her knives and mesmerized them until food was available.

Bored, Crowley turned the area around the playground into a dead zone and watched parents and nannies curse at their phones. *Maybe you’ll pay more attention to your kids*, he thought as he shifted the concentration in the sandboxes to something closer to mud.

~

The party ended with no sign of a hell-hound.

Chloe breathed an audible sigh of relief as they packed up the car and headed home.

There was a cat the size of a lynx waiting for them on the front step.

~

"She’s such an independent thinker,” Lucifer chuckled in approval as he read Trixie’s thank-you note. “Turning a hound into a cat… what a unique beast that will be.”

“Your girlfriend had a lot to say about it,” Crowley offered. “Well, mostly she just said your name a lot.”

The devil’s smile widened. “She does that.” His smile faltered and his head bowed heavily.

Crowley crept out.

Chapter End Notes

I realize I'm not the only one who decided Trixie needed a hell-hound, but in my defense, this chapter has been done for quite a while. As soon as I realized she'd be turning eleven in Season 5, I felt this needed to happen. Because, of course he'd give
her a hell-hound.

I'm not positive this is actually how hell-hounds work in GO, but it's the only way it could work for Trixie to get one. And it played on the names being tied to form theme from back in the chapter about Crowley's Fall. A theme we will see again!
“...So princes outrank kings... and where do the generals fall?” Linda looked helplessly at the letters and notes scattered across her kitchen table.

Maze felt a stab of sympathy for Linda, and more than a little irritation at Lucifer for his long and rambling letters which were starting to overload Linda’s mind. Trying to talk her through Hell’s politics was becoming an ongoing battle. Not helped that neither of the resident demons were experts.

“Don’t worry about the generals,” Crowley said as he returned to the table with a glass of water in hand. He stared at it until the water turned an alcoholic yellow. “They die too often to care about.” He looked at Maze. “Who’s overseeing the army now?”

“Baal... unless something happened in the last decade.”

Crowley sighed. “Another crazy idiot.”

“They’re all crazy idiots.”

“No argument there.”

Maze had received little communication from Lucifer. To be fair, she hadn’t bothered to answer the one letter he had sent. That had been a request to keep her updated on Charlie’s growth and any strange occurrences on Earth, and given her permission to torture Crowley all she pleased if he stepped out of line.

She would have kept an eye on him even without Lucifer’s encouragement. Demons weren’t exactly trustworthy. But unless Crowley was the subtlest bastard Hell had ever produced, he seemed about as harmless as a Fallen was capable of being.

It confused her. She’d clawed her way to the top of Hell’s pecking order by using others as stepping-stones to reach her next challenger. She’d been talked down to by every Fallen she’d come across and had taught them, with blade and fury, that the name of Mazikeen was to be respected.

To find one who showed no interest in fighting was perplexing. Crowley didn’t bow the way a demon of lower rank ought, but he didn’t behave as if his lack of decorum was a challenge. More just apathy for the social order of Hell.

Maze was surprised to find it was nice to have another demon around. Someone who’d shared a similar upbringing. Who knew she was fully in control when she grabbed a human by the throat. Who understood why Earth was awesome in relation to why Hell was terrible. Who felt no awe for a posturing angels. It was nice to not be entirely isolated.

That didn’t mean she felt the need to be at all nice to him.

Linda took a breath. “Okay, so the princes are the advisors...”

“Right. There are traditionally seven of them.”

“Can you tell me about them?”
Crowley began. “Well, there’s Mammon. The humans named him Greed, which pretty much sums him up.”

“He’s loyal so long as there’s something in it for him,” Maze supplied. “Lousy fighter. He’s covered in so much gold that all you need is a little leverage and he’ll end up stuck on his back.”

“Also nice if you’re running away from him,” Crowley agreed. “Then there’s Beelzebub. The lord of the flies. Likes carcasses and solving problems with extreme measures. The humans named her Gluttony, although it never completely stuck.”

“What do you mean ‘named them’?”

Crowley looked uncertainly at Maze. She jumped into the explanation. “You’re a therapist. People come in your office and you identify their biggest problem, right? So, imagine you just called them ‘Adulterer’ or ‘Brainless Moron’ after you figured that out about them. And if you call somebody that enough, it sort of becomes their identity.”

Crowley nodded. “Back when humans did more demon summoning, they got into figuring out what made them up. We can be pretty terrifying when we want to be. But if you can name something, and make it just that name, it becomes less scary. You feel like you know what it is, so you know how to counter it.”

“So… having a name… limits you?” Linda frowned.

“Sort of. It takes away the mystery. Humans can stand up to things better then, and the demons have less power over them.”

“Okay…” Linda wrote quickly. “Who else?”


“What do you mean?”

“Belial was never worshiped,” Crowley explained. “A lot of the stronger demons used to spend more time on Earth posing as deities. They’d get a cult going, get worship and sacrifices that way. Fight with other demon cults.” He shuddered. “Fun times.”

“They don’t do that anymore?”

“Heaven forced a new policy about two thousand years ago. Less interference. Not so many big, obvious miracles. The big guys all went back to Heaven and Hell after that. They didn’t find it so much fun to play with the humans when they couldn’t show off.”

“A lot of them still yammer about their glory days.” Maze rolled her eyes. “Belial could never get a cult off the ground, so she was never properly worshiped. She’s also crazy.”

“But she’s still an advisor?”

“She wasn’t so crazy back when she got the job.”

“Those three were the first princes,” Crowley said. “Along with the four that got themselves killed a thousand years ago. The boss only just replaced them.”

“Right…” Linda scanned through her notes. “Marchosias… Decabra… and…?”

Crowley shrugged. “Some Lilim from the business office. Lucifer’s going for efficiency now. The
old guard is furious about the lesser demons, but the boss is ramming change down their throats as fast as they can swallow."

“But prince is just the title. It doesn’t refer to gender, right?”

“We’re kind of fluid about those.”

“And the kings…?”

“Govern the four regions of Hell.”

“I thought there were nine rings? Like in Dante?”

“There are. But they’re not really rings…” Crowley trailed off, lost in trying to translate Hell’s metaphysics into human language.

“Don’t worry about the geography,” Maze said quickly. “It changes a lot.”

“Changes?”

“Sure… locations aren’t as fixed as they are on Earth. They move around as needed.”

Linda blinked at them.

“It’s a big place,” Crowley said. “And it’s a mess. And it likes being a mess. So even where there’s order, Hell likes trying to turn it back into disorder.”

“Sounds terrible.”

“It is.”

“Does anything… stay in one place?”

Maze nodded. “If Lucifer wants it to. Well, technically, whoever controls the throne.”

“And the throne is above the city?”

“Sometimes,” Crowley and Maze said in unison.

Linda’s head hit the table.

“Linda, none of this is really important.” Maze tried to pat her hand in what she hoped was a sympathetic gesture.

“We could just highlight the relevant parts of the letters,” Crowley offered.

Linda gratefully pushed the letters at him.

Crowley picked up a pen, shook it until it turned into a highlighter, and went to work.

Linda stared at him. “How do you do that?”

“Do what?”

“Turn things into other things?”

Crowley glanced at the marker in his hand. “It’s just… kind of a convenience thing.”
“Lucifer never does that.”

“I don’t think he wants to take the risk. You have to keep it small or you attract attention.”

“What attention?”

Crowley pointed a finger upward.

Linda looked at the ceiling, blinked, then looked at Maze. “Can you do that?”

Maze leaned back in her chair and glared sullenly in Crowley’s direction. “No, that’s one of the things the Fallen lord over the rest of us. And it only works on Earth. Prayers don’t get answered in Hell.”

Crowley kept his focus on the letters. “This’ll take a few minutes. Did you want to record a message?”

“Oh, right. Charlie will probably wake up soon.”

Crowley set a video camera on the table. “Just try to keep it under ten minutes. Preferably less so Decker can do a message too.”

“Why so short?”

“Data’s heavy.”

Linda looked mystified.

“Crowley’s a weakling,” Maze supplied helpfully.

Crowley ignored her. “Have you ever heard, ‘You can’t take it with you’?”

Linda nodded.

“It’s true. Material possessions don’t go willingly into Heaven or Hell. And getting in and out is incredibly hard. Even for the residents.”

“Right…” Linda looked at Maze. “You told me you couldn’t go back on your own.”

Maze grimaced. “Only the angels can fly in and out.” She scowled at Crowley. “Part of their ‘Greater Demon’ crap.”

Crowley held up his hands. “I didn’t say anything.”

Maze considered him. “You’re alright… for a Fallen.” It was the kindest concession she was willing to make.

“Does that mean you won’t stab me?”

“No promises.” Maze turned back to Linda. “And everyone has to use the gates. It’s impossible to get through any other way. Unless you’re Crowley.”

“Why is that?”

“We all have our talents. Mine’s getting in and out of places,” Crowley replied.

“Talents? Like what Amenadiel does with time?”
“Right. We specialize. Beelzebub shows you your greatest fears… Lucifer manipulates desires… Uriel sees patterns…”

“He’s dead,” Maze supplied.

Crowley paused to consider that news. “Good riddance.” He continued. “We were all created with purpose. And, currently mine is delivering the mail. But my way of getting in and out makes it even harder to carry things. And everything has a weight to it. Especially something like that.” He nodded at the camera. “Hell’s pretty behind on the times in terms of technology. If the realm doesn’t understand it, it doesn’t like to cross through.”

Linda nodded with a vague and lost expression.

“Don’t worry about it,” Maze advised. “Just shoot some cute stuff with Charlie.”

As soon as they were alone, Maze swatted Crowley upside the head. “Stop breaking her!”

“It’s not me writing these things!” He studied the letter in front of him. “And it’s not like either of us have much to do with this.” He glanced at her. “Where do you rank in all this, anyway?”

“Head torturer? Sort of a rank on its own. Nobody wants to discuss if they outrank me so I don’t have to deal with anyone higher-up.” Maze stretched her arms behind her head until her bones popped.

“I can see why.” Crowley ran the highlighter over a long sentence. “And I’m too far at the bottom to have to care.”

Maze eyed him, suspecting not for the first time that he had no idea what that brand he wore meant. Such a mark meant something very different depending on placement, curvature, and strength. Crowley’s roughly translated to, ‘I like this one. Leave him alone’, as opposed to the more usual, ‘Mine. No touching’, which adorned the palace servants and personal guards.

It was a subtle difference, but very important for those who paid attention to such things.

When she’d first seen Crowley’s, she'd immediately poked it to see what he’d do. Crowley had flinched and covered his neck with obvious discomfort. Maze was intrigued. She'd seen too many demons puffed up with importance at their sudden elevation. She’d beaten a few of them down to proper size just to prove she could with impunity. His embarrassment raised him a few notches in her opinion.

She leaned a little closer to him and dropped her voice. “How are you doing with finding the sword?”

He jumped. “Aziraphale’s been hunting for info. We’re following up on a lead after this.”

She waited a moment. “I’m coming, right?”

Crowley gave her a puzzled frown. “You want to help us?”

Maze spoke in a whisper. “I’m going to lose my edge if I spend any more time cooing over a baby.”

The demon grinned. “In that case, how do you feel about breaking into churches?”
“Here we are. All safe and sound.”

Aziraphale parked his motor-bike on the street across from the church. He beamed at his passenger. “Thank you for joining this little caper of ours.”

Ella took off her helmet and grinned. “Are you kidding? Of course I wanted to go on an angelic sword-hunting mission!” She glanced around. “Where’s your boyfriend?”

“Crowley should be here shortly. He said he got tied up with Dr. Martin, but he’d meet us… oh, that might be him.”

A fierce-looking motorcycle roared around the corner at far past safe speeds. It screeched to a halt beside his. Two demons climbed off.

“Nice bike!” Ella crowed.

Aziraphale sniffed and refrained from saying she’d not taken the time to compliment his. And the canary yellow of his bike was far nice than the gleaming black of the larger motorcycle.

“That,” Crowley declared with a covetous grin for the bike. “Is a lot of horsepower.”

Maze purred her satisfaction. “Nice wheels, Nerd,” she greeted Aziraphale. “So, what are we stealing?”

Aziraphale grabbed Crowley by the arm and hauled him a distance away. “Why did you bring her?” He hissed.

“Because she wanted to come, and we owe her a favor,” the demon replied. “And I’d rather I know where she is than to turn around and she’s got a knife to my back.”

“I can hear you, you know!” Maze called.

“Why’d you bring Ella?” Crowley countered.

“I thought a human might prove useful. And Miss. Lopez seemed very eager.”

“If you’re done with the foreplay, can we get on with it?” Maze demanded.

Aziraphale drew himself up to retaliate to that insinuation, but Crowley spoke first.

“It’s pretty simple. We’re just sneaking into the church to get some information about Aziraphale’s sword.”

Aziraphale felt a glimmer of hope. “I’m afraid,” he said to Mazikeen. “This won’t be a comfortable mission for you. Perhaps you could act as our ‘look out’.”

Maze scoffed. “I can handle a church. Let’s go.” She strode toward the front door.

“Is that a thing?” Ella asked. “I took Lucifer to church. He was fine.”
“It would have to be very consecrated ground to keep the boss out,” Crowley replied. “It varies for
the rest of us. Hallowed ground isn’t all the same. And all demons are different.” He gave the
church door a tug. “Huh. Already unlocked.”

They filed inside the dark building.

The demons winced as they crossed the threshold. Crowley picked up his feet in a pronounced
manner. Maze whirled around with a sudden display of angry tension. Beyond that, neither seemed
overly bothered.

“What are we looking for?” Ella asked, peering around eagerly. “Crucifix? Holy water? Spears of
righteous destiny?”


“Seriously?” Maze grumbled. “There are hundreds of libraries in the city, and you had to come
here?”

“It’s a unique book,” Aziraphale protested. “I suggest we split up and…”

The group froze as they heard voices coming from the sanctuary.

They crept closer, the voices coming clear.

“…Have mercy upon this poor soul, and cast the demon from her…”

“Are they seriously doing an exorcism?” Maze snorted.

“Oh, dear.” Aziraphale murmured. “They may hear us. We’ll need a distraction…”

He saw the wide grin on Crowley’s face much too late.

“I volunteer as tribute!” The demon declared gleefully.

“Crowley, no!” Aziraphale grabbed for him, but Crowley was already plunging into the sanctuary.

“Brothers and sisters of the Lord!” He wailed, twitching wildly. “I feel the darkness within! I’ve
been touched by the devil! I’m marked to his service! Help me, friends! Help me, Obi Wan
Kenobi! Save me, Batman! Tom Cruise, heal me with your witchcraft!”

“Another sufferer has been called to us!” A voice cried.

Anxious murmurs surrounded the demon, who hammed it up with the best possession banter
Hollywood had to offer.

Aziraphale clapped a hand over his eyes.

“Will he be alright?” Ella asked, peering through the door to watch a gaggle of frightened humans
surround the demon.

Aziraphale shepherded them away. “As long as they don’t realize what he is. We might as well let
him have his fun.”

“I see the light of God! It burns us, precious. It buuuurns!”

The trio hurried deeper into the dark church.
“So, what’s this book?” Maze asked.

“It’s the revelations of If-Thy-Eye-Offends-Thee-Cut-It-Out Puddle, a rather obscure prophet, but a distant relative of Agnes Nutter, so I hope her gift was hereditary.”

“What kind of a name is that?!” Maze scowled as they started up the stairs.

“A very common one for its time period,” Aziraphale replied primly. “Mr. Puddle’s visions had to do specifically with battle and holy weapons. Apparently, he did have visions relating to the Sword of Eden. I can only hope he saw something useful to locating it.”

“Where do we look for this thing?”

“I’m not certain. Miss Lopez, you seem to have a clear idea of where you’re going. Are you having some form of premonitions?”

Ella, leading the way along the hall, pointed at the wall. “I’ve just been following the signs for the library. Doesn’t that seem like the right place to start?”

Maze snorted.

The library was locked. Aziraphale miracled it open before Maze could break the handle.

Ella flipped on the lights. “What does it look like?”

“It’s about three hundred years old. Early typeface. I can’t be certain of anything other than that.” Aziraphale looked hopelessly at rows upon rows of books. A large portion were Bibles, and five shelves seemed to be nothing but identical hymnals. That still left far too many…

“Here it is.” Maze stood by a glass case placed ornamentally at the back of the room.

“Oh. Yes.” Aziraphale was starting to feel upstaged on his own caper. “Let me just take care of the lo- youch!” He clutched his stinging hand to his chest. “Oh, deary me.”

Ella surveyed the glass case from all angles. “Security system. The electrical volts are a nice touch.” She pulled a toolkit out of her pocket. “I knew I brought my toys for a reason.”

“Let me take a look at that, you baby,” Maze grumbled, grabbing Aziraphale’s hand and forcing him to uncurl his fingers. “Just a little voltage. You’re fine.”

“How would you know?”

“I torture people. You learn a lot about electrical burns. Yours are minor.”

Aziraphale wished for Crowley.

“All… Set!” Ella sat back as the lock popped open. “So, we grab the book and run?”

“I’m hardly going to steal it!” Aziraphale ruffled at the thought.

“I’ll do it.” Maze started forward.

“No! I mean, I brought this!” Aziraphale produced a phone with a proud grin. He was so glad Crowley had shown him how to use the camera function. “If you could kindly keep watch, I just have to find the relevant pages.”
He sped through the book, feeling almost physical pain to flick so fast through the pages without
the time to appreciate and cherish the book properly. He didn’t have time to do much except snap a
photo every time he saw the word ‘sword’. Fortunately, If-Thy-Eye-Offends-Thee-Cut-It-Out
Puddle had not been much of a writer. The book was short and filled mostly with ads for similar
books of prophecy.

“Done!” Aziraphale hummed. “Now we just need to put things back the way they were.”

“I’m not sure we have time,” Ella murmured, staring toward the hall.

They heard a series of thumps.

Maze stuck her head back in the room. “Hey, I think I just knocked out a priest… so, we should
go.”

“Oh, dear-dear-dear.” Aziraphale made a rapid gesture with his hand and the case snapped closed.
“I don’t think I can manage the security system…”

“Don’t worry about it.” Ella tugged his arm. “We have to leave.”

They scrambled down the stairs and toward the entryway.

“What about Crowley?” Ella wanted to know.

“Oh, yes…” Aziraphale looked back. “I should tell him we’re done. I do hope he’s finished
playing.”

From the sanctuary came the alarmed cries of the humans.

“He can’t be dead!”

“I can’t feel a heartbeat!”

“He just dropped… did we kill him? Oh my God!”

Aziraphale sighed. “Excuse me?” He called and walked in. “I’m looking for a friend of mine.”

At Aziraphale’s voice, Crowley, who’d been prone on the ground, jerked upright with a dramatic
gasp of breath. “Saint Peter? Peter is that you?” He quested his hands around blindly. His glasses
were gone, and he was prudently keeping his eyes closed. “Why is it so dark? Has the devil taken
my sight?”

“Not recently, my dear.” Aziraphale boosted him to his feet.

“Do you know this man?” A priest demanded, leaping up to halt Aziraphale.

“Yes, yes. I’m sorry he ruined your exorcism. He takes a bit of pleasure in interrupting those.” The
angel surveyed the group’s setup. “Not that you’d have gotten anywhere. What sort of shape was
that supposed to be with the salt and candles? Any self-respecting demon could have walked in and
out of that without trouble.”

the antichrist walk the world!”

The half dozen humans watching the performance were starting to look suspicious. “He’s faking
it,” one declared flatly.
“Being possessed? Of course he is.” Aziraphale looked fondly at the demon. “He’s always been a firm believer in using his own body. I mean, drastic circumstances, of course. But it’s very uncomfortable. I don’t recommend it at all. Who was the original possessed party here?”

A young woman raised her hand with an uncomfortable flush.

“Feeling better?” The angel asked, receiving a small nod. “Excellent. There’s nothing like the real thing stumbling into an exorcism to banish any phantom pains. Well, goodnight good ladies and gentlemen. Please be careful putting out the candles.” He dragged Crowley out of the church.

“Stopping your heart?” He scolded as soon as they were outside. “You frightened those nice people half to death!”

“They’d sent someone for holy water! I thought it was the best survival strategy.” Crowley snapped his fingers and poofed a new pair of glasses into existence. “Did you get what you needed?”

“I hope so. I haven’t had opportunity to read it yet.” Aziraphale reached for the phone.

Maze slapped him on the back. “Reading later! Post-heist drinking now!” She swung onto her bike and pulled Ella on behind her. “And you’re buying!”

~

“It wasn’t a real exorcism, was it?” Ella asked once they were crammed into the booth of a pub, food and drinks spread around them in feast of a job well done.

“Of course not,” Aziraphale replied placidly, his eyes mostly focused on the phone. “There aren’t any demons to do any possessing. Isn’t that right?” It took a moment for him to notice Crowley wasn’t answering.

The demon was looking over his shoulder, his attention directed toward the church despite a distance of miles.

“Crowley?” Aziraphale asked with a flicker of concern.

Crowley tore his attention back to the table with a shudder. He turned to Maze. “Did you smell anything back there?”

Maze chugged her beer with an indifferent shrug. “I was never any good at that. Why? Someone there we know?”

“No…” Crowley’s tongue flicked in uncertainty. “…Just a stale scent. That didn’t belong.” He laughed carelessly and grabbed randomly for something edible. “Probably just memories of the last idiot to wander into their sanctuary.”

The demon was lively the rest of the evening, but he turned into a serpent as soon as they left the pub and spent the night curled around Aziraphale’s shoulders while the angel read and planned.

Chapter End Notes

I couldn't remember if it's ever been an established detail on the show that Mazikeen
has a motorcycle, but obviously she has a motorcycle. There is no other vehicle she'd consider... But where does she attach Charlie's car-seat?

Thanks for reading through another week. Wow, we're at 2,500 kudos. You're all so amazing. Thanks for supporting my weird story.

Next week we'll follow Chloe's latest investigation, check-in with life in Hell, and get another look at how events of the apocalypse are affecting life now.
Running in Place

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

“Mrs. Fishburn. Thank you for meeting with me.” Chloe seated herself on the edge of a much too stiff sofa and tried not stare around the living room. The wallpaper was done in massive pink blossoms, and the room stank from warring jars of potpourri. Shelves lined the walls, every inch of them covered in staring porcelain dolls.

I wonder what level of Hell this would be, Chloe found herself musing.

The sixty-something-year-old woman smiled blandly at the detective. “Of course, of course. It’s been a long time since any police came to the house. My boy hasn’t done anything naughty, has he?”

“No. This is about your husband’s murder.”

The woman’s smile snapped to sorrow. “That awful business. So tragic. I thought they said they’d never learn who did it.”

Chloe tried to maintain a neutral expression.

The murder was several years old. She’d only come across it again when investigating the son in connection to another murder. He was rumored to have gang connections – odd since the family seemed well-off, apparently having invested well from the husband’s life insurance.

The husband had run security in a pharmaceutical warehouse. Tragedy had struck one night when he’d apparently surprised thieves in the act of making off with a shipment of painkillers. He’d been shot, the drugs stolen, and no clue had ever materialized regarding the identity of the thieves.

It had seemed like an inside job to the investigating detectives. Security cameras had been taken offline. The other guard was conveniently absent. The trucks had been in and out without a trace. The only blemish in the crime was the dead guard.

The other guard had been questioned relentlessly, along with anyone else who’d had access to the building. But the drugs had never been seen again, and no connection could be found to their disappearance and any influx of cash of anyone involved with the company.

The adult son of the Fishburn’s had as of late been attracting some notice on the streets. Chloe had asked Lucifer to see if his father could provide any information regarding his son’s associates.

‘I don’t know about the son,’ Lucifer wrote back, ‘But I seem to have solved a murder.’ He reported Mr. Fishburn’s Hell-Loop was nothing but a repeat of his wife gunning him down while he screamed his desire for revenge at her betrayal.

Now Chloe sat in the living room with a woman she knew had shot her husband, and she had absolutely no proof to the deed.

It would be easy to fall into punishing without a conviction. There was something so galling about a murderer smiling calmly and innocently at her. But Chloe would do it right. She was a cop. She’d hold true to what that meant.
Besides, she knew what was waiting for the woman in the end.

“Is something funny?” Mrs. Fishburn asked.

Chloe forced the small smile from her face. “I wanted to tell you I’ve been looking into your husband’s murder.”

“Have you now?” No change of expression.

Chloe mentally readied herself, then began the slow game of questions.

She began with things the woman would have answered a dozen times before. Did her husband have any enemies? Had he been worried? Had he known where the valuable products were kept in the warehouse? Did he trust his fellow guards? Had she been threatened? Did she have reason to believe her life was in danger?

That surprised the woman. “Me? Whoever would want to hurt me?”

And Chloe now spiraled around her son’s gang connections. What was his relationship with his father? How much had the son known about his father’s job? Had he purchased anything valuable without explaining where the money came from?

The woman was surprised by the questions, but never grew insulted. Her boy was good, deep down, she said. He may have gotten in some trouble, but he’d never resort to murder. He wasn’t like that.

Chloe assured her she couldn’t imagine someone raised by upright parents could ever deviate too far from the straight and narrow.

*What do you desire,* she asked in her mind. *Why would you murder your husband?*

There were so many reasons. It could be justified – abuse or threats. But the theft of six million dollars’ worth of prescription drugs certainly suggested specific motives.

Satisfied she’d gotten as much information as she could and directed the woman’s concerns into the directions she wanted, she said her goodbyes and returned to the car.

It would have been nice to have permission to plant bugs, but this would have to be done the old-fashioned way for now. Cold cases didn’t exactly receive the resources of open investigations.

She waited in her car for a few minutes, talking on her phone and making eyes at the house. She was only returning a phone call from her mother, but her annoyed expressions could probably be seen by the woman peering through the window blinds at her.

Her mother droned on. Chloe didn’t really listen, watching the house for any signs of activity instead. At last she extracted herself from the conversation and drove away, hoping she’d made impression enough to spook the son when she next questioned him.

Within five minutes she was stuck in the perpetual traffic jam which was Los Angeles and found herself with time to lean back and think.

“When are you getting a new partner?” She’d been asked by every person in the precinct. It was a fair question. It had been far too many months. Her partner was not returning. And she really should consider backup.
She’d attempted a few partners. The captain had assigned her two different rookie detectives with the belief she could mold them. One had moved away (no fault of Chloe’s). The other had changed partners… probably her fault. She just couldn’t settle with someone new.

She’d partnered with Dan a few times, but they’d agreed after the second attempt that their amiably-divorced relationship was too badly strained working that close together for too long. Lucifer’s harassment of Dan had always served as distraction so that she and Dan didn’t notice the things about one another which had driven them apart. Without him, old scars had a way of being chaffed into wounds once again. Besides, they realized, if they both worked the same case, who could pick up Trixie from her increasing number of after-school activities?

The captain was pushing her to further her career – take the sergeant’s exam. She had enough impressive arrests to her credit to be well on the way to receiving the notice necessary to become a captain if she played her cards right.

Yet Chloe found herself spinning her wheels. Not moving forward, not making changes. Avoiding a new partner. Avoiding life changes.

*This isn’t me,* she told herself repeatedly. She’d learned long before not to wallow. Her father’s murder had inspired her to become a cop, and she’d never regretted that life choice. It had given her direction to move forward instead of retreating into pain. When she’d been ostracized by the department for questioning the integrity of her fellow officers, she’d held her head up, gritted her teeth, and stuck with her beliefs. And she’d been proven right. She’d fought through suspicion, sexism, bad relationships, parental expectations, scorn, and setbacks to become the respected detective she was now.

So why did she feel unmoored and unable to return to shore? Why couldn’t she accept her life as it was now and move on?

Because, she sighed, a series of constant letters whispered of what she’d had.

And she couldn’t cut herself free from that loss.

Chapter End Notes

I generally have no interest in the murder-of-the-week part of *Lucifer* episodes, so this mini plot of Chloe actually doing her job won't last long. But it was a good way to check in with her mental health.

I've gotten the story fairly organized. Looks like it's going to be about 70 chapters - most of which are in some form of written. So, barring life emergencies, it looks like five updates a week will continue to the end, which will be around the beginning of Sept. Yikes. Sounds intense putting that down.

This week will introduce the last necessary plot threads. Please stick with me if the first couple days seem a little dull. Wed-Fri will make you happier. The next two weeks will be finishing up and bringing together various plotlines. Then onward toward the conclusion!
Adam watched his students with half an eye as they bent over their tests. One was trying to cheat off their neighbor. They looked up, met their teacher’s gaze, and hastily returned to their own work.

Teaching was fulfilling, Adam thought. He’d considered a few different careers, and a few different age groups. But, he thought he’d chosen correctly. His students were just out of childhood. The world was ahead of them but they were already beginning to feel the suspicion that those childhood certainties that they could do anything weren’t quite accurate. They were beginning to learn disappointment. Disillusionment.

Hope was the gift he thought he could best provide.

He taught them about their planet. About how precious it was. Did they understand the unending cycle one drop of water went through from ocean to cloud to back again? Did they see the beauty in a caterpillar’s struggle to break free of its cocoon and become a butterfly? Did they understand that a dead whale meant one less whale, and the world needed more, not less, of those?

In the night he still sometimes heard the voices whispering at him to just fix it all. End the wars. The pollution. The famines. When they were at their worst, he’d sit at the window, Dog crushed to his chest, chanting out the names of ordinary people who’d made a difference.

He’d become quite a student of history. In that his ‘godfathers’ had been quite helpful, even if he’d had to quietly clone Aziraphale’s more interesting books. (Even for the antichrist, the angel didn’t give up his library.)

He’d learned from them what they’d witnessed first-hand. And he’d learned the danger of interfering.

“Henry the eighth,” he’d once prompted when the conversation had flitted toward that topic.

The demon pointed an accusing finger at the angel. “That was all him.”

“Catherine of Aragon was a lovely woman,” Aziraphale protested miserably. “I didn’t think she deserved all the lies being told about her. I thought if the pope said they should remain married, Henry would settle down and treat her properly. And she was a far better queen than Anne Boleyn.”

“And the next thing you know, he’s begging Bloody Mary to stop lighting people on fire just because they don’t go to her church.” Crowley looked amused. “Great few decades for Hell… not so much for his side.”

From them Adam had learned the unintended consequences of interference. You never knew what you’d create.

“So, is it better to do nothing?” He’d asked.

“What did Burke write…?” Crowley mused with a glance at Aziraphale.
“The only thing necessary for the triumph of evil is for good men to do nothing,” the angel supplied.

The demon nodded. “You can call what I do tempting people to evil. Or, you can call it strengthening their resolve toward good. It has worked both ways. Sometimes change comes around because a good person stands up and says we’re not going to do that anymore. Sometimes change comes because something so awful happens that everyone takes a step back and agrees maybe they should make sure that never happens again. You never know what’ll change the world.”

So, Adam tried to inspire sparks to change the world. No powers, except maybe to find people with passion. They’d been easy to spot once Anathema taught him to see auras. He found people with dreams and tried to ignite them. Sometimes it worked. Some of his classmates were off fighting for the rainforest, and global unity, and alternatives to plastic. And some of them were in jail for passions taken too far.

Now he was a teacher. Now he hoped he could make a small difference. Even if it was just one school. But who knew which of these children could have the sparks to really change the world?

If he could only get through to them. Often he felt like he was slamming his fist against a brick wall. Even the ones who took interest in what he taught often couldn’t be bothered to think about changing the world the moment they left his classroom. They were worried about their own problems – romance, looks, popularity. The newest television program distracted. The newest fashion demanded their money.

And, worse, were the ones so trapped in the pain of their own lives that they couldn’t see anything else. Adam saw the ones with the scars on their arms. With hunger in their eyes. With fear in their stance when they heard their parents’ voices.

You couldn’t think of higher matters when you were hungry. You couldn’t think of changing laws when you feared abuse at home.

Worst of all was the emptiness. The dead souls. He felt them wherever he went. The people who had given up. Who had resigned themselves to a hopeless existence which would end in a Hell-Loop they’d never try to break. The living dead.

Adam felt Dog pressing against his ankle. Dog always knew when Adam fell too deep and was there to bring him back. Dog was something real. Something so very of Earth, no matter where he’d begun. Something constant to bring Adam home.

He reached down and scratched Dog’s head, mentally promising his pedigree mutt a nice opportunity to chase rabbits that evening.

The students continued to labor at their tests while the prince-of-this-world mused that perhaps a school dance charity fundraiser could combine their immediate concerns with a larger picture.

~

“Dan? I thought you were off today.” Chloe blinked at the sight of her ex-husband trudging through the precinct with a downcast air. “What’s wrong?”

Dan took a long breath before answering. “I… just arrested someone from my improv class.”

“Oh, no.”
He closed his eyes, pain written on his face. “He came in… and he wasn’t right. But we started, and I thought he settled down. Then, he took a swing at another guy, and just started beating him. And while we were pulling them apart, his backpack tipped, and a bag of meth fell out.”

“Oh, Dan.” Chloe offered him a hug.

Dan was unresponsive. “Most of them didn’t know I was a cop… The looks they gave me…” He took a ragged breath. “That was supposed to be my escape. Somewhere to work out stuff. Have some fun. Not be…” He waved a hand at the station. “…This.”

“I know. I’m so sorry.”

He took a shaky step away. “I have to finish booking the guy… then…”

“Let me take care of that for you,” Chloe suggested. “Go take your day off.”

“I think it’s ruined at this point.”

Chloe was resolute. It took a little prompting, but at last he left, and Chloe headed for the holding cell.

Drug abuse was rampant everywhere. Needles lay openly in the gutters. Empty buildings housed meth labs and crack dens. The desperate stole to feed their addictions. Bodies of overdose victims were found frequently. Hospitals and jails regularly housed unfortunate souls.

At the holding tank, Ella stood on the other side of the glass, talking with an inmate who sobbed madly.

“I didn’t mean to hit her!” He wailed. “She didn’t deserve it. She’s too good for me.”

“Yeah, she sounds like a great car,” Ella agreed. “And what you did with that tire iron was just criminal.”

The man collapsed against the glass, weeping openly.

“So… maybe it’s time to get some help?” Ella murmured. “I know a good clinic…”

Chloe retrieved the man Dan had arrested and headed upstairs.

“How often do you go down there?” She asked Ella later.

“Whenever I have spare time on my lunch break,” the forensic scientist answered. “I just talk to them. Most of them are just so scared and lonely, you know?” Her eyes filled with sorrow. “Why does the world make people feel so empty?”

Chloe shook her head. “Probably because there aren’t enough people like you trying to make it better.”

“Chloe!” Ella laughed. “You do the same.”

“I don’t know if I have your capacity to try and make people’s worst days a little easier.”

“No?” Ella grinned and leaned against her. “Then why are you doing Dan’s paperwork?”

~
“Oh, how awful,” Eve gasped as they emerged from the forest and into the devastated land.

Eve hadn’t quite known what she was signing up for when she agreed to plant trees. She hadn’t known about the California wildfires and the tragedies they caused. Towns and forest destroyed in the wake of the increasing terror. Dry land, so easily ignited by human error. Tragedy followed.

Siobhan, the project leader, had plenty to say. About human carelessness. About misuse of water resources. About global warming. About how the rich’s homes were protected while the poor saw their towns burn.

Eve tried to be positive. Ash was good for the soil. The trees would be well-nurtured. And it was nice some of the wealthy were generous enough with their money to provide all these seedlings. And, surely, people would learn from the tragedy and better protect all humankind from this happening again.

To the last Siobhan only scoffed. The fires grew worse every year. Didn’t anyone care? No! Bottled water companies drained the rivers. Factories clogged the air with smog and pollutants. Greenhouse gases warmed and destroyed the ozone.

It was all hopeless.

And yet, Eve noticed, Siobhan and her friends were out there every day. Planting trees. Walking everywhere they could. Collecting trash. Eating locally-sourced goods. Relentless that if the planet was going down, they’d work to counter the coming end as long as they could.

But even as she worked gamely beside them, she saw the other side. She saw the indifference in people who slowed down their cars long enough to throw fresh trash on the roadside where they worked. She saw the hollow-eyed people who had seen their lives ravaged by fire and had nowhere else to go. She heard the laughter from business executives when asked for donations, or to please stop throwing hazardous waste into the river.

There was a deadness to people she’d never noticed before. In Heaven perhaps she’d only seen one side of humanity. The ones who’d striven for better. But there were the rest, so caught in their own lives that they didn’t notice anything else.

It stung her soul. Once her life had been full of vibrant green. Now the world seemed hopeless and brown.

"We had paradise once," one of the team members grumbled one night as they sat around their campsite. "The Garden of Eden and all that stuff. Then humanity ruined it."

“All wrong for you,” Siobhan teased, nudging Eve. “You can’t help who you were named after.”

Eve had learned it was better not to tell people who she really was. Nobody believed her anyway, and her identification certainly didn’t say she was 6,000 years old or created from a rib. Easier just to create Eve Gardner from her birth in the 1980’s than reveal any details from before that.

This time, she spoke up. “Do you know what happened after w… they left the Garden?”


Eve found herself smiling a little. “They had kids eventually. But first they had to find a place to settle down. And when they did, they built a garden.”
She leaned back against a rock and shifted a little closer to Siobhan. “The earth was hard and dry. They didn’t know about water. Or how to till the soil. Or what was safe to eat. But they learned. They tended the Earth, and gradually those plants blossomed. The plants gave them food and shelter. But mostly.” She looked out at the expanse of land around them. “They gave them a place to call home. And that gave them hope.”

She smiled. “That’s what we’re planting here. Hope.”

Chapter End Notes

Quote Source: Thoughts on the Cause of the Present Discontents by Edmund Burke.

Hey, Dan actually got a scene. At the absolute last minute. It was supposed to be Trixie, but that failed miserably.
Crowley watched the high drama in the throne room from a secluded crevice in the wall.

Running Hell had kept Lucifer busy as of late. He hadn’t had time to finish any letters, leaving Crowley stuck Below. It meant he’d slept enough to feel awake and bored. Leaving the castle still wasn’t a safe occupation, but the brand gave him access to most of the palace, so he’d begun to explore.

Watching politics unfold in the throne room was a lesson in tedium and a fascinating observation of posturing. Every demon in the room played a role – showing off how large and impressive they could be, or non-threatening, or loyal, or clever. Crowley wondered if any single one of them displayed an ounce of truth in word or deed.

The Throne of Hell could be found wherever Lucifer wanted it to be. Some days he sat high above the city, looking down on the madness of Hell from his lofty perch. Wyverns and harpies clung to the ragged spire of the throne’s base. Woe to any who dared fly too near their Lord when he desired solitude.

Within the palace was the ornate throne room – a room which could be as large as it needed to be to hold those attendant upon the King. Whether intimate enough for a private audience with visiting dignitaries, or massive enough to hold the teeming hordes of Hell, the room was meant to intimidate. The colossal arched ceilings were done in jeweled mosaics glorifying the Lord of Hell and his accomplishments. Statues and tapestries lined the walls, each one crafted and presented as an offering to he who had been Lord and Master of the Fallen since their descent.

Crowley found it all very pretentious and superfluous. It reminded him of churches he’d seen back before the reformation – blinding with gold while the peasantry starved outside the barred gates. He still had a low opinion of cathedrals – one of many things he and Aziraphale had argued about throughout the years (although the suspected Aziraphale agreed with him).

Lucifer was enthroned this day, looking impressive and alert for the moment. The six princes of Hell sat in lower thrones in a half circle around him. Beelzebub and Mammon had the seats at Lucifer’s right and left. Belial and Marchosias were stationed in the middle of the rows, with the two lesser demons flanking on the ends. The old guard cast the occasional withering glare at the new princes. Marchosias smugly ignored them. The Lilim gritted their fangs and tried to sit tall.

The rest of the room was crowded with guards, scribes, attendants, nobles, servants, curiosity seekers, and supplicants. If there was an order to the chaos, it would have taken a wiser mind than Crowley’s to find it.

Cases were brought before the throne. Some came with petty issues of land claims, murder, theft, and the like. Most of these were handed off. The Lord of Hell had made it clear that every small matter wasn’t his business any longer. There were proper authorities. Those authorities were to be fair or they’d hear from their ruler. The demons were to follow proper procedures.

It wasn’t, Crowley noticed after a time, more important issues which now reached the throne. It was the same petty problems, but it was the nobility of Hell who felt they deserved their King’s personal attention. They wouldn’t be dissuaded by officials claiming there were channels to follow.
Lucifer was not impressed.

Crowley snickered quietly to witness dukes and counts being made to understand they weren’t nearly as important as they thought.

The session concluded at last. Lucifer swept out with retainers and guards flanking him. The princes left with rival pomp. The rest of the crowd splintered into small groups, now more vocal to share their real opinions about the changing makeup of the court and Hell’s new regulations.

Crowley thought it was a good time to slip out. He crawled from concealment and worked his way along the wall toward the nearest door. He threaded through knots of demons, willing himself to be as unremarkable as possible.

“…don’t matter how strange it is! He’s our King an’ if he says we’re gonna… YOU!”

Crowley reared back as Hastur’s eyes locked on him. How had he missed-?! He’d forgotten Hastur was so very skilled at lurking. He turned tail and bolted.

The demon charged after him, roaring in fury.

Crowley fled as fast as he could slither. Hastur and far too many of his buddies were swift on his tail. Hands grabbed at him from all angles, but Crowley dodged his way amidst the crowd, forcing the larger demons to slow and shove through surprised gaggles. Several fights broke out behind him as demons blundered against each other and reacted with violence.

The main entrances were blocked with too many bodies. Crowley darted for the throne and the doors behind it.

A guard put out a spear to halt his flight.

Crowley arched his neck, showing off the brand.

The guard nodded and let him pass.

He slowed a relieved fraction, better planning his escape route away from certain death. Hastur would have to argue his way through. Crowley had a little breathing room.

Relief lasted until he heard voices behind him.

“It was him! In the throne room!”

“Summon my legions! We’ll watch every exit.”

Beelzebub!

A fresh wave of terror hit the serpent. Both of them-?! He had to find somewhere to hide. And fast! The pounding feet were getting closer.

He cast out his senses, searching for any useful scent. Something… there had to be something… there was always a way…

~

“He came through here! I smell him!”

A half dozen demons burst through the door, weapons raised and snarls on their muzzles.
They were greeted by a furious crowd of guards bearing the insignia for the house of a prince of Hell.

“Out of our way!” An advancing guard roared. “We’re on a hunt!”

“These chambers are restricted!” The opposing guards roared back.

Beelzebub shoved her way to the front of the crowd with Hastur on her heels. “They’re here on my authority. Let us pass!”

“What’s the commotion about?” Asked a voice from deeper within the room.

“Prince Beelzebub is here, my prince!” The head of the guards replied.

“Let her in.”

Beelzebub stormed into the room, her body more than half dissolved into flies. “Where,” She buzzed. “Izzz he?”

Reclining on the floor, scrolls and books stacked around him, was Marchosias. Beside him sat Decabra and several scribes. The wolf-demon showed off a pale row of fangs as he turned his head. “He who?”

“The zzerpent.” Beelzebub forced her body to reform at least around the mouth, though the rest of her was still half dissolved into whirling insects.

“Serpent?” Decabra looked scornful. “There are thousands of snakes in Hell. If you want a meal, hunt elsewhere.”

“No!” Beelzebub nearly lost her shape in a rush of anger. “The serpent. That damned worm, Crawly.”

Marchosias glanced around the room, his expression languid when his eyes returned to her. “Is there really much difference between one snake and another?”

“We tracked ‘im!” Hastur bellowed. “We picked up that filthy snake smell and it led us right here.”

Marchosias growled, his serpentine tail twitching in a meaningful way. “Filthy?”

“What? No! You ain’t filthy!”

The wolf continued to snarl. “This is a private meeting to discuss legal matters. You barge in with armed guards. You insult me. You disrespect my guards.”

Beelzebub drew herself up. “I am a prince of the realm.”

“As am I. As is Decabra.” Tufts of flames darted from Marchosias’ maw. “Disagree with that all you like, but it’s true. And we except equal respect from you.”

Beelzebub eyed the two princes and their guards with open loathing. “You won’t last,” she spat. She whirled away. “Hastur! We’re losing the trail. Onward!”

When they’d gone Marchosias uttered quiet thanks to the demons in the room. The scribes and guards filed out until only Marchosias and Decabra remained.
The wolf stood up, glaring down at the serpent coiled beneath him. “If you’re going to hide, don’t wiggle the whole time.”

“I get twitchy when Beelzebub talks,” Crowley said sheepishly.

Marchosias leaped onto a low couch and rested his head on the arm. “Why haven’t you done anything about Hastur yet?”

“What can I do?” The serpent replied bitterly.

“Challenge him!” Decabra snapped. “If he’s dead, your problems are over.” She flexed her triple set of arms in emphasis. Decabra’s human persona might have heavily resembled Judi Dench, but in her demonic form she’d been known to snap opponent in half and swallow the remains whole.

Crowley snorted. “He wouldn’t be the one who’s dead at the end of the fight.”

“Tell our King then,” the wolf-demon prodded.

Crowley flinched. “That’s a very terrible idea.”

“He likes you. You’re probably one of the few he’d actually protect.”

“He doesn’t like me. He’s hated me since the Garden. He never forgave me for ruining his private time with Eve.”

Marchosias snorted a puff of smoke. “He branded you. That means something.”

The serpent hunched his neck, covering the mark in evident discomfort. “Mostly proves I’m property of the crown.”

“There you go,” Marchosias replied cheerily. “He won’t like Hastur breaking his things.”

“Don’t act like that,” Decabra scowled. “Most of Hell would give someone’s right arm for that kind of mark of favor.”

“Crowley’s not everyone,” Marchosias yawned. “He’s too invested in sweet angel cuddles to curry favor with our Lord and Master. How did Aziraphale take the sight of your lovely tattoo?”

“Not well.”

“Oh?” Marchosias wagged his tail. “Stomped his foot and shook his fist?”

“He sent Lucifer a strongly worded letter.”

There was a moment of silence. Then Marchosias rolled off the couch in a fit of laughter.

Crowley hissed irritably. He arched his neck in threat display.

“I’m sorry.” Marchosias swiped his tongue across the serpent’s face. “How very angelic of him.”

“It’s all he can do!” Crowley settled back in a tight knot. “It’s driving him crazy that I keep sauntering off to Hell and all he can do is wait. Even if our King hadn’t sealed the gates, Hell doesn’t exactly welcome visiting angels.”

“At least you still get walkies,” Decabra reasoned. “The rest of us are tenured for eternity.” She reached out two hands and scratched Marchosias’ exposed belly.
The wolf-demon’s leg twitched and his eyes rolled back in clear enjoyment of the contact.

Crowley glanced between them with a look of surprise, then understanding. He turned deliberately away, flicking his tongue toward the door. “I should go before they double back. Thanks for helping me.”

“You’re always welcome,” Marchosias agreed.

“Mostly always welcome.” Decabra gave the wolf a meaningful look.

“Right.” Crowley uncoiled. “How goes your trial prep?”

Marchosias rolled off his back. “I know what happened. Now just to convince to Hell to save a few demon lives by the power of love!”

The serpent snorted. “Nobody in Hell understands a fragment of love.”

“We do!” Decabra snapped.

“We’re corrupted,” Crowley countered. “ Humanity does that. Trying to prove to the Hell-bound idiots that kinder emotions exist…” He shook his head.

“Marchie’s going to do it,” Decabra declared loyally, one hand resting on the wolf’s shoulders. “If our King believes, the rest WILL follow.” Her expression turned slightly desperate. “They have to.”

Crowley made as best a bow as a serpent could. “Good luck, oh princes of Hell.”

“Come visit us sometime when you’re not running for your life!” Marchosias called as the serpent slipped out the door.

~

“He can’t have vanished!” Hastur looked ready to tear all of Beelzebub’s guards asunder. “We was so close!”

“He can’t go far,” Beelzebub reasoned. “There aren’t many places in the castle the worm can go without being stopped. My demons stand at every exit. We’ll find him. No matter how long it takes.”

“It’s too long already!” Hastur wailed. “He shoulda been burnin’ forever ago for what he did to Ligur.”

“You’ll have your revenge,” Beelzebub promised. “We both will.”

Alone, Hastur wiped away the tears he definitely wasn’t crying. “Dunt want revenge,” he grumbled. “I want Ligur.”

He threw back his head, roaring pain and fury toward Heaven. “It ain’t fair!” He screamed. “Everythin’ else got put back! Why not Ligur!!”

Chapter End Notes
Before you ask, yes, you will see Aziraphale's letter.

I didn't mention before, because in the original draft she wasn't meant to be a fleshed out character (sometimes stories surprise you!) but Decabra is an Original Character. There is a demon called Decarabia in The Lesser Key of Solomon, which is where the name came from. But I didn't want Decabra to be anyone of rank, so she's my own creation. Yay.
Twenty years before…

Putting the world back exactly how it had been proved a difficult task for an eleven-year-old mind. Some things were simple, of course. Tibetans went back to Tibet. Atlantis returned to the bottom of the ocean. Confused aliens forgot why they’d deviated from course to bring messages of peace and galactic love.

On another plane of existence, Adam and Azrael engaged in a brief and wordless discussion regarding the souls of the dead. It was Death who gave ground, allowing telemarketers, delivery men, biker gangs, and motorists to return to their bodies.

Trees shrunk back to their original size (some stayed a touch bigger because they’d tried so hard to reforest the world and Adam couldn’t entirely force them to go back to being saplings). The kraken returned to slumber until the real end times. The fish returned to the ocean.

Roadways were cleared of traffic. Buildings restored. Cars rightened and repaired.

But one thing gave an eleven-year-old mind a burst of confusion.

It was a pile of melted ash and goo floating in the remains of a puddle of holy water.

The only occult casualty of the war.

If there had been others, perhaps Adam would have properly puzzled through what he was looking at, but he was in a bit of a hurry and a touch distracted trying to fix everything while his Earthly father scolded him for being where he didn’t belong. He knew the puddle didn’t belong where it was, so he rolled back the clock, tried to restore it to what it had been, and moved on without another thought.

He rolled back too far.

If Crowley hadn’t taken the time drive Aziraphale past the ruins of his bookshop, and then halted there in amazement to find it restored, he might have returned a quarter of an hour sooner to his apartment. Or if he could have spoken to his plants, they would have told him of a curious figure who’d stumbled in a daze through the rooms, trying to make sense of a whirling head and suddenly restored feathery wings.

But by the time Crowley arrived, and finished hugging the Bentley parked at the curb, there was no sign that the angel Kokbiel had ever been there.

They did lunch at the Ritz without concern of who – Above or Below – might see them. After standing against Riders, armies, and the devil himself, they couldn’t find energy to care who saw them sharing a table.

“It’s exactly the way it was,” Crowley said, meaning his apartment. “But I still see it. That puddle of demon goo…” He wavered. Confessing weakness wasn’t something a demon did.
He didn’t say he hadn’t stayed there the night before. He’d been exhausted. He’d wandered the apartment, checked the plants, assured himself the canister of holy water was truly gone, and prodded himself to just go to bed. And then he’d curled up in the back of the Bentley and slept away the lingering tension of the apocalypse.

“I’ll sell the place,” he said carelessly. “I’ve lived there long enough anyway. It’s not the best anymore. I’ll find somewhere loud. Alive.”

“Um,” said Aziraphale. This um meant more than he could express. What it meant was he’d had a sudden image spring to mind when Adam announced he’d put the world back exactly as it was. An image of Crowley and himself under the same roof. Silly, he knew. Dangerous to them probably. But it had been a nice sort of dream to cling to as the apocalypse swirled around them.

Crowley drove them back to the bookshop, taking Aziraphale up on his offer to show off the new additions to his collection. Crowley slid into a spot conveniently open just in front of the shop. He got out, leaning on the car door as he gazed up at the building. “Didn’t it used to be smaller?”

Aziraphale looked up, and his heart gave a surprised leap as he discovered the building now had an additional story.

Of course they climbed the stairs immediately, surveying the open and empty floor space. Aziraphale remarked over things like sturdy floors and a very modern kitchen. Crowley immediately found stairs leading up the roof. He slid back down, announcing it was perfectly flat and ideal for a garden.

They went down to the bookshop where cataloguing the sudden influx of Stevenson and Verne novels occupied their minds. And also bemoaning that Adam’s wine selection was rubbish. They drank some of it anyway.

It was late when Crowley shook off the alcohol, slid into his car and drove away.

Aziraphale was left stewing and staring at the ceiling, wondering how he could think to suggest what he desperately wanted to suggest.

If Crowley had not passed a moving van on the way back to his flat, maybe things would have been different. But he did. And then he doubled back, parked the Bentley, dumped everything out of the van, and drove off with it.

And so, while in Detroit a young girl was being pried out of what should have been a fatal car wreck, and in Los Angeles a teen was protesting to her mother that she didn’t want her first starring role to include a nude scene, Crowley was stuffing his plants and personal possessions into the van and driving back across the city.

~

The angel Kokbiel returned to the apartment in the early hours of Monday morning after a long and confused flight over continental Europe. He didn’t have the faintest idea where he was, but he’d started in the apartment, so he assumed it was his home base.

He thought there had been more greenery before, but his mind was still terrifically hazy, so he didn’t wonder too much.

Crowley had mostly left the flat fully-furnished. He’d barely used the electronics and felt his current décor wouldn’t fit the new place. About the only thing he took was the bed, thus leaving the flat inviting for anyone who might wish to take it.
The angel explored, finding a fridge stuffed with food and the TV stuffed with movie channels. He settled back for his first taste of Tikki Masala and tried to make sense of the current century.

He roamed London, hunting for anything familiar. He found he preferred nighttime to daylight, which put him in touch with interesting people. He got involved with a BDSM group, and that felt familiar at least. He wore a lot of leather.

He found his way into a planetarium one evening, and that felt familiar too. Since most people seemed to have day jobs, he got one in the gift shop. He was soon promoted to giving scripted talks in the planetarium. So long as he stayed on script, he was fine. When asked questions, he tended to refer to stars by names no one had ever heard, or could pronounce. He talked in great detail about constellations which couldn’t be seen anymore because of the light pollution.

With his paycheck, he tried to buy things which felt like him. Nagged by the feeling there had been greenery in the apartment before, he bought a couple plants, but that didn’t seem right. He bought an ant farm and that felt better.

He tried visiting a church, thinking perhaps that would jog his memory. He didn’t know why he tensed when he crossed the threshold, but nothing happened. Still, he didn’t settle at all, and when he saw a basin of holy water, he experienced an absolute panic attack and bolted.

On his day’s off, he visited national parks, and felt a confused duality. He wanted to be closer to the sky, but he also had the distinct impression he’d been living somewhere where there were no stars. He felt safer with a roof over his head… but he wanted to be outside.

Once someone tried to rob him at knife point. Although he accepted self-preservation was an instinct angels should reasonably have, he reflected that what he did with the corpse afterward wasn’t particularly angelic.

He ate a lot of meat.

With all the visiting of parks, he eventually became involved with groups creating dark skies parks. That felt right. He liked the darkness. He liked the stars. He felt like there was a good reason to limit incursion into nature.

He was on the ground floor of getting several of the UK’s parks certified as dark parks.

He sometimes thought about moving out of London, but the flat still felt like the closest he had to a home so he stayed. It was more than he could afford on his salary, but he’d found quite a cache of pounds under a floorboard (one of Crowley’s many emergency stashes) and he had no trouble with rent. He didn't bother with utilities or taxes.

Several humans – male, female, and otherwise – propositioned him for everything ranging from getting coffee after work to casual foreplay to more aggressive entertainment. He took them up on all of it, finding no real preference for any type of human. He liked his time with them, but he felt he already had someone important to him. If he could just recall who…

He thought sometimes that he should return to the Silver City. That ought to have been his first thought, really. No doubt he’d find his memories there. But… a nagging thought said he wouldn’t be welcomed there. So, he stayed on Earth.

And then one night, after twenty years of living his somewhat human life, he heard a call.

“YOU DO NOT BELONG HERE!” Came a voice from across the sea, and Down Below and
within his own mind. “GO HOME!”

It was a voice he felt he should obey, and also felt it was important not to obey. He stood uncertainly, grappling against the uncomfortable duality in his chest. Should he listen? And if he did… where was Home?

Not Earth, no. This was definitely not where he was supposed to be. Somewhere else was meant to be Home.

The Silver City? It made sense, even if something inside him insisted, no, that wasn’t where he belonged. But it had to be, didn’t it? He was an angel. He knew his Almighty-given name. Heaven was where he’d begun.

After days of grappling with the confusing feelings, he locked up the flat and climbed to the roof. He spread his wings – the dark and silent wings of a great grey owl – and flew Heaven-ward.

There was confusion at the gates when Kokbiel, once the guardian of the night sky and long counted among the Fallen, flew to the archway of Heaven and requested entrance. Of course they let him in. He was clearly an angel. But what to do with him once he was there?

Someone eventually suggested Amenadiel should be consulted. He’d been deeply involved with fighting the rebellion, and he was much more reasonable than Michael. And Gabriel had been irritable beyond belief since the failed apocalypse. A messenger hastened to Earth to find the first-born.

Amenadiel listened seriously and debated his options. Considering recent events, it seemed the wrong time to bother Luci about this. Leaving a note for Linda and Maze that he had family trouble to deal with, he returned to the Silver City to unravel the mystery of a restored Fallen, who’d never been redeemed.

Chapter End Notes

Did I surprise you? I saw one person guessed correctly in the comments yesterday. Well done!
“If you’ll testify against your friends, I promise I’ll talk to the DA. We can get you a lighter sentence. Minimum security prison. Maybe even time served.”

Chloe put on her most persuasive voice as she blocked Nathan Fishburn from bolting from the abandoned building.

He wasn’t a bad young man, she thought. Bad home life. Bad crowd. If he’d had better influences, maybe he’d have found a better career path than replacing prescription drugs with placebos.

Brilliant, really. Now that she’d found most of the story. The break-in had been to force the company to install new security features – ones already under the control of a respectably organized crime group. Not only had they had a nice profit from stealing the drugs, they’d then had access to the warehouse itself. They’d been stealing and replacing drugs at a steady, lucrative trickle. Despite some hiccups – like Mrs. Fishburn murdering her reluctant husband and demanding his cut – the plan had been moving along just fine. But recently one of the gang had had second thoughts after watching their grandfather’s struggle with the pain of cancer. They’d wanted out. They were dead. Nathan was meant to be the fall guy. They’d promised payments to his mother as long as he was in jail.

But Chloe had run him down too soon. And she’d tracked down the story by the time she had though she still had little proof. Difficult to prosecute when several of her witnesses were dead. But if Nathan would testify…

“What about my mother?” He whined in the frightened way of one who’d never escaped his parents’ shadow.

“You know she killed your father?”

He trembled, nodding unwillingly.

“She should pay for that, shouldn’t she?” Chloe pressured. “Do you really want to live in fear of her forever?”

This is taking too long, she thought. She had to get Nathan away from the building, much as she would love to call for backup right now to seize the pill manufacturing equipment and boxes of placebos Nathan had unwittingly led her to. Someone was sure to come looking for him soon.

She said as much, pointing out he’d be dead if he was caught talking to the police.

That did it. He led her toward the exit.

They hadn’t gone far when a flicker of movement prompted Chloe to throw herself on top of Nathan, driving them both to the ground.

Bullets cracked over their heads.

Nathan shrieked.
“Stay down.” Chloe drew her gun. “LAPD!” She shouted. “Put down your weapons!”

Gunfire answered her shout.

Two of them, she thought. She dragged Nathan into the shelter of a collapsed wall. Not bad odds. If she could get one in her sights…

Or call for backup.

Backup. This was what partners were for.

A shot rang close to her shoulder and she ducked lower.

“Arnie!” Nathan screamed, leaping to his feet. “Help! She’s got me! I didn’t tell-” His words turned to a screech as bullet slashed across his skull.

Chloe pulled him down, using her jacket to pin the wound closed. He seemed to have just been grazed. But head wounds bled so much it was hard to tell.

Nathan writhed and wailed.

“Quiet!” Chloe demanded. She took a firmer grip on her gun and prepared to rise and fight her way out.

There was a long moment of silence, then a panicked yowl from one of her attackers.

“What?!” The other voice shouted.

“There’s a huge snake over here!”

“Well, get away from it!”

“I can’t! It’s gonna bite me if I move. Shoot it!”

“Arnie!” More voices sounded in chorus, accented by the rhythm of pounding feet. “What’s with the shooting?”

“Some cop’s got Nate!”

“Where are they?”

“Over there!”

“SOMEONE SHOOT THIS SNAKE!”

The voice sounded absolutely panicked.

Several seconds of gunfire and swearing followed.

This was the best distraction Chloe thought she’d get. She grabbed Nathan around the middle and crawled from the room. In the hallway beyond, she rose and fled, dragging the half-conscious young man along with her.

Behind came shouts and gunfire, then a screech of pain. Words came out garbled to her ears.

“…where’d it go…”
“…gun blew up…”

“…the cop…”

“…Get Nate…”

“…not moving with a snake around…”

“…someone stop them…”

“…getting away…”

Chloe had no idea where she was going as she rushed through the decrepit building in search of an exit. Nathan was leaving a trail of blood behind, and he was absolute dead weight. Alone she might have a chance, but she wasn’t leaving him to certain death.

She caught a flicker of movement at the corner of her eye. Her head snapped around with an instinctive surge of fear as a dark-colored snake slithered past her. Her hand tensed on her gun, even as her brain reminded her the snake was probably just scared and lost. Certainly, it was leaving her alone.

She approached an intersection. Ahead, the snake halted. It looked right and left, looked back at her, blinked one eye, and chose the left branch.

Chloe spent a second in blank staring. Had a snake just… winked at her? Well, she’d had weirder experiences. She turned left.

Another few turns, then down a flight of rickety-but-stable stairs, and they reached a basement maze of debris piles and nonsensical halls. Ahead was a door so rusted over it didn’t look as if it had opened since the building was constructed.

The snake reared up and hissed at the door.

It swung open.

Chloe dragged Nathan through the door and into the darkness beyond.

The door slammed shut behind her.

Chloe switched on her pocket flashlight, scanning around what appeared to be the boiler room. There was no other exit.

Her flashlight beam swept back over the snake crouched by the door. The light reflected a red gleam in its eyes. It hissed. Her flashlight went out.

Chloe suppressed a fresh surge of panic. She clapped her hand over Nathan’s mouth to stifle his groans as she heard muffled voices through the door.

For an eternity, the voices milled about, moving closer and more distant at unsteady intervals. Gradually, they faded into silence.

A single lightbulb came on overhead, turning the room to ominous shadows.

Chloe looked down at Nathan. He’d fallen unconscious. She wrapped the jacket in tighter tourniquet around his head wound. Nothing serious, she thought. Provided it didn’t get infected. She’d have to get him out of here as soon as possible.
The snake hadn’t moved from the door. When it noticed her eyes on it, it crawled closer, approaching cautiously with several wary pauses.

Chloe’s mind was having troubles. Some instinct was screaming at her to shoot the serpent before it could get near her. A more rational part was thinking of seven-year-old Trixie with her face pressed against the glass of a snake cage at the zoo, loudly declaring snakes to be amazing.

Another part was inexplicably imagining Eve cuddling affectionately with this particular snake. She stifled down any lingering fear and spoke carefully. “So that Serpent of Eden thing isn’t a metaphor?”

“We don’t really go for metaphors,” the snake replied.

His voice sounded awkward, as if he was having trouble forming the words. Still, the tone was familiar. Enough for her to put away her gun. “Were you following me?” She asked.

“Not intentionally.” The serpent crawled closer. “I just got in. They said at the precinct you were on a stakeout. Those always seem boring on TV, so I thought you’d like the mail now. I saw those guys checking out your car, so I followed them inside.”

“Thank you.” Chloe pulled out her phone. “No signal.”

“Let me see it.”

She lowered the phone and the serpent glared at it for a moment. “Try it now,” he said.

Chloe raised the phone, finding it fully charged and the signal clear. A swift call to dispatch and she had assurances of backup as soon as humanly possible. Considering crime rates in LA, and traffic, she suspected they’d be in for a wait. She sat back against the wall. “Are you alright?” She asked Crowley after a moment of watching him curl into a tighter and tighter bundle.

“Cold floor,” he explained, burrowing his head beneath his coils.

“Why don’t you transform?”

“I’m barely keeping from passing out as it is.”

Chloe fought down a wave of fear and held out her hand. “Here.”

Crowley arched away from her. “I shouldn’t.”

“It’s alright,” Chloe insisted. “I don’t want you freezing.”

He crawled reluctantly up her arm and settled over her shoulders, wrapping his coils once around her neck. “Thanks.”

The sensation of scales made her skin crawl. She forced herself to remain calm. It was like seeing Lucifer’s face the first few times. She just had to remember the identity beneath the impossible. “It’s the least I can do. After everything you’ve done for Lucifer and me.”

Crowley huffed a tired laugh. “Whatever my King commands.” There was a note of exhaustion in his voice.

Chloe abruptly recalled the bruised and frightened demon who’d walked into her life months before. She’d grown accustom to his tired demeanor, and the bruises had faded from memory. It
had been easy to pretend there was nothing questionable about this situation. “You’re not being… forced to do something you don’t want to, are you?”

The silence went on longer than she would have liked. “Aziraphale’s on Earth,” the serpent said at last. “I do what I have to if it gets me to him.”

“You can’t just be here on your own?”

“After what Dromos did, Lucifer locked us all down there. He only lets me leave because I can sneak out by the back door.”

Chloe’s stomach churned. “But he could trap you there? Do whatever he wants? No one could stop him?”

The serpent lifted his head. “He’d never hurt you, if you’re worried about that.”

“No, I know.” That wasn’t what frightened her. She knew that already. He’d take every bullet to keep her safe. “There’s a whole other side of Lucifer I’ve barely seen… and I try not to be afraid of it.” She took a breath. “The way he forced those demons back to Hell… to just command like that. And they had to do what he said…”

It was easier to believe in Lucifer’s kindness when he was here. When she saw the proof of who he was beneath the twisted face. But he’d been gone so long. She found herself thinking of those historical documents Father Kinley had found. Was she deluding herself? “There’s good deep down. No matter what face he’s wearing…” She heard the doubt in her voice.

“Has he told you much about Hell?” Crowley asked. “How he began?”

“No… I didn’t want to know.” She hesitated. “Why?”

“You should understand who he was. And why.”

Chloe clenched her fist. In her mind she tried to bring up the image of the man she loved. It came out at war with the thing which had frightened her. The life she’d lost him to. “Okay.” She said at last.

Crowley spoke slowly. “We Fell. Him. Me. Thousands of others. For a lot of reasons. Jealousy. Pride. Desire for something besides the roles we’d been assigned. Asking the wrong questions. Playing badly with others. Maybe some good reasons. Definitely some bad. There were plenty who Fell because they were nasty pieces of work who just wanted to watch everything burn.

“And then we were loose and lawless in a new realm. Someone had to make order out of the mess. We would have slaughtered each other otherwise. The things Lucifer had to do… He fought his way to the throne and he held it by proving he was stronger than the lot of us again and again and again.

“That kind of brutality… you’ve seen it with humans, haven’t you? It can become all they are. It’s easy to forget there are other solutions. Lucifer’s smart. He always knew there was more than just hurting us into falling in line. You know what he can do with desires. He learned how to control us. Fear. Devotion. It was all tied up together.”

Chloe shuddered.

“But, he always had… I don’t know… Logic? Justice? About what he did. When the Lilim were born, he wouldn’t let the Fallen make slaves out of them. They had to earn their right to live, but he
gave them more of a chance than anyone else.

“And when the human souls started to descend, he condoned their torture. But only to the extent of their crimes. And some got out – got past their guilt. And he let them go. He chose to give them a chance.” He paused a moment. "He's not always good. Certainly doesn't always make the kindest choices. But he's not evil. Just... struggling."

Chloe tried to make sense of it in her mind. Cruelty and goodness all bundled up into one. Evil incarnate according to every book ever written, but she knew better. She’d seen kindness.

“Since he came back,” Crowley went on. “He’s been trying. Following Dr. Martin’s advice. Yours. But it’s a fight against thousands of years of instinct. So... sometimes he forgets, and sometimes he still has to be brutal. But he’s trying. He's learning. You did that.”

Chloe found herself laughing a little weakly. It wasn’t funny. But it fought back the tidal wave of emotions threatening to overwhelm her. “I don’t know if I can do this. Be the devil’s guiding light. That’s… a lot.”

“He said you accepted him for what he is. Both sides of him.”

“I did… At least, I’ve tried to. I didn’t handle it well – seeing his other face. But… the day he sent the demons back… I wasn’t scared of him anymore. Just afraid this would happen – that I’d lose him back to what he used to be.”

She wiped her eyes. “And now… we just go on like he’s coming back. Like he can be who he was here. But it’s never going to happen, is it? I’m never going to see him again. I can’t keep waiting for him.”

Crowley pooled down from her shoulders and perched on her leg. “Me and Aziraphale – we know we’ll lose each other eventually. We’re on opposite sides of a war whose prophesied end does not turn out well for me. Even now – he’s on Earth and I’m exhausting myself clawing my way back and forth to Hell. But we make it work with what time we get. Because we’ve agreed it’s worth it.”

“So… is it worth it for me?”

“No idea. That’s for you to figure out, isn’t it? You and the boss? Figure out how to do couple’s counseling via letters if you’re really not sure.”

Chloe’s phone rang.

Within ten minutes several gang members who’d hung around the building were under arrest, stolen drugs were being processed, and an ambulance was carrying Nathan away.

Chloe drove back to the precinct with a trunk full of evidence, a snake asleep in her passenger seat, and her mind swirling with uncertainties.

Chapter End Notes

The title is from Iris by the Goo Goo Dolls, which I listen to on a loop anytime I write Chloe/Lucifer chapters. If you're not familiar with the song/movie it's from, it's about an angel struggling with his love for the human woman he can't be with. Sound familiar?
Another week concluded, and we are now over halfway through! Next week, Chloe starts making choices, Kokbiel explores Heaven, and we get one last look at the events leading up to the apocalypse.
Speak of the Devil

Thirty Years Ago…

In twenty-four hours, the antichrist would be awake and in the world.

A handful knew, of course.

A few forces of evil were arranging for an American ambassador’s wife to go into labor while flying into an airbase in rural England.

An abbess at the Chattering Order was about to receive a dream warning her of the approaching unholy day.

The representatives of Good and Evil stationed on Earth had no idea.

They were not caught napping, though. They were at work that night doing their utmost to progress their side’s part in the Great Plan.

In Evil’s case, that meant a demon was at a terminal in a power station in the south part of London, trying to convince the phone lines to do exactly as he wanted for a forty-five-minute block at lunchtime the next day.

On Heaven’s part, an angel was currently visiting a dream on a land developer in northern London, begging him not to turn a lovely stretch of forest into a parking lot.

Only one of them was to be successful.

Central London was also being visited by evil incarnate, although neither side was aware.

To be fair, it was rather hard to call the Lord of Hell evil incarnate any more than his soon-to-appear son could be considered Good or Evil incarnate. Humanity might like insisting the devil was at the root of everything wrong with the world, but Lucifer had noticed long before that humanity did just fine on their own. They hardly needed his help to tarnish their own souls and direct their steps to Hell.

He’d been surprised several days to before to learn there even were still demons stationed on Earth.

“The field office is still running?” He’d interrupted Beelzebub to ask while she was describing her preparations for Armageddon. “I thought we closed that centuries ago.”

“No, Lord. We still have a presence on Earth,” the lord of the flies stuttered as she tried to maintain her train of thoughts. “Not many, of course. Dagon has scaled back the representatives. But he’s kept enough to ensure your part in the Great Plan will succeed.”

Lucifer rolled his eyes.

He wasn’t at all excited about this apocalypse business. He knew it had been prophesied. 6,000 years. That’s what the Earth got. Waste of good planet, if he was asked. But nobody asked him. He’d just been told what he was supposed to do.

And then nagged to get on with it.

First Beelzebub. Then Amenadiel. Then Beelzebub AND Amenadiel. Then both of them, the other
princes of Hell, and a strongly worded note from the princes of Heaven. And an additional note from Michael gleefully describing just how he was going to dismember Lucifer – signed with a heart, of course. Possibly Lucifer’s still beating heart ripped from his chest.

Michael needed better hobbies.

They didn’t really need his help with any of it. Except the baby.

“Fine,” he’d grumbled at last. “You can have him.”

And they’d left him alone after he’d agreed to turn over the baby at the appointed time.

That would happen tomorrow. Tonight he walked through London for what he expected would be his last visit to Earth.

He liked Earth. He’d found all the excuses he could to take a week or month off from ruling Hell to visit during the past 6,000 years. He’d chatted with emperors of Peru, warlords of Mongolia, and senators of Rome. He’d kayaked around the arctic circle, and walked through the Amazon. He’d hunted kangaroos with the first Australians, watched kabuki theatre in Japan, tried tobacco in Mexico, and viewed fireworks in China. He’d been on hand when confused fossil hunters found the first dinosaur fragments. He’d stolen the first folio of ‘Love’s Labor’s Won’. (Rubbish play. He’d done humanity a favor by getting rid of it.) He’d nipped into the library of Alexandria to swipe a few scrolls before the flames could catch them. He knew what had happened to the sphinx’s nose.

And tonight was the beginning of the end.

What was he looking for? Something to make it worthwhile? Some bit of meaning?

He’d rebelled against Heaven. He’d been cast down. He’d become a king. In eleven years, no matter what Beelzebub insisted about their odds, he was to lose a fight with Michael and spend the rest of eternity chained in the burning lake.

He needed something to make it worth it.

Unfortunately, alcohol was easier to find than meaning.

Within a short time, he was in bed with a pretty young man, both too drunk to remember how they’d gotten there. He was fairly certain there had been two young ladies involved at the start, but now the gathering was more intimate.

“I like your voice,” Lucifer remarked as the man concluded a lengthy story which hadn’t made sense in beginning, middle, or end, but may have involved a cat.

It was a nice voice. A soothing, purring cadence. Deliberate pronunciation of his words. It could be a commanding voice, Lucifer thought. But also the perfect to croon in lovemaking.

“Talk to me,” the devil murmured. “Let me hear your voice.”

And the man talked agreeably, following Lucifer’s prompting to speak at every volume, in every emotion from distress to outraged. He talked until the grey hours of morning, then slipped into slumber.

Lucifer gave the sleeping figure a long and deep kiss on the mouth. Then a much gentler kiss on the forehead. He shook off the alcohol and spread his wings.
“Welcome, Lord,” Beelzebub droned eagerly in greeting as he alighted on the palace steps. “Are you prepared?”

“I suppose it’s time, isn’t it?” The Lord of Hell sighed.

“Yes, Lord.” Beelzebub licked her lips. “The destruction of the world is begun. First humanity. Then Heaven falls to our might.”

“No way out of it, I assume? Pity. Well, do as you please. Don’t trouble me about it.” Lucifer stalked toward the castle.

“Is that a new voice, my Lord?” Beelzebub asked.

Lucifer paused to taste the words across his lips. “Yes. A little piece of Earth I thought I’d preserve. I rather like it.” He laughed hollowly. “Perhaps I’ll keep it until the end of the world.”
The memories of the age of the rebellion still hung clear and painful in Amenadiel’s mind, even after endless ages had passed.

It had been in that time before time had really existed, and it had stretched so long that it was hard to recall the peace of before when all had been right in Heaven.

Or had it ever truly been alright?

Had the questions always hovered in the air?

He remembered when the brother he would later know as Lucifer came to him with whispers and questions. When the first flicker of doubt entered his mind.

He’d rejected it harshly and with certainty then. But, in private, he’d felt it linger and he’d wept at his weakness.

The Creator had already begun to retreat then. Amenadiel, first-born among the children of Heaven, still clung to how it had been in the beginning. When he had felt the presence continuously. When his purpose had been simple. When he’d been sure.

There was a part of him which would always blame his siblings for coming into existence and driving away that closeness. Sometimes he told himself they were as welcome in their Creator’s presence as he. Sometimes he told himself they were all equal in their Creator’s eyes.

Sometimes he wished he’d been an only child.

The pain had been so raw in the time of the rebellion. It was not good versus evil. It was siblings against siblings. Friends against friends. What horrible shock it had always been to swing back his sword and see the angel opposing him was a friend he’d sung with in the choir, a soldier he’d trained, a competitor from a flying race – someone he’d had no idea felt differently than him.

There had not been an instant the rebellion had begun. It had started with whispers and disquiet. Some things which were ignored, some which were silenced. But whispers had grown louder, becoming open questions. Stifling turned brutal.

Who began the violence? Who’d struck the first blow?

It hadn’t been one single issue. The more the Creator stepped away, the more questions were raised, and the more the cruelty seemed to grow among them.

And when the fighting began, there were not two sides. There were three – those who fought for the throne, those who fought against, and those who hung back seeing which way the wind blew.

There were also those who kept their heads down and kept on with their work. Amenadiel counted them as on the side of Heaven since they didn’t Fall, but he wondered after if they loved creation more than the Creator, and cared for neither side.

Sides didn’t stay the same. Angels were swayed by the arguments of the rebels. Others felt the
rebels went too far and returned to the side of Heaven.

And the end… it couldn’t be called a victory. Because it had just happened.

Amenadiel remembered that moment. Face to face with his wayward brother at last. Both their swords shattered in the heat of battle. And they’d wavered a moment, aware they had no weapons to hide behind any longer. That they must tear at each other with fists and violence if that fight was to continue.

For a second, Amenadiel had been aware of everything on that last terrible battlefield. Thousands upon thousands of… of his family… slaughtering one another with no end in sight. They were past reconciliation. Blood saturated Heaven. There was no welcoming back to the fold these… these fallen ones.

And then the Creator’s might had washed over them.

Separating the sheep from the goats, the gospels might say.

Amenadiel knew only that he and his brother had thrown up their hands in mutual terror as the brilliance and presence of their Creator cascaded in a massive wave over all of them.

Amenadiel had never felt so insignificant.

When he’d raised his eyes at last, his brother was gone. And thousands with him.

There’d been no cheering in Heaven that day. There’d been silence and awe. And fear. They’d not won the battle, no matter what they would say afterwards. After their memories had been dulled by the sheer inability to grasp what they’d felt. Long after was when they’d rejoice and boast of their victory over evil. That day they’d surveyed the field of dead and dying angels. And they couldn’t separate the rebels from their own.

It had been easier after the Fall. After their names had been erased and their forms twisted into something new. Easier to call them evil and wrong. Easier to smite.

But still, there were moments Amenadiel would find himself in combat with one of the Fallen, and for a moment, for a terrible, flickering instant, he would know who they had been and what they had once meant to him.

“They would be welcomed back if they submit before the Throne,” Gabriel would say in that oily voice of his. “Surrender their pride and admit their wrongdoing. We would see them made pure and welcomed back as our family once more.”

Gabriel had had Puritanism down long before a human ever considered the word.

Amenadiel believed that. He said as much to Lucifer a few times. He considered himself kinder than his siblings to the Fallen. He’d visited Lucifer periodically, reminded him Heaven’s grace could still be his. About the time Lucifer set an entire pack of hell-hounds on him, he began to see his brother as an irredeemable lost cause.

And purely evil.

Easier to label the entire lot of demons nothing but evil and all the angels entirely good and leave it at that.

Then he didn’t have to think why he disagreed with his siblings so often, and why, sometimes, a
demon made sense.

But he’d always believed the side of Heaven to be righteous and forgiving. If the Fallen ever returned to the fold, they’d be welcomed.

That was the point of Grace.

…And now?

Amenadiel was not who he had been in the time of the rebellion. Or who he’d been at Armageddon’s failing. His pride had been crushed upon the shores of humanity, his understanding of good and evil questioned a thousand times over.

Maybe that was why he saw Heaven with new eyes when he watched Kokbiel.

Kokbiel was not forgiven in the eyes of Heaven. The angels who scorned him said it was because he wasn’t repentant.

Amenadiel wondered how he could be considered repentant when he couldn’t remember his crimes.

To say Kokbiel was an idiot wasn’t fair because his mind had been made for a purpose, and that wasn’t quick-thinking. He could list the name of every star in the sky. From the first created through the last birthed before his Fall. He thought at the speed of stars – unchanging for centuries, then blazing with a new thought all at once.

Perhaps before the Fall he’d been understood. But in Hell, with the celestial pathways of his mind stifled and closed, and no need to know the names of the stars even if he could recall them, he’d been seen as nothing but a fool. Insults had made him cruel. Cruelty had made him rise in the ranks. He’d loved those who’d treated him with value and hated those he believed made fun of him.

As Ligur he’d embraced the survival necessities of Hell as absolute truths.

As Kokbiel… Heaven was as far from his understanding as anything could be.

Amenadiel visited him often. He had a feeling he was Kokbiel’s only contact.

“You’re not a prisoner,” he’d had to assure him repeatedly.

It seemed like he was. Kokbiel had been given quarters in Heaven, and very much encouraged to stay there unless supervised by Amenadiel.

Out and about, he caused disruption.

Amenadiel had spent enough time with Mazikeen to understand Kokbiel’s behavior as the survival instincts of Hell. He treated every strange object as a potential weapon, every stranger as a possible enemy. He wouldn’t bow to the Throne, not out of a lack of devotion, but because it left him vulnerable from behind. He wouldn’t fly for fear of monsters in the sky. He reacted to celestial blaze and pools of purified water as if they were acid.

Kokbiel behaved as a healthy, well-adjusted demon, who wisely assumed everyone was out to get him until convinced otherwise. For the angels, who’d never been met with open hostility and languages of challenge, he was a stain of wrongness.
And yet… and yet he belonged. In the most unexpected ways.

He suddenly began singing the music of the spheres. Pure and beautiful with a voice to make the chorus weep. And then when the choir director tried to hug him, he flipped them over his back and pinned them to the ground.

When Amenadiel finally got him to fly, Kokbiel followed pathways to ancient parts of Heaven which Amenadiel barely remembered. Kokbiel often landed at locations to say, “This is where…” and then he’d trail off halfway through a story which failed to mention names… or he’d garble the names if he spoke them.

The matter of his name bewildered Amenadiel. Because Kokbiel wasn't pronounced as Kokbiel. When the angel opened his mouth, the sound that came out was both Kokbiel and Ligur simultaneously. And when he wrote the symbol of his name, the sign meant both, and also something entirely new.

Not redeemed. Not Fallen.

If he wasn’t good, he had to be evil, some said.

Those were the only two options, weren’t they?

Amenadiel was beginning to believe otherwise.

In his mind he drafted a letter to Lucifer.

‘Is it possible,’ he wrote. ‘That there never were two sides? You and I were called brothers at our creation. We still are. Was this just a temporary separation until we both realized we were wrong? Is it possible for Heaven and Hell to find common ground?’

Who could know the true mind of the Creator? Amenadiel had thought he had the answers once. Now he saw how much the council of Heaven muddled along, pretending they had all the answers.

But as Amenadiel watched an angel stumble through darkness in search of clarity, he wondered if all of them were exactly like Kokbiel in the end.

Not evil. Not good.

Just searching for truth.

Chapter End Notes

Ugh. This chapter. Here's a tip: When drafting a story, write a clearer chapter description than 'something with Amenadiel and Kokbiel'. This story has exactly two chapters set in Heaven and this one needed to do all the setup for the other… which is still a mess, and this didn't do anything it was supposed to do. Also, I wrote a great ending for it... and then realized the ending referenced events which won't happen until next week. I'm actually perfectly happy with this chapter as it stands, but I hope I don't regret everything that ISN'T in it later. We'll find out!
“I don’t know if Charlie’s old enough for this,” Linda fretted as she smeared an additional layer of sunscreen on the baby.

“With that complexion, he’s not going to burn,” Maze tried to assure her. She peeled off her clothes, exposing her lithe, bikini-clad body to the beach at large. She stretched deliberately, turning slowly to arrange her clothes across a beach chair.

Linda hadn’t noticed the show, too occupied making sure the baby was secure beneath the beach umbrella and wiping off the sand which had already drifted over his blanket.

“Linda, just put him down and let him eat sand,” Maze scolded. “He’d never going to grow into a warrior with you coddling him. It’s high time we forged his first sword.”

“Maze,” Linda said in a tone of an argument had too many times. “He can’t even crawl yet.”

“Great time to learn! He has limited defenses right now. Start in a position of weakness and change the circumstances to his advantage. You’re already picking out training schools for him!”

“I don’t think Happy Tykes Daycare includes armed combat training.”

“Well, it should.”

Linda settled herself with a magazine. “This is nice,” she said after a pause. “I’m so glad you suggested this.”

“Yeah,” Maze murmured absently, scanning down the beach. “Do you see a guy with brown hair, a short beard and a tattoo of a skull on his arm anywhere?”

Linda dropped the magazine. “Did you bring us along on a bounty hunt?!?”

“Well, yeah. I needed to blend in. This guy’s slick.”

“Maze! How many times-”

“Relax. I arranged backup for you.” Maze waved her arm toward the water.

Chloe came out of the ocean, helping Trixie up as they retrieved their surfboards from the waves. Trixie grinned and waved back. They made their way across the beach to join the sunbathers.

“Looking good out there!” Maze gave Trixie a high five.

“I didn’t know you surfed,” Linda said with a smile.

“My dad’s been teaching me.” Trixie looked proud of herself.

“She’s doing great.” Chloe beamed. “She and I don’t get to do this much, but this is good weather for it.”

Trixie set down her board. “Can I go swim?”

Chloe nodded. “Stay near the shore.”
Trixie took off.

Chloe sat down, unzipping her wetsuit a few inches. “This is a great day,” she said with a relaxed sigh. “I just don’t do... hobby stuff enough.”

“No murders today?”

“None so far.” Chloe yawned. “I may actually get a day off.” She looked sleepily down the beach. “Did you invite anyone else to your beach party bounty hunt?”

Maze hesitated, pretending to be very interested watching a group of tourists splashing in the shallows. “I told Eve where we’d be.”

“Eve’s in town?”

“Yeah... she called yesterday. I guess the job didn’t work out, so she was coming back here for a little while.” Maze gritted her teeth and forced down the un-demonlike flutter in her chest. Or maybe not un-demonlike. The only other demon she had contact with anymore was stupidly sappy. Was this something Earth did to demons? Look at Lucifer after all.

_Eve’s not interested, _she reminded herself. _At least right now. And I’m not going to sit around hoping she’ll change her mind. Okay, I haven’t had more than casual sex since she left... but I hadn’t had more than that before!_”

“Maze!”

Mazikeen jumped to realize Linda had been speaking to her. “What?”

“I said, why do you think your bounty will be here?”

“Oh, he used to be a lifeguard.” She nodded toward the lifeguard stand. “That’s one of his buddies. I’m hoping he comes to him for help. Since all his assets are frozen and I’ve put the word out there’s someone after him.”

Chloe stretched her arms behind her head. “If we’re lucky, nothing will happen, and we can just enjoy a nice afternoon. No murders... no worries... no wondering what the King of Hell is doing...”

“Because you’re definitely not doing that right now,” Maze snorted.

Linda checked Charlie one last time, then shifted her beach chair into the sun and leaned back. “Have you talked to Lucifer about your relationship yet?”

“I keep putting it off. It’s just easier to concentrate on murders, you know? And the whole thing with the cat took up a lot of letters.” There was a moment of silence. “Yes, Linda, I know I’m stalling.”

“I didn’t say anything.”

“I can hear your therapist voice in my head.”

Maze’s scanning eyes fell upon a figure meandering in their direction. She started to wave her arm, then settled for a small gesture, which was enough to catch the woman’s eye.

“Hi guys!” Eve was all bright smiles as she joined them.
The women sat up for a quick round of greetings.

“How did the job go?” Chloe asked.

“The job part was great!” Eve threw herself down in the sand. “We were planting trees in an area that had been destroyed by wildfires. But, see… the project leader was really nice. And she really liked me. And we ended up sleeping together. It seemed great, you know? But then, I turn around one day and realized I’m only listening to the music she likes, and I’m buying her type of clothes, and I’m eating the diet she suggests…” She breathed out a pained sigh. “And I realize I’ve just disappeared into the relationship. Again.”

Eve flattened her face against the ground. “What is wrong with me?” She demanded helplessly. “Why do I always turn into whatever someone wants me to be?”

“Eve, I don’t think there’s anything wrong with you…” Chloe said awkwardly.

“Then why don’t I feel like I exist unless I’m with someone? I really tried this time, you know? But even the job… that wasn’t my idea. And I get Crowley was trying to help, but his advice has not historically made things easy for me.”

“Since the last time it got all of humanity condemned,” Linda mumbled. Louder, she said; “You enjoyed the job, though?”

“Yes! Being out in nature was great! I loved that part. And I met some great people. They’re really passionate about saving the planet. I like that. I mean… living in the penthouse and having fun with Lucifer was great… but I wasn’t really doing anything important. This felt… I guess I get why he liked solving murders… not just for the punishing part. Doing something with meaning. I haven’t felt that way in a long time.”

“Eve, it sounds like you’re on the right track,” Chloe said. “And you know what kind of trap relationships are for you. So, maybe… don’t sleep with anyone for a while?”

Eve gave her a look as if she was insane.

“And wear protection if you do,” Maze added.

Eve laughed. “Oh, don’t worry about that! Even Adam and I figured out not to have kids until we were settled down.” She rolled over and looked up at the sky. “Mmm. This is a nice day.” She stripped down to her bikini and arched her back, settling her shoulders comfortably into the sand.

Maze forced herself to look away. Her breath came out in tense pants, but less out of lust and more in painful understanding. Disappearing? Yes… she understood. Hadn’t she been the loyal soldier of Hell from the moment of her creation until very recently? Hadn’t it taken Earth, and learning to love, and a long, long struggle to find herself?

Mentally, she let Eve go. It was better for both of them. Eve wasn’t the only one still trying to swim in a sea threatening to drown her identity at any moment.

“Ooh, Eve! What’s that scar?”

All eyes turned at Linda’s gasp.

Eve traced the long scar just above her bikini line. “Hazards of living without modern medicine. Adam and I had to figure out all that stuff like tooth care and what plants were poisonous the hard way. It’s amazing we lived as long as we did. And all our kids survived okay… minus the ones
Cain killed.” She admired the rest of herself with a self-effacing laugh. “Nice of Heaven to restore us to perfect bodies when we got there, wasn’t it?” She eyed the scar with a slight frown. “Funny that one didn’t go away.”

“What happened?”

“I don’t even remember,” Eve laughed carelessly. “I got stabbed, bitten, scratched, and burned so many times I can’t even count. That day we decided to tame the first camel – that was a day for injuries.”

“You should give Chloe some pointers for taming animals,” Maze said with a grin.

Chloe groaned. “Don’t get me started on that cat.”

They talked absently about pets, with Maze insisting Charlie needed a hell-hound as soon as he was old enough to pick out a name, and Linda vetoing that plan emphatically.

“How often do you hear from Lucifer?” Eve asked as the conversation shifted around.

“Once or twice a week,” Chloe replied. “I don’t know how long that is for him. I guess time’s really different in Hell. Sometimes his letters sound like it’s been weeks… and sometimes hours. I think he’s doing better. At least… I guess managing Hell is going better?” She looked to Linda for confirmation.

Linda shook her head. “It’s a mess. But he seems to have things a little organized now. Just reading his letters is enough to make it clear why he wanted off the throne.”

Eve leaned forward. “Poor guy. Do you think it would be okay if I wrote to him?”

“I think he’d like any distraction he can get,” Chloe said with certainty.

“I wanted to apologize again. For what I caused. And also say I really get it now – what he said about us being bad influences on each other.” She looked anxiously at Chloe. “Are you two together now?”

Chloe shook her head. “I have no idea. We can’t be, right? The long-distance thing is a problem. And that’s not getting fixed.”

“Oh.” Eve’s face fell. “Right.” She took a painful breath. “I’m really sorry. I shouldn’t have done… So many things.”

“I understand.” The detective managed to smile at her before looking into the distance and blinking hard. “He did the right thing.”

Maze clenched her fists. “Oh, stop wallowing over him, Decker! You deserve better than to be hung up on a guy!”

“Maze!” Linda snapped.

“No, she’s right,” Chloe agreed. “It’s probably time for me to move on.”

Maze felt her heart lurch. The prospect of Lucifer without Chloe was about as bad as watching Chloe lose herself to a memory. But before she could formulate an answer, she saw a furtive figure talking to the lifeguard. Her hand slid into Charlie’s diaper bag, emerging with handcuffs.

“I am never taking my baby anywhere with you again,” Linda grumbled.
“Give ‘em Hell, Maze!” Eve called cheerfully as the demon rose and stalked toward her prey.
Lucifer stood on the balcony overlooking the city.

Pandæmonium played out below him. Demons about their business. Monsters sniffing from the shadows. Shadows occasionally devouring the unwary. Nothing of interest.

His eyes turned wearily to the horizon, the land spreading out as far as he could see. He could look at any vista of Hell that he chose with merely a thought. There were few he wanted to see.

His work was done for the moment. Organized to the point that he could put off what little was left for him to do.

His last letter lay half-written on the bar. He was having trouble finding anything to say.

He’d found every Hell-Loop which played a facsimile of his detective. There hadn’t been many, but he’d memorized her every movement and action within the illusions.

It had given him some semblance of joy once. Now it was little better than pornography – a false image of something he’d rather have the reality of.

He’d tried to distract himself. Hell didn’t lack for vices, even if none bit with the same intensity of Earth. He could have any willing demon in his bed. There had always been countless eager creatures willing to offer whatever service their Lord desired. He wanted none of them now.

Sex was a pleasurable pastime, not necessarily an act of love. It would have been different with Chloe – not just a mindless rush of ecstasy. And he didn’t want the mindless anymore. He longed for the real.

He spread his wings and launched himself into the air. He had no plan, but he found himself flying toward the distant gates of Hell. He’d check the fortifications, he told himself. And pretend they weren’t there to keep him in.

His guards and attendants appeared behind him before he’d gone far. The King was never truly alone. And yet… always alone.

Hell seemed to be behaving itself, he thought with some satisfaction. Although perhaps less behaving as straining beneath its restraints. He felt the disquiet of the elite as he forced changes upon them. He felt their rage against him.

So be it. He was their King. They would obey.

It was a long flight with frequent stops and frequent distractions. He was relieved by both, allowing young demons to babble in their self-important manner as they tried to make themselves noticeable in his mind. He wanted to pat their heads and tell them not to try so hard, but it was kinder to let them think their actions pleased him.

There was little to note at the gates. He checked the guardians, spoke with the guards, and flew on.

His kingdom, his prison. His to rule, his to rail against.

He’d rule it, though. He’d improve it. Change the old ways. Bring it into the modern era. Use what he’d learned on Earth.
Maybe reach out to Heaven even. Ask what was the point of what both sides did. Neither made headway on Earth. Humans did as they wished. Would another threat of Armageddon change anything? Perhaps Heaven could be impressed upon to leave Earth alone.

Anything to protect his loved ones.

~

Why, why, why had he left the castle?!

Too bold. Too careless. Too clever.

That had always been his downfall.

Crowley fled, trying to get far enough ahead that he could move as if he wasn’t fleeing.

Earth had taught him not to run from predators. Run and their instinct was to chase. Act big. Act confident. Act scary.

Easy when facing down a lion. Not so much with Beelzebub and her guards on his heels.

He gained enough distance to transform. Smaller was good. He could hide where they couldn’t follow.

But a small demon-serpent on the streets of Pandæmonium was in danger from every demon, monster, and bigger serpent he ran across.

He dove through the jaws of a hungry snake which could have swallowed him whole. He wriggled through a crack in a wall just in time to keep two hell-hounds from pouncing. Now he was inside someone’s Hell-Loop. He closed his eyes and tried to sniff out reality through the phantom torments. He could hear the soul screaming their agony. This must have been a physical torture Loop. Good. Those were simpler. Psychological ones were terrifically confusing and had very hidden exits.

He found the door, nudged it open a crack and looked around.

He was in a narrow row of Hell-Loops. Few places to hide unless he ducked into another Loop. And it was so easy to get stuck in those. Rumor had it even Lucifer had been caught in one not long ago. Still… hopefully no one had seen him come this way.

He crawled down the length of the hall, huddling in doorways every time he heard a sound.

He reached the end of the hall and peered out at the street. Not too many demons on this thoroughfare. The building across the way had been damaged recently. Rubble was piled against the building, some of it still tumbled into the street.

Perfect. If he could get there, he could get proper cover. Use that to get into the upper floors of the building and crawl through walls and crevices until he reached the castle. Then he’d just have to find a gate not guarded by any of Beelzebub’s people.

He started across the street.

“There he is!”

The voices came from above – the direction he’d failed to look.
Crowley fled, but it was too late. Beelzebub’s demons surrounded him on every side.

The lord of the flies herself merged from a gathering of insects into her more human appearance. “At lazzzt!” She buzzed. She reached for him with eager talons.

Crowley curled helplessly into a ball.

Beelzebub gave a sudden shriek of pain and recoiled, clutching her hand. “What?!”

The brand on Crowley’s neck blazed hellfire-bright.

The guards stumbled back with a cry.

Crowley didn’t wait to wonder. He shot through a wavering in the line of guards. In seconds, he’d vanished into the rubble and was slithering as fast as he could go.

Behind, he heard Beelzebub’s voice raised in outrage. “Our Lord’s protecting the traitor?!?”

“…Then give those five legions to Vepar and send him one of the humans to complete the fortifications along the Styx.”


“And what’s the point? Everything along the western bank of the Styx is governed by Vepar. Why that one area?” Lucifer felt the annoyance as meeting between him and his princes drifted toward the usual push-and-pull.

“As I recall,” Mammon murmured. “They played dice long ago and Agares won that section of the river.”

“Pointless reason, as I thought,” the King snapped. “Reassign the legions.”

“Agares will think they’re being punished.”

“Give them something from the treasury and be done with it. Next issue.”

“But, my Lord!” Mammon protested.

“The will of the King is Mighty and Good!” Belial croaked. She fell into chanting, “Mighty-mighty-mighty,” until no one could get a word in edgewise.

Decabra tried to bring up more pressing issues, but eventually the meeting broke in mutual annoyance.

“If that’s everything,” Lucifer grumbled as he rose.

“My Lord…” Beelzebub began, her flies whirling an agitated spiral around her head.

“Yes?” Lucifer’s eyes flickered an irritable hellfire.

The prince wavered, then looked away. “Nothing… My Lord.”

“Good.” Lucifer stalked from the meeting.
Crowley hugged the walls and moved with care, hiding anytime he heard voices.

It had been days since his run-in with Beelzebub, but he hadn’t settled. He hadn’t dared leave his room until one of Lucifer’s servants brought him the mail.

He hadn’t told the King of the encounter. He had no intention of doing so.

Lucifer’s hold on Hell remained tenuous. Crowley heard the grumbling as he slipped through the lower regions of the palace. Crowley didn’t understand business or politics enough to comprehend everything, but he’d witnessed Decabra’s skill at building and destroying empires. In the long run, he believed the changes going on were good for Hell.

But in the short-term, he could see Lucifer upsetting the elite. And the elite told those beneath them why everything the King was doing was wrong. And they believed.

Crowley had watched empires fall, and falls weren’t big, showy things for the most part. Empires didn’t fall to one assassination or invasion. No, they fell to the grumbling and disillusionment of the common people. Empires were nibbled away slowly as they over-reached themselves, or lost their identity, or suppressed the weak too long.

Some empires survived in some semblance of what they’d once been after the once-unconquerable had been defeated. But they were never the same.

And he’d seen many wars. Wars didn’t begin because of one assassination or one invasion. They started because the tension hit a boiling point and erupted.

There was no way Crowley was going to add fuel to any fire.

Anymore than he already had.

He hadn’t known he was protected. Protected enough to make a prince of Hell retreat. The connotations were alarming.

It wasn’t normal. He’d seen Lucifer’s guards face off against danger. They were branded, but they fought like their lives depended on it.

The palace servants didn’t behave in a self-assured way as if nothing could touch them. The mark warned other demons that they’d have the King to answer to if the branded one was killed, but that was as far as it went.

Yet when Beelzebub had come at him with murder in mind, he’d been defended.

Why?

Lucifer hated him. That had been a fact of his existence since the Garden. He’d led the humans to the tree, ruined whatever subtler game Lucifer was playing, and faced the wrath of Heaven and Hell. He’d only survived because…

…because the same as now. He could go where the other demons couldn’t.

He’d done a favor which had yielded him his life. But he’d kept out of sight from that day onward.

Admittedly, Lucifer had been much nicer to him lately. Enough for Crowley to not keep up a mental recital of ‘please-don’t-kill-me’ anytime the devil glanced his way.
He’d assumed Lucifer's need for him was stifling the desire to throttle Crowley into nonexistence.

…But was it possible he’d been forgiven? That the friendliness was legitimate?

Crowley reached the fissure and took a breath. Another dive out of Hell. And his angel waiting on the other side. Maybe they'd go for seafood ton…

Crowley recoiled from the fissure with an alarmed hiss. The scent which clogged his mouth was not Earth. Not nothingness. It was a stale, dank sort of smell. Something he’d…

He nosed at the fissure, but the scent was gone.

Had that been real? Or just his mind playing tricks?

It had to have been a passing… something. Some scent wafting from another part of Hell.

Nothing else could get out his way, after all. The lesser demons could only go by the gates or through possession. The greater demons (what was left of them) were all named and known in their powers. Humanity mostly had the measure of them. Names and powers didn’t change – not without influence of something far beyond the power of even the devil.

No… it had to be his imagination.

He slid into the fissure.

But why did the scent seem familiar?
The house felt much too silent.

Chloe had thought she wanted it that way. An evening free from work. Trixie at a sleepover with a friend. Just her and the hell-cat. Perfect opportunity to write the letter.

If she could just figure out what to say.

She watched the cat in search of inspiration. Whiskers was stretches full-length across the sofa, blissfully licking her paw. She would have appeared a perfectly normal cat, if she wasn't close to fifty pounds.

Behaviorally, Chloe thought Whiskers couldn’t figure out if she was a cat or dog. In true feline form, she didn't seem bothered by the uncertainty. She came when Trixie called, and followed her everywhere. She sat primly in the car and refrained from clawing the furniture after Trixie scolded her once. She’d brought home exactly one dead bird. Trixie had read her a lengthy lecture on how terrible housecats could be for the bird population, and insisted that Whiskers couldn’t go about harming innocent birds if she was to be allowed outside. Since then, the cat had been the protector of songbirds and bane of the neighborhood cats.

When the cat wasn’t putting the fear of Hell into the domestic creatures of LA, she slept in pools of sunlight, rubbed in catnip, played with squeaky mice, and lapped up milk like it was in short supply.

Dan was inexplicably allergic to her.

Chloe looked away. Whiskers wasn’t giving her any better insight into letter writing.

For months she’d corresponded with Lucifer. She’d told him of her cases, Trixie’s school adventures, evenings out with her friends… anything mundane. What she had never once written was, ‘what are we doing?’

It hung over her like a knife. This lack of clarity. Did Lucifer think they were dating? Did he expect her to wait in case he returned? Or… what happened if she died? Would she get a choice? Would Lucifer even know if she fell into a Hell-Loop or was carried away to the Silver City? Would anyone bother to tell him?

Should she tell him that she thought she should move on? Start… dating again? It wasn’t like she’d waited for him back when he had seemed interested but reluctant to commit. She’d had men then. She could do so again.

…and she didn’t want them.

She rubbed her eyes. She really knew how to pick men, didn’t she? Dan - sweet in his own way, but with issues enough to make both agree the divorce had been correct. Pierce… Lucifer had tried to warn her she was dating an immortal serial killer. But how could she have possibly believed the nonsense he was spouting?

But it was true! And her world had come crashing down to find her partner was the devil, her
housemate was a demon, and her fiancé was historically known as Cain.

And after a year of piecing the weirdness of her life into something she could embrace, suddenly Lucifer was gone.

And she’d never really recovered from that blow.

Maybe she should encourage him to end this. Tell him it would be better if they both moved on. Then maybe her life would make sense again.

But… was that what she wanted?

~

“She said to read the letter first, then watch the video.”

Lucifer didn’t like how distressed Crowley looked as he handed off the mail. “Was something wrong with the detective?”

Crowley hesitated. “…She was crying.”

Lucifer sighed. “Thank you,” he managed, willing himself not to touch the letters until he was alone.

He stood at the bar, staring at the envelope and debating destroying it without viewing the contents. If he didn’t look, it wouldn’t be true.

Because he could guess what it would say.

He’d been deluding himself as long as possible. Pretending she’d always be there. Unchanging. Maybe just out of reach, but he could be with her again. At least in his dreams.

His.

He could pretend, but in the end, he knew the truth. Chloe was and would always be her own self. Her own life. He’d been part of it. He’d wanted to be part of it forever.

But she didn’t have forever.

And he couldn’t keep pretending she’d wait for a future that would never come.

He couldn’t dare give up the throne for her. Not at the cost of the Earth.

He couldn’t ask her to give up the world for him. Maybe he’d see her in eternity… but he hoped not. She was too good for this place. And his future was a war the prophecies said he’d lose and a return to the burning lake.

That wasn’t a fate he’d ever ask her to share.

Eventually he had to look. Eventually he had to torture himself. It was in his nature. Or maybe it was the nagging self-loathing which longed for others to make him as miserable as he was inside.

The first page of the letter was the typed stream of conscious he generally received. Her current case. The adventures of her offspring. The growing fondness for the cat.
On the second page it turned to handwriting.

'...I’ve been trying to figure out what this is. We’ve said we love each other. But, what does that mean? Can we ever be together? You act like this is all we’ll ever have. I need more than that…'

The words blurred.

He put his fist through the wall. A dozen wine bottles were casualties to his pain.

Eventually he returned to the letter.

She struggled her uncertainties out on paper. She talked over what they’d had together. How important it had been. How he’d been there for her. How she’d begun to imagine the future. Even if they’d never talked about it. She’d finally come to accept him. She’d been ready for… whatever would happen…

The letter broke off.

Lucifer crushed it in his hand and sank to the floor.

He half composed a letter of protest in his mind. Offering her anything her heart desired if she’d only let him keep this frail connection to her.

He half dreamed of meting out his fury. Send a horde of demons to drag her to Hell where she could be his. Forever.

He half dreamed of giving it all up. Forget Hell. Forget what it would mean for the Earth. Cast himself at her feet and swear he’d be with her as long as she lived. Just… don’t end this.

‘...If that’s what you want, my darling,’ he wrote in his mind. ‘I’ll respect your wishes.’

It hurt. He could feel the knife carving her out of his heart.

But it was right. If he truly loved her, releasing her from this fetter binding them together was right. She was human. She deserved a true love. Love of her own kind. Someone who would wake up beside her in the morning. Drive her spawn to school. Bring home dinner for those ‘Taco Tuesdays’. Grow old at her side.

She didn’t need him.

He rose to begin writing, then glanced at the USB drive. Yes… he should do this properly. Why not complete the torture? He plugged it into the computer.

Chloe’s face appeared on the monitor. Her eyes were red and sunken.

“Lucifer.” She wiped her eyes. “The… the letter wasn’t working. I thought I could… say everything better like this.” She sniffed. “God… this isn’t any better. Okay.” She took a breath.

“I… I need to know what this is. What our future is. I know you’ll never lie to me. You haven’t given me any false hope. You… know we’re probably going to be separated for a long time… don’t you?”

“So I think… I should move on… you know? Date someone… on the same plane of existence. Stop living letter to letter. It’s not fair to me. For you to keep trying to make this something we won’t have again.
“…And it’s not fair to you. To act like everything’s going to go back to normal. Like you’re on a work trip and you’ll be back… here… with me.”

She lost her voice for nearly a minute.

Lucifer clawed splinters out of the table, nearly screaming at his inability to help her with her pain.

Chloe went on in a tight voice. “Okay… so I think I shouldn’t keep waiting for the impossible. I should let you go. Set myself free. Let us both move on.”

She took several agonized breaths. Her fists clenched. Her eyes turned fiery.

“Screw it! Forget normal. Forget God and Heaven and Hell and angels and all of that. I love you!”

She clutched the camera with both hands. Her face went out of focus but the words rang clear. “I don’t care how long I have to wait. We’re going to be together. I know who you are. You’re kind. You’re good. You’re the person I love.

“It doesn’t matter if I go through life with just your letters. If this isn’t normal. I want to be with you. And it’s going to happen. I know what that means. I know where you are. I know what that means for me. And I don’t care! I’ll tear my way through Heaven and Hell to be back with you. Okay?”

The camera shook. She set it down, collapsing into a chair with tremors racking her body.

Whiskers sprang from the couch and jogged up to her. The cat nuzzled her head against the detective with soft, calming purrs.

Chloe took another breath. “If I don’t see you again in life… okay. We’re going to have eternity together. Right? Tell me we can have that. And I’ll be there. Whatever that means.”

The screen went dark.

~

On the list of ways Crowley never wanted to be awakened, shaken from slumber by the Lord of Hell was the absolute top.

His first reaction was utter terror. “I didn’t do it!” He yowled, flinging his wings over his head. “Whatever it was, it wasn’t me!”

“What? No!” Lucifer stopped shaking him. “I need you to go back to Earth!”

Crowley tried to think of the correct and coherent response. The result of careful debate was an agonized moan.

“Please,” the devil panted.

Crowley peaked at him from beneath his wings.

He couldn’t think when he’d ever seen his King looking more human.

Lucifer’s hair was a mess as if he’d been tearing at it. His shirt was undone several buttons and eschew. There was ink on his hands and clothes. Everything about him was sleepless and rumpled.

“I need you to go to the detective,” Lucifer insisted. “And give her this.” He held out something
which Crowley took automatically.

The second he saw what it was, he yelped and dropped it.

It was the signet ring of Hell.

He glanced at Lucifer’s hand. No, the King was still wearing his. This was… a second sign of rulership?

“Give that to the detective,” Lucifer pressed.

The wheels in Crowley’s sleep-addled mind slowly turned. “You’re…” He panted weakly. “You’re making her Queen?” He used the English word. There wasn’t an equivalent title in Enochian or Lilim. No one had ever considered the need for a word describing a co-ruler of Hell.

“If she’ll have it. Me. Forever.”

Crowley blessed.

“But not without her understanding what that means.” Lucifer thrust a thick scroll at the demon. “She needs to know about Hell, the prophecies, my fate, what this will do to her soul. She can’t…” He panted helplessly. “It can’t just be because of love. It’s for eternity. She has to understand that.”

He turned desperate and imploring eyes on Crowley. “Can you help her understand that?”

Crowley looked up at the leader he’d followed to his Fall. He still had many mixed feelings about how that had turned out. Which put him rather clearly in the devil’s advocate position… well, the opposite, actually.

“You know I’d have to tell her all the reasons she shouldn’t,” he said warily.

Lucifer nodded.

“And…” Crowley cringed. “If she says no…?”

Lucifer put a hand on the demon’s head. “I swear no harm will come to you. She has to make her own choice. Clearly. With her eyes wide open. No gray area of what this means. No manipulation. If she wants this,” he waved a vague hand at Hell. “It has to be with all the information before her.”

Crowley let out a breath. “I was the Serpent of Eden once… Guess some things never change.” He gingerly picked up the ring.

As he rose, he gave one last anxious glance at the devil. “You know I’m going to have to sleep for a week after this? I won’t be able to let you know what she says for a while.”

“I can wait.” Lucifer huffed a small laugh. “I’ll wait for her for eternity. What’s a few weeks?”

~

Lucifer tried not to wonder and stew. He tried to push the thoughts of Chloe aside. He ruled his kingdom. He continued pressuring for changes. If she said no, this was all he had. If she said yes, he’d be preparing it for a future with her. It would take her time to make a choice. To clearly understand everything he’d sent her. To process all the reasons Crowley would give her to stay away from the pandemonium.

He guessed the days until he could expect an answer. Two weeks at least. Time for her to debate the choice. Time for the messenger to recover.
No time soon.

He was stunned then, three days after he’d sent Crowley away, to find the serpent unconscious outside his chambers. Beside the viper lay a photo. With trembling hands, he gazed at the image.

Chloe looked back at him, her eyes fierce and defiant. Her hand was raised, the ring on her finger.

He turned it over.

‘I’ve listened to all your reasons why I shouldn’t, and I don’t care. I love you. Whatever happens to you – to us – we are going to be together. For eternity.’

Chapter End Notes

A good way to end the week?

I do regret Chloe’s entire arc in this story had to be about nothing but romance. That is very not me. But this had a ton of characters, and this is where her mind was at the end of the season, so someone had to have the romantic entanglement.

And this story has reached 3,000 kudos. Not to mention 1,500 comment threads, 1,300 subscriptions, and more. I can't thank you guys enough for reading, liking, commenting, bookmarking, translating, and sharing this around the internet. I am blown away by the response. Thank you all so much. I hope it's worth your time right up until the end.

Next week, the search for the Sword of Eden, and the struggles of the angelic cast.
Fifteen Years Ago…

“I don’t like it,” Aziraphale grumbled, his arms folded stubbornly.

“Divinely inspired art, Angel? Don’t you like humanity focusing their talents on reflection of their origins?”

“It’s not the subject… I just don’t like the connotations.”

“Well… we are enemies.”

The painting they stood before was William Blake’s ‘The Fall of Man’. Crowley loved paintings of Eden. Mostly because the artists always made him look ten times larger than he was and Aziraphale appeared absolutely jacked. He even liked this one – even if Aziraphale had the Serpent of Eden by the throat and held his sword cocked back in preparation to behead the tempter.

“That didn’t happen,” Aziraphale protested miserably.

“Creative license?” Crowley suggested.

“I hate paintings of Eden,” the angel grumbled. “They always make you enormous and me so… lumpy.”

“They’re called muscles, Angel. Those things you’d grow if you stopped eating so many crêpes.”

Aziraphale scowled at him, but Crowley was conveniently contemplating the next painting over.

Crowley found religious paintings fascinating. Aziraphale found them embarrassing. Especially angel icon cards of himself. Crowley gleefully bought every different one of Aziraphale he came across and left them hidden around the flat and shop for the angel to find at unexpected moments.

“What’s this new wing you wanted to see?” Crowley asked, steering Aziraphale away from the gallery.

“Oh! It’s a pottery display. I’ve heard good things about it. I can’t wait to… Well! That’s nowhere close to being from the 14th century!”

Crowley rolled his eyes as he lost Aziraphale to tutting over improperly labeled antiquities.

He rambled at random through the museum, absently studying paintings to see if he’d met any of the artists. Eventually his wandering led him to the metal works gallery. He paused, eying a room filled with suits of armor. Something in the air caught his attention. His tongue flicked out. He drifted toward the threshold.

“Crowley!” Aziraphale caught his arm. “I’ve been looking for you.”

“Already? I thought you’d be demanding to see the head of the museum.”

“I asked. They’re not in today. I’ll have to come back and tell them how wrong they are.”
Crowley snickered. Sliding loose of Aziraphale’s grip, he drifted into the gallery. “Do you smell that?”

“You shouldn’t go in there,” the angel protested.

“But you do sense it?”

“Of course. There’s divinely blessed armor here.” Aziraphale caught his arm again. “And I don’t want you getting a rash.”

“I’m fine, Angel. I’ve been around enough of the stuff.” Crowley headed for a suit of armor at the far end of the room. He halted and studied it critically. His nostrils flared and his tongue darted madly.

“It’s just blessed armor,” Aziraphale insisted.

“I think…” Crowley climbed over the barrier. “…It’s more than that.”

“Crowley!” Aziraphale hissed frantically. “Come away from there!”

The demon ignored the fussing angel. The scent was teasing well back in his mind. Something terrifically familiar and deadly which he hadn’t run across in years.

He crouched down, studying the broadsword which hung, tip resting on the ground, from the armor’s gloves. “Good way to ruin a blade,” he murmured disapprovingly.

The hilt really was something – ornately done up in gold enamel and set with low-quality, but still probably expensive, gems. Not a hilt for the sword of a common knight at all. A showy piece for a noble of some kind. But the blade wasn’t so fine. Not by human standards.

Crowley’s tongue lashed across the blade. He drew back his head with a satisfied grin.

“Excuse me!” A security guard bore down on them. “Did you just lick the display?!”

Crowley retreated across the barrier, calm as ever. “Uh… yeah… I’m afraid I did. Had to get a better look. Couldn’t do that from here. You understand.”

“No! You’re coming with me right now to explain yourself!”

“Love to, but my boyfriend says we have dinner plans.” Crowley made a small gesture with his hand.

A suit of armor behind the guard fell to pieces.

The guard whirled around.

“I can’t take you anywhere,” Aziraphale grumbled as they walked out of the museum. “The signs clearly say ‘don’t touch’. And that most certainly includes licking.”

“Relax,” the demon purred. “It’s not like anyone will remember.”

“Mr. Crowley! To what do I owe the pleasure? Have you any more witches in need of finding?” Shadwell rubbed his hands together eagerly and peered dimly at his visitor.
Shadwell’s health was in slow decline, though his personality was as fiery as ever. Crowley felt a silly sort of pride in this relic of an age and people long past. Uncouth and insulting, yet so general about it that it was hard to feel anything but amusement for the old man.

“Not at the moment,” Crowley assured him. “The witches have been quiet. Probably thanks to you.”

“Aye.” Shadwell held up one finger dramatically as if it was a loaded gun. “They know not to toy with the likes of me, now don’t they?”

“Right. I was wondering about weapons. I seem to recall the army has passed down some historically important pieces.”

“Oh, aye! We have the thundergun of Witchfinder-Colonel Ye-Shall-Not-Eat-Any-Living-Thing-With-The-Blood-Neither-Shall-Ye-Use-Enchantment-Nor-Observe-Times Dalymple. Is that what you’re thinking of?”

“I was wondering if you had anything older.”

“Like the dagger of Witchfinder Captain Suffer-The-Little-Children-Unto-Me Jenkins, maybe?”

“Do you have a sword?”

Shadwell’s face lit up. “Do we have a sword? Aye, Laddie. And not just a sword. Such a sword! Do you want to see it?”

“I would, yeah.”

Shadwell thrust a finger and most of his head into Crowley’s face. “But, Laddie, you must promise… promise… to never breath a word about holy relics of the witch finder army.”

“I can promise I don’t do much breathing as a general rule,” Crowley replied.

Shadwell nodded solemnly. “And don’t be telling the missus neither. She’s squall somethin’ fierce if she saw it.”

Crowley had to help Shadwell get down a long box from the top of the china cabinet.

“This,” Shadwell breathed reverently. “Is the longsword of Witchfinder-Major Do-Not-Hold-Back-Offerings-From-Your-Granaries Devins. It was given to him by a great noble in return for banishing a great horde of demons. They say he used this sword to smite their leader back to Hell!”

Crowley picked up the sword and gave it an experimental swing. “Yeah… I doubt that.”

“It’s written in the great witchfinder archives!”

“Bully for you. How much do you want for it?”

“Mr. Crowley! That is an artifact of historic significance and great personal value. I couldn’t part with it for all the treasures of Heaven!”

“I’ll give you five hundred pounds.”

“…In cash, of course?”
The night security guards were reasonably alarmed when all the camera feeds in the museum switched the playing ‘Golden Girls’ reruns instead of shots of the museum. They scurried off the check the most valuable exhibits.

Suits of armor didn’t rate high, but eventually someone wandered that way and found a man with a sword slung over his shoulder sauntering into the room.

The guard grabbed their radio to report what they’d found, but the man glanced back with a smile. “I don’t think anyone else needs to know about this. Not a big deal. Just seeing the exhibits after hours. Can’t blame me for wanting to avoid the tourists.”

“Put down the sword! It’s stolen property!”

The man glanced at the sword. “This? I’ll have you know I paid good money for it. It’s not stolen at all. In fact, I’m adding it to your collection.” He walked into the room.

Finding the radio was playing a loop of Queen songs and didn’t seem in favor of calling anyone, the guard did what seemed most logical and fell into step behind the man.

The man walked up to a suit of armor holding an ornate broadsword. “Tell me, what do you think is the valuable part of that sword? The hilt or the blade?”

The guard stood beside him, feeling rather dazed. This man wasn’t acting the way a burglar should, and it was throwing off his instincts. “The hilt, I expect.”

“Exactly what I thought you’d say. Now, as for this sword I have, the hilt is nothing special, but the blade looks to be in better shape than that one there. Wouldn’t you agree?”

The guard admitted that seemed correct.

“Excellent. So, here’s what I’m going to do. I don’t want that hilt. I only want the blade. So, I’m going to swap it with this one here. The museum comes out fine as far as they’re concerned. It’s the hilt they want. And you come out even better if you’ll just stand right there.”

Standing right there seemed like the wrong thing to do. But for the life of him, the guard couldn’t recall the right thing to do. So he stood statue still and watched the man do some strange hand-waving which ended with the museum still possessing a nice-looking sword, and the man clearly the loser of the deal.

The man folded three hundred pounds into the guard's palm, snapped his fingers once, and walked away.

After, the guard couldn’t recall how he’d fallen asleep in the Asia wing, or where the three hundred pounds came from, but he decided it was a nice bonus for a job well done and never said a word.

“Crowley?” Aziraphale called uncertainly as he stared at the object done up in brightly-wrapped paper and lying on the bookshop counter. “What is this?”

“That? Oh. Merry Christmas.” The demon sauntered up with much too casual an air.

“It isn’t anywhere near Christmas.”

“Yon Kippur then. Or Lemuria. Or Ramadan.”
“My dear…”

The demon shrugged. “Just pick a holiday and say it’s what it’s celebrating.”

“Why did you really get me a present?”

Crowley looked defensive. “I saw something you’d like, okay? So… Happy Saturnalia or whatever.”

“Thank you.” Aziraphale felt uncomfortable. “I didn’t get you anything.”

“Well, it would hardly be a present then, would it? It would be an obligation.” Crowley looked sullen. “Just open it already.”

The angel dutifully undid the bow on the… clearly it was a sword. Crowley had wrapped the paper very tight around it without any attempt at disguise. Aziraphale had to assume this was a trick and whatever was inside was definitely not a sword. This whole thing had to be a joke.

But it was a sword, he found, after carefully removing the bow, rolling it up neatly, slicing through the tape with a letter opener and folding it back slowly. (Crowley hissed all the while.) And more than a sword…

Aziraphale ran his finger down the blade, feeling the soft answering hum. “This is a celestial sword.”

“The blade is. The hilt’s human grade.” Crowley studied the wall. “I tried to clean them up properly so they’d look alright together.”

“You did a good job,” Aziraphale said honestly. He could barely tell where blade and hilt had been forged together, except he felt a whiff of hellfire as he ran his finger over the hilt. “Wherever did you find it?”

“The museum.” Crowley scowled at the look Aziraphale gave him. “I didn’t steal it. Technically. I just swapped blades. They’ll never know. They’re happy with what they have.”

The angel decided to file that under things to never ask about. “Wherever did the museum find a celestial blade?”

“I wondered about that too. Then I saw this.” Crowley turned the blade over and pointed at a rune.

“Barachiel,” Aziraphale murmured. Clarity rushed to him. “The first apocaylpse. Of course. She was struck down.”

“And her blade apparently broken. So, some intrepid human picked it up and made a human sword out of it. And it’s been floating around Earth for the last thousand years.” Crowley pushed it toward him. “It’s not one the owner’s ever going to come looking for. You’re safe to use it.”

Aziraphale still stared. “My dear… why would you give me a sword?”

“I’ve been watching you reach for yours for 6,000 years.” Crowley studied the ground. “I know… it’s not the same. But if there’s ever another apocalypse or something… now you have a weapon.”

“Crowley…” Aziraphale embraced him. “Thank you. This is… certainly unexpected.” He picked up the sword and swung it experimentally. It wasn’t the same. It didn’t have the same feel. But it sang with Heavenly might. And that did make him feel safer.
Something did occur to him. “You told me once you couldn’t touch a celestial blade.”

Crowley looked innocent. “Did I say that?”

“Yes! You said…” Aziraphale trailed off in slow recollection. He laughed. “I knew it. There was good in you from the start.”

“Good in me?” Crowley looked affronted. “Don’t insult me like that. After I just gave you a birthday present too.”

Chapter End Notes

Here is The Painting they're looking at. My greatest regret is I couldn't find a way for Crowley to say, 'Don't blink', in regard to all the weeping angels at the bottom.

I know this chapter is a strong tonal shift from the last one, but we'll be building to another big chapter on Friday - one of my favorites, actually! No Chloe and Lucifer this week, but I think you'll be happy with Crowley and Aziraphale's adventures.

The story now has FAN ART! Thanks so much to Ashyday404 for this excellent piece! I'm so touched. It's Crowley and Aziraphale racing from back in Chapter 22.

The big news from the weekend is I finished the rough draft of Serpent Delivery! I have a huge amount of editing to do, and some major changes to make, and possibly one more scene to add, but it is all put together. I'm so excited for you to see how it all turns out. Thanks SO MUCH everyone reading along. I really hope you find it worth it in the end.
“I think I finally understand it!” Linda declared, surveying a kitchen table buried in notes regarding Hell and its government.

“Then you know more than everyone there,” Maze replied.

In what was becoming a typical evening activity, Linda sat in the kitchen with the two demons and tried to make sense of Hell.

Crowley tested a baby bottle on his wrist, glared until the milk cooled a few degrees, then settled Charlie in his lap. “Bottom’s up, Lil’ Angel,” he hummed.

Charlie latched eagerly onto the nipple.

“He’s really taken to you,” Linda observed.

“You just have to sing to ‘em in Enochian and they calm right down,” Crowley replied.

Linda blinked, then returned her attention to the notes. “Now that Hell isn’t exploding my brain anymore, I wanted to ask you about… everything else.”

“Everything else?”

“Like… is Purgatory a thing?”

“Sort of.” Crowley shifted the baby as Charlie gasped for air. “There’s an in-between place, but people don’t really stay there. Except Mindy St. Claire.”

“Who?”

“Don’t worry about it. Souls kind of go where they think they deserve. If people are stuck in their heads, they end up in our territory, wallowing in guilt. The ones that think they need to work through stuff before they’re Heaven-bound do a stent somewhere between, but they usually figure out it’s not a place worth hanging around.”

“What about Heaven?”

“Linda,” Maze interjected with a concerned eye on Crowley. “You know we’re not welcome there, right?”

Linda grimaced. “I just meant… is it organized the same way as Hell?”

Crowley’s voice was steady, if just a little restrained, when he spoke. “It’s similar. Or it was at the start. Seven princes of Heaven with the Almighty above. Seven princes of Hell to serve the throne.”

“With Lucifer above?”

Crowley grinned. “He had a bit of a god complex going at the start. But, same as us, Heaven lost Archangels from time to time. They replaced them for a while. Then they just… stopped.”
“Replaced? Like made new angels?”

“No, just promoted from the seraphim." He counted off on his fingers. "Lucifer Fell, and some others got killed... one wandered off... So that leaves... four now?"

“And what are they like?” Linda leaned forward eagerly.

“Gabriel’s a prick,” Crowley said flatly. “I didn’t like him much when we were on speaking terms, and now he just makes things hard on Aziraphale. He’s so holier-than-thou that he’d probably have accepted Hell for the good of saving souls if the boss hadn’t taken it. And it would be a way scarier place.”

“We got lucky with Lucifer,” Maze agreed.

Crowley nodded. “Then there’s Michael.”

Maze shuddered.

“That bad?” Linda asked.

“Grade-A, punch-first-talk-later, manipulative bastard,” Crowley replied. “Much smarter than he acts, as everyone finds out to their downfall. But… if he decides you’re family, he’ll protect you until the burning lake freezes over. He’s had the decency to visit Lucifer a few times.”

“And he kills a few dozen Lilim whenever he shows up,” Maze scowled.

Crowley gave her an apologetic look. “Michael… he likes humans. He’s visited here more than the others. So, while Gabriel would just torch the planet, Michael’s more willing to keep the place around. So… can’t really hate him.”

“I can,” Maze muttered.

Crowley flashed her a grin. “And then there’s Raphael. She's focused on higher matters - stars, planets, big cosmic movements. Things that move slower than life on Earth. She doesn’t really care one way or the other about this place. She’ll just vote with majority. Which, I guess, is helpful to make it three against one in favor of leaving Earth alone now that Amenadiel and Michael are voting the same way.”

Linda jumped. “Amenadiel’s an Archangel?”

Crowley gave her a bemused look. “He’s the first-born. Strongest of the lot. Which means…” He wiped the baby's mouth. “…Dromos was real stupid to try and take you. Your daddy would have clawed down the gates of Hell with his bare hands to get you back.”

“Would that have worked?”

Maze winced. “Nothing cuts through those gates. If Dromos had sealed the gates of Hell, or the castle doors, nothing could have gotten in.” Except… she thought, glancing at Crowley.

If the same thought had occurred to him, he didn’t show it. “The council decides everything regarding Heaven unless the Almighty decides to speak up. But I don’t think they hear from On High as much as they pretend to. Our Creator seems to like letting us play by ourselves.” He muttered something under his breath which sounded suspiciously like, ‘ineffable plan, my arse’, but didn’t elaborate.
“Do the councils ever… talk to each other?”

“What do you mean?”

Linda frowned. “I mean, collaborate? Talk through their differences? Settle issues between Heaven and Hell reasonably?”

The demons laughed. Maze finally answered. “Linda… You put an angel and a demon in a room together and it’s nothing but hate. And usually a dead demon.”

“But…” Linda looked between them.

Crowley snorted. “I’ve been a corrupting influence on Aziraphale. He’s about the only one who won’t stab a demon on sight.” He frowned. “And, apparently, Amenadiel. So that’s two.”

“How many are there?”

Crowley shrugged.

Linda pressed on. “How many left when Lucifer did?”

Maze could see the tension mounting in the fallen angel. She spoke hastily. “I think Charlie’s about to fall asleep.”

“Oh.” Linda rose quickly. “I’ll just put him down.”

Maze turned on Crowley as soon as they were alone. “You can tell her don’t want to talk about this, you know. She’d understand.”

Crowley had pulled off his glasses and was rubbing his eyes. “She’s the boss’ chief advisor. He told us to tell her anything.”

“Yeah, but it’s Linda,” Maze protested. “She likes helping people, not dredging up bad memories. Plus…” She switched to Lilim and lowered her voice. “She hasn’t figured out she’s been picked as the seventh prince of Hell.”

“She should,” Crowley answered back in Lilim. “She’s been Lucifer’s guiding influence for years now. And look at what he’s sending her.” He waved a hand at the table.

“She’s still thinking in human terms. That death is final. Not that there’s another career waiting for her if she wants it.” Maze’s hands balled into fists. “When’s he going to ask her?! She’s going to need time to adjust to the idea.”

“I think he’s waiting for the council to settle down. They’re still upset about him promoting lesser demons to what they thought was a ‘Fallen Only’ rank.”

Maze snorted her contempt.

“Plus, he still has to explain about Chloe,” Crowley muttered.

“What about Chloe?”

“Nothing,” Crowley said quickly, paling several shades and looking abruptly panicked.

Maze frowned at him. She knew Lucifer well enough to suspect Crowley was enduring more than anyone here understood. She opened her mouth to tell him Lucifer was an idiot and more bark than
bite - provided you could bite harder. But a voice interrupted her train of thought.

“Crowley!” Linda had returned with a phone in hand. “Aziraphale's on the phone.”

Crowley took it from her. “Hi, Angel… I got in a few hours ago… I didn’t know you were in town… You said you’d be gone until Thursday… Yes, you did…”

Maze smirked, listening shamelessly to the banter until Crowley hung up. “You are so whipped.”

The demon grinned. “He needs someone to worry about.” He turned to Linda. “I need to go calm down my puffed-up parakeet before he starts molting.”

“He’s always welcome to come here,” Linda replied as she took the phone back.

“He’s trying to keep away from…”

“I brought dinner!” Came a booming voice and a slam of the front door.

“…Him.” Crowley finished.

“Amenadiel!” Linda charged from the room with a panicked whisper. “I just put Charlie down!”

The demons followed her into the living room.

Amenadiel eyed Crowley scornfully. “Serpent,” he said by way of terse greeting.

“Big, scary baby-daddy,” Crowley replied. He turned to Linda. “Give me a call if you have more questions. And when you're ready for a mail pick-up.”

“So…” Amenadiel began with an air of disdain once the demon was gone. “What’s he been filling your head with this time?”

“Be nice,” Linda scolded. “I like him.” She took the take-out bag from him and walked toward the kitchen. “We were talking about Heaven.”

“You asked a Fallen about Heaven?” Amenadiel sounded incredulous. “They’re not exactly reliable sources.”

“Why not?” Maze demanded. “They saw enough of the place to want to leave.”

Amenadiel scowled. “The Fall drove most of them insane. They’re not trustworthy.”

“Crowley seems nice,” Linda protested.

“He’s a tempter. Of course he seems nice. Even Lucifer must not trust him if he had to brand him into behaving.”

“Wait, what?” Linda sputtered.

“That is not what that means!” Maze bridged the distance between herself and Amenadiel with a hiss of fury. Despite her human form, her teeth were bared and her fists were clenched. “You have no idea what you’re talking about.”

“Neither does he if he’s telling lies about Heaven.”

“Lies?! You don’t even know what he said!” Mazikeen felt a rush of protective instincts. “He’s
running himself exhausted coming back and forth,” she snarled. “And answering all Linda’s questions even if they hurt. You know none of them ever want to talk about what happened in Heaven!”

“I didn’t know,” Linda protested.

“He won’t admit it. None of them will ever say how much it hurts them to remember.” She’d learned that weakness of the Fallen's early on and used it to great advantage as she forced them to acknowledge her as worthy of respect. Strange. For the first time, she wanted to protect one of them. She whirled on Amenadiel. "The last thing he needs is you with your holier-than-thou Archangel attitude! Have you talked to Aziraphale yet?”

Amenadiel looked away.

“See? Easy for an angel to talk like the Fallen make all the mistakes, but they get awfully quiet when they’re the ones who need to apologize. Hell’s awful, but it’s no wonder none of them ever want to go back to Heaven with your lot waiting for them. How would the Archangels act if a Fallen showed up looking for reconciliation?”

Maze stormed out of the kitchen, leaving Amenadiel staring wide-eyed and trembling behind her.

Chapter End Notes

Michael's character and backstory are very loosely based off a defunct webcomic... which I was going to link, but the website looked awfully broken and virus-y when I checked, so we're not going to go there. Gabriel's character is about the same as the mini-series. Raphael is my own invention.

Crowley's explanation of what happens to souls after they die is taken from the great philosopher, Terry Pratchett, and his book, Mort, which contains one of my favorite explanations for different religions' take on the afterlife. It says; "YOU SHOULD HAVE WORKED OUT BY NOW THAT EVERYONE GETS WHAT THEY THINK IS COMING TO THEM. IT'S SO MUCH NEATER THAT WAY." (And if Death says it's so, who are we to argue?)

If you'd like to argue about principalities possibly outranking archangels, congratulations. You're as much a nerd as I am. And also save it for tomorrow when there will be an explanation.
It was a beautiful and sunny day in Los Angeles.

An angel and a demon were spending it in bed.

Aziraphale wouldn’t have minded being out and about, but Crowley had arrived from Hell the day before, and had little energy for anything besides sleep. Although he’d told Aziraphale not to stay with him if he had other things to do, Crowley slept better with the angel beside him, and Aziraphale insisted this was exactly where he wanted to be.

The angel sat up in bed, books and papers strewn everywhere. Crowley lay against his side, deep in slumber. Occasionally, he’d stir. Aziraphale would rub his back until he drifted off again. It was what little comfort he could offer.

He looked down at the demon, his eyes lingering on the devil's mark. To the human eye, it was barely visible. To Aziraphale’s sight, it stood out in cruel hellfire flickering. He hated it – this garish reminder of how instantly the precious life he and Crowley had crafted together could be taken away. But it couldn’t be changed. Despite their loyalties falling with Earth, their alliances were on opposite sides, and neither could be called free agents.

Crowley made light of the brand, and was often evasive regarding what he endured Below. He'd been extremely evasive regarding why he'd made so many trips so close together lately, saying only that Lucifer wasn't expecting him back anytime soon, and he intended to enjoy a long rest. Aziraphale did the only things he could do – support his companion whenever they were together, not press for details Crowley wasn't willing to voice, and pretend the sight of the devil’s mark didn’t make him ill.

Crowley twitched and mumbled incoherently.

“It’s alright, my dear,” Aziraphale murmured absently. “Go back to sleep.”

“No…” The demon protested groggily. “…I’m awake.” He shifted as if intending to rise, then flopped back on his face.

Aziraphale smiled. He rubbed small circled between Crowley's shoulder blades, eliciting a soft purr from the demon.

“What’re you reading?” Crowley mumbled.

“I was scanning more obscure gnostic gospels in search of any mention of the sword.”

“Anything?”

Aziraphale sighed. “I’m afraid not. I fear I’ve exhausted all human knowledge on the subject.”

“Do y’know anything you didn’t before?”

“Only what Puddle wrote on the subject.”

“Which was?”
Aziraphale picked up his notes and read off the pertinent prophecy. “‘The blaze of Eden divided burns dim in the emptiness until the world found among the white bears forges alliances.’ There’s more but it’s about things which already happened. That seems the only relevant one to us.”

Crowley huffed out an annoyed sound. “I hate prophecy. They’re never helpful until after the fact.” He propped his arms beneath his chin. “Don’t know if we need books. As I see it, we got two problems we don’t know how to fix.”

“And those are?”

“Amenadiel’s got the key.”

“I suppose asking him nicely to return my property is out of the question.”

“He hates you. And he’ll notice if I try to steal it off his neck.”

“Yes, that is a difficulty.”

“And the rest of the sword is in another reality.”

“And the only thing which is known to be able to cut through realities is the sword.”

“And only with all three pieces together,” Crowley added. “The sword’s not doing much good as it is.” He sighed. “We don’t even need a big hole. Just a little one and I’ll get the sword for you.”

“My dear.” Aziraphale’s hand contracted possessively into Crowley’s shirt. “You’re not going into another reality without me. I lose you to Hell too often. I’m certainly not going to allow you to get lost alone somewhere inhabited by an unknown entity.”

“That’s another thing.” Crowley sat up, his sleepy expression changing to a frown. “I know I don’t have the best memory for Heaven, but what’s all this talk about a goddess of creation? We only had one Creator, didn’t we?”

Aziraphale shook his head. “Maybe it was different for the Archangels.”

That statement was one which had caused tension enough back in the beginning. The Seraphim, from whose ranks the elevated Archangels were drawn, had been created before the others. They were the first, the most powerful, and had not let the others forget it. Dissension and a feeling of injustice had led more than a few toward the side of the Fallen.

There was a differences between those first created angels and the others. Both in power and in relationship. Amenadiel, Lucifer, Gabriel and the rest had been siblings by name and action, closer with their Creator than the others were to ever know. There was a familial bond among them which still lingered despite Falls, distance, feuds, and uncertainties.

The ranks upon ranks of angels which filled out the Heavenly host had been formed gradually as the need for them arose. They’d been siblings only in the sense that they’d shared the same Creator. None had considered the others to be more than distant relations. Unlike the Seraphim who’d had something of a childhood, they’d been formed to be what they were. As soon as their names were breathed into them, they’d known their purpose and identity, and flown away to assume their stations.

That hardly meant they’d lacked in personality. Too many of them had Fallen to say they’d been created without free thought.
There were multiple types of angels – some looking so unbelievably weird that there was a reason it was standard practice to start any conversation with a human with the phrase, ‘fear not’. They were divided into three spheres - divisions based on angel type and purpose. The first sphere stood closest to the Creator and third closest to Earth.

It seemed no surprise Aziraphale and Crowley had both come from the third sphere. Principalities were meant to be leaders of the sphere, followed by the archangels (not to be confused with Archangels – it sounded completely different in Enochian, or so Aziraphale had assured multiple Biblical scholars) and at the bottom were the masses who fell under the umbrella term of ‘angels’.

‘Peasantry of Heaven’ Crowley had jokingly called his class, which Aziraphale had never thought was fair. But, then again, he’d seen the first sphere lord over the others enough to wonder if the demon hadn’t gotten that term thrown at him back when he was still welcome in Heaven. Aziraphale would always defend Heaven and its Hosts, but sometimes he thought Crowley hadn’t been wrong to leave.

Crowley scoffed and rubbed the sleep from his eyes. “Either way, there’s an entity over there that’s got your sword and may not be too happy to see us.”

“Dr. Martin said they left willingly.”

“That was three years ago. Unless they've figured out how to breathe life into existence, they may be pretty lonely and angry. And if they has figured that out, there might be a crowd of celestial warriors waiting on the other side.”

Aziraphale moaned. “Would you stop making this worse than it is?!?”

Crowley snorted and slid from the bed. “I say we get the key from Amenadiel first. Maybe you can… I don’t know… hone in on your sword with it.” He sauntered into the kitchen. “Any idea how we wrestle it away from him?”

Aziraphale began stacking his books with a sigh. “Not really,” he called. “We haven’t spoken since that little argument.”

“The one that nearly flattened Linda’s house?”

“We were not that out of control!”

“Just saying, if you’re going to talk to Amenadiel, I’d better be there.”

“Crowley! I am capable of surviving without you!”

The demon returned, drinking orange juice from the carton. “Sure you are. But do you want to?”

“Perhaps we can offer him something in exchange for the key.”

“Mazikeen said the necklace was a gift from our Creator and he won’t part with it willingly.” Crowley scooped his pants off the floor and tried to shrug into them one-handed. Orange juice splashed about wildly. Every drop returned to the carton before reaching the floor. “What could we give him that’s worth the same as that?”

Aziraphale sighed. “I don’t suppose he’d like an original manuscript of Revelations with St. John’s notes in the margin.”

Crowley froze with a look of alarm. “You’d give up your books?!”
The angel looked grim. “For my sword, anything.” He saw Crowley’s expression and spoke quickly. “Except you, dear.”

The demon resumed locating his clothes. “You’d better keep believing that.” He finished off the orange juice and poofed the carton back into the elements from which it had been made. He paused a moment. “What about your sword?”

“That is what we’re discussing.”

“No… your current sword.”

Aziraphale put a hand to his back where the celestial blade resided somewhere in the same ether where his wings could currently be found. “I couldn’t give that up!”

“Why not?”

“You gave it to me!”

Crowley snorted and threw a sock at him. “I gave you that sword because I couldn’t give you your real one. If we can use Barachiel’s blade to get yours back, let’s do it.”

“Are you sure?” Aziraphale wrung his hands nervously. “It was so kind of you and I wouldn’t want you to think I didn’t-” He broke off as another sock hit him in the face.

“Whatever you decide, we gotta start with you talking to Amenadiel first.” Crowley pushed his hair into place and hooked his glasses over the top of his head. “Without flattening anything.”

“I am perfectly in control…”

There was a knock at the door.

Crowley frowned. “Did you give out our address?”

“Only to Miss Espinoza,” Aziraphale replied, struggling to maneuver off the bed amidst the book piles. “For an emergency contact.”

“Why are we Trixie’s emergency contact?”

“Because I don’t have an occupation and can be at her school faster than her parents. Also, Miss Mazikeen has been banned from school property.”

Crowley waved a dismissive hand at the struggling angel. “Don’t get up. I’ll deal with it.” He left the room.

Aziraphale heard a surprised exclamation from Crowley, then a murmur of voices.

“Hey, Angel?” Crowley called uneasily. “You’re real sure you’re in control of yourself, right?”

Chapter End Notes

I was looking through some art, and apparently I’m not the only one who thinks Crowley would drink from the carton.
Thanks to bloodymoon for discovering Gaimen and I apparently read the same wikipedia articles.
Aziraphale couldn’t remember the last time he’d flown with anyone besides Crowley.

He glanced back at the worried demon watching from the balcony as he and Amenadiel flew off. Amenadiel had insisted they talk alone. Aziraphale felt it was wise not to argue.

Flying with Amenadiel was unnerving. Everything about the Archangel radiated power. His massive wings were goose wings in shape and nature – capable of long-distance, power flying; and also useful for beating someone senseless.

Aziraphale’s wings were closer to those of a vulture – not exactly meant for swift flying, but he could glide beautifully and hang in the air indefinitely. ‘Guardian angel wings’ Crowley called them when he burrowed beneath the broad feathers.

Crowley’s more versatile raven wings gave him a maneuvering edge over Aziraphale. When they flew, Aziraphale would set a steady path and Crowley would fly off-centered above or below him. They knew precisely the length and strength of their wingbeats. It had been decades since they’d accidentally bumped wingtips.

Amenadiel was someone new, and someone alarming… and someone Aziraphale was having to strain himself to maintain a steady pace beside without bumping wings or getting caught in the powerful downdraft.

Fortunately, it wasn’t long before the Archangel dropped toward the ground.

Aziraphale glanced around the parking lot in which they’d landed. “Where are we?”


They reached the entryway to a zoo. Amenadiel paid for their tickets, and they stepped through the gate.

Amenadiel acknowledged Aziraphale’s puzzled glance with a shrug. “I thought we should go somewhere we could walk and talk.” He turned his head to watch a flamingo stride through a shallow pool. “And with enough people around that we’ll be careful.”

They made their way through the congestion near the entrance to a quieter outdoor reptile area. Giant tortoises slowly chewed lettuce and watched the angels walk past.

“If you expect me to apologize...” Aziraphale began.

“No.” Amenadiel shook his head. “I’m the one who should.” He took a few long breaths. “I thought differently back at the apocalypse. But… the past few years. Living with humans… really getting to know them…” He leaned on the rail of an iguana exhibit. “I was wrong,” he admitted at last.

Aziraphale stood stiff and silent beside him. This felt too easy.

Amenadiel saw his suspicion. He looked away, watching the iguanas as if they were the only thing
that mattered. “I thought I had all the answers back then. I thought I knew what was right and wrong. I’m… learning now.” He bowed his head. “I lost my wings. My powers. I was… trapped here. Believing I was being punished.”

Aziraphale stepped a little closer. “For what?”

“I… thought it was my job to force Lucifer back to Hell. I did… terrible things for what I thought was a higher purpose. I hurt him. Mazikeen and Linda too. I used them. I treated humans like… like they were nothing.

“And then I spent years trying to understand my test. What did I have to do to return to Heaven?” He laughed softly. “Do you know what I finally discovered? The key was accepting myself. Deciding I had a choice. That I could choose to return. Choose to have my wings back. So, I thought I finally understood.” He moved away from the iguanas. “And now I’m more lost than ever.”

Aziraphale followed him, feeling entirely mystified.

“What I am sure about is… I don’t feel you were wrong anymore. I don’t know if saving the Earth was part of the plan or not, but destroying all this in a maddened quest to prove good can triumph over evil – that’s wrong.”

They walked alongside a pond of basking alligators.

“How did you know?” Amenadiel asked helplessly, turning on Aziraphale as if he had all the answers. “How did you know what to do? How did you know your purpose?”

Aziraphale stared blankly at the Archangel. This was not how he had ever heard his superiors speak. They’d always acted certain. Even when they weren’t, they certainly pretended. How strange to see confused loneliness in the eyes of the most powerful of all.

How many nights had they spent with a bottle of wine and steady banter about the theological questions of the day? Crowley always had questions – the kind which terrified Aziraphale early on in their friendship. The kind he’d thought it was his duty to answer or dismiss. Definitely act sure of himself.

But he’d walk away from those meetings, puzzling about the things Crowley asked. He’d read, talked them out with human scholars, contemplated intricacies. Gradually he’d find his answer, or find a deeper mystery, or set the query aside as something to consider later. And he’d found himself more confident in his own beliefs each time he worked through a question.

He’d come to appreciate questions. And value the act of not knowing. There was something beautiful in mysteries, and in admitting some things were to remain mysteries.

He still believed in a plan. Still believed his Creator had an awareness for what they’d set in motion. Still believed he had a part to play, insignificant in the grand scheme as it would likely be. He still believed in the ineffable.

How hard it must have been, he thought, for an Archangel to fall from certainty. Maybe as brutal in its own way as the Fall from grace had been long before. He wondered if any demons had raised their heads to Heaven and asked if they still had purpose on the day they found themselves cut from Grace.
“I didn’t,” he admitted at last. “I still don’t.” He tugged open the door of the reptile house. “I used to think someone would tell me if I was wrong. If I went too far from what Heaven expected of me.” He paused, drinking in the soothing scent of reptiles. “But when I did finally hear from Heaven, I found them... out of touch.” He coughed with discreet embarrassment. Amenadiel was certainly included in that generalization.

Amenadiel nodded cautiously.

“At which point I began to suspect it was wise to trust my own judgment when matters on Earth weren’t as they claimed them to be. Heaven, I found, is not infallible.”

Amenadiel jumped and glanced at the roof.

“Our Creator might be,” Aziraphale continued calmly, quite certain he’d not spoken blasphemy. “But humanity is not the only ones gifted with an abundance of free will. And if our Creator wishes us to find our own purpose, I only hope they’ll nudge me toward mine when the time is right.”

They studied frogs, salamanders, and serpents without saying anything for some time.

“So you think the Fallen could be redeemed?” Amenadiel asked suddenly, his eyes on a chameleon.

Aziraphale blinked at the question. “I think…” He said slowly. “…Even if they could… Heaven wouldn’t let them forget.”

Amenadiel sighed. “You’re very right.”

They left the building behind, making their way up the path to a crossroads.

“Tigers, monkeys, or orangutans?” Amenadiel asked.

“Monkeys,” Aziraphale decided.

They started up the trail.

A question had been hovering at the forefront of Aziraphale’s mind. A question he couldn’t think of a polite way to bring up.

As they watched a gibbon snatch a fruit from another, Aziraphale found the words spilling out. “That’s my sword you’re wearing around your neck.”

Amenadiel looked startled. “I… didn’t think of that.”

“It’s a celestial blade,” Aziraphale continued doggedly. “It was forged from my essence.”

“You gave it away,” Amenadiel replied.

“And I reclaimed it. And when Heaven asked for it back, I returned it.” He forced himself not to stare desperately at the necklace. “But it’s still a part of me.”

Amenadiel put a possessive hand over the pendant. “It was given to me. By our Creator.”

The words hung unspoken. If you were meant to have it, they would have given it to you.

Aziraphale forcibly ignored the implications. “You’ve kept it safe. But I would like to be whole again.”
Amenadiel tensed. They walked past two enclosures in silence. “You’re going to reclaim the Sword of Eden?”

“If I can.” He waited a beat. “That does require reclaiming every piece of it.”

The Archangel was silent. His face was closed-off and distant.

“What about a trade?” Aziraphale suggested.

“What would be worth it?” Amenadiel’s tone didn’t indicate any desire, although he did sound curious.

They were nearing a birdhouse. Aziraphale led the way inside. He climbed over the rail and into the bird area, finding a concealed place within the foliage. He rolled his shoulders, bringing his scabbard and sword into their current plane of reality. He unsheathed the blade and held it out to Amenadiel.

The Archangel sucked in his breath. “That’s an Archangel's blade.”

“Barachiel’s,” Aziraphale replied.

“How did you get that?”

“It was left behind on the battlefield a thousand years ago. It passed into human hands. Eventually it came to me.”

Amenadiel reached tentatively for the hilt. His hand closed on it, then jerked away with a hiss of surprise. “Hellfire?”

Aziraphale frowned and looked down at the blade. “Well… yes. The blade was broken and the hilt lost. It was forged onto a human-made hilt.” Odd. He’d felt the hellfire in the forge lines, but it had never bothered him.

Amenadiel took the hilt carefully, tensing until it was properly balanced in his hand. He turned it slowly, eying the blade from every angle.

“Your blade was broken, wasn’t it?” Aziraphale asked. “In the rebellion?”

Amenadiel nodded slowly, his eyes never leaving the sword. “Luci and I both shattered our swords then. His is hell-forged obsidian now.”

“But you never forged another sword.”

“I’ve used many swords. But that one was forged for me. From me. I couldn’t replace it.”

“I know the feeling.”

Amenadiel looked up quickly.

Aziraphale tried to pretend he wasn’t using all the tricks he’d watched Crowley use. One didn’t spend thousands of years around a tempter without picking up a few pointers. “Losing mine – it was like missing a limb. I don’t regret giving it to someone in need, but it hurt. More than I envisioned. And when I got it back… I imagine it was like the moment you regained your wings.”

Amenadiel nodded slowly.
“This.” Aziraphale reached out and gently touched the celestial blade. “It felt right to have a blade in my hands again, but it’ll never feel the same. Still, this one always felt more comfortable than any other sword. It’s a blend of ethereal and human. That’s something few of us would understand.”

“It wasn’t forged for either of us,” Amenadiel said, his tone filled with longing.

“She was your sister. A fellow Archangel. I think she’d be honored to know her memory lives on.”

Amenadiel pushed the sword back at him. “The Sword of Eden’s too dangerous. Luci was right to get rid of it. The temptation to misuse it…”

Aziraphale took the sword back but held it lightly balanced across his palms. “I carried it from its forging - through the rebellion and onward. I knew it was meant to preserve life. I never wanted to use it for anything else. That’s what it should be doing. Not broken and adrift. It’s hurt.” He put on his most imploring face. “And it’s a part of me.”

Amenadiel looked away in open conflict. “If that sword fell into the wrong hands, it could destroy Heaven.”

Aziraphale waited a beat. “Heaven is stronger than its gates. One sword could never destroy Heaven. Nor the goodness it stands for.”

Amenadiel turned away abruptly. He returned to the path and strode out of the bird house. He marched past the hippos and baboons without a glance.

Aziraphale trailed along, waiting to see how the mental war would turn out.

They made it all the way to the polar bears before Amenadiel spoke. “Will you promise never to turn against Heaven?”

Aziraphale chose his words carefully. “I preserve life. That was my task in the Garden. It’s what I still intend to do.”

Amenadiel slowly pulled the necklace over his head. He clenched his fist around the pendant. “Will you promise not to give the sword away again?”

There was a right answer… and then there was the truth. “I don’t regret giving it to Adam and Eve. They needed it. And if I know there’s need again, I will do what I must.”

Amenadiel sighed and thrust the necklace at him. “Take care of it.” There was obvious pain in his voice.

Aziraphale felt the pendant thrum a celestial cadence which echoed into his essence as his hand closed around it. How had Amenadiel not known what it was? How could he not feel the power of this tiny piece? Already, Aziraphale could feel the pendant tugging across reality in search of its missing self.

Amenadiel started to walk away, his fists clenched and his head bowed. "I'll collect Barachiel's sword another day."

“Wait a moment,” Aziraphale called. He ducked into a little gift shop standing by the trail. He knew what he wanted, and the store obligingly provided.

Returning to the waiting Archangel, Aziraphale held out Amenadiel’s necklace. He’d replaced the
Amenadiel held it up, studying the dangling charm in the shape of the Earth.

“Welcome to humanity’s side,” Aziraphale said quietly.

The Archangel slid it over his head. He smiled slowly. “It feels right.”

Chapter End Notes

Who spent an hour squinting at a map of the San Diego Zoo to write this properly? I want to visit now!
The difference between London and LA, Crowley thought irritably, was the people. In London you could do impossible things right on the street and the people just stiffened their upper lips and played like it was normal. London people didn’t go for foolishness. Nothing would break their unflappable nature.

People in Los Angeles…

“Is that a dead body? Can I touch it?”

Sometimes, the angel and demon had concluded, one had to give up searching books for answers and just try things. That was why they were currently sitting under the pier with Charlotte Richard’s body rolled up in a beach towel while they waited for the sun to set and the crowds to thin.

Despite their best efforts, a skeleton seemed to draw humans like demons to tortured screams. So far eight people had asked to touch it, two had wanted to know if they were shooting a metal band album cover, three had asked if it was for sale, and one had wanted to know if they were putting on a production of Hamlet and here was their résumé if they were. Absolutely no one had suggested calling the police. Crowley had taken out all cell phone coverage in a block around them when they’d first arrived just in case. He was finding that to have been utterly unnecessary.

Although it had been handy for getting people to move further down the beach.

“I think we can begin now,” Aziraphale said at last as the crowd thinned with the setting sun.

Aziraphale walked unhesitatingly to a spot in the sand. He reached out a hand and placed it flat against nothingness.

Crowley laid the skeleton just beneath Aziraphale’s outstretched arm. He studied the angel who stood with his eyes closed and his fingers clenched around the pendant. Crowley put a hand on his shoulder, transformed, and wound his coils around the angel’s neck.

Aziraphale spoke at long last. “I can feel it,” he said weakly. “Bu it’s still so distant.”

“Put out your wings,” Crowley suggested.

Aziraphale looked curiously at him, but flared out his wings. They glowed pale and luminescent in the twilight.

Aziraphale gasped. “That’s much clearer.”

The serpent thrummed a satisfied purr. “We fly between realities. Stands to reason you’d feel closer to another reality when poised for flight.”

“You don’t use wings when you go between places.”

“Sure I do. You just can’t see them.” Crowley didn’t bother elaborating. His way of getting in and out of places seemed so simple to him, and utterly impossible to everyone else. He’d tried to
explain it to Lucifer back in the Garden, and had never bothered trying with anyone else again.

“Do you suppose we could just fly to this new reality?”

Crowley considered.

If Aziraphale took off right now, he could fly out of this realm and to the gates of the Silver City with no effort. Angels were equipped with the same homing instinct for Heaven that demons had for Hell. With more effort, Aziraphale could turn his flight in the darkness and aim for the gates of Hell. Reaching the gates of either wasn’t difficult. Getting through the gates was the challenge. The gates were the real openings into the realms from the darkness between.

“If it had a gate, and we knew where to find the gate, and we knew it was anchored in some way to this reality, yes,” Crowley said slowly. “But as far as we know, the closest this reality has to a gate is right here.”

“Then I have to open the gate.” Aziraphale sounded resolute as he crouched down and pulled back the towel covering the skeleton’s abdomen.

“Do you have an idea what you’re doing?”

“...I have a guess.”

Crowley snorted. “Well, we’ve dealt with closer to hopeless situations.” He slid down Aziraphale’s arm and coiled on the skeleton’s ribcage.

They could both feel the faint flicker of ethereal energy clinging to the bones. Something so powerful crushed inside a mortal form couldn’t depart without leaving a trace. A breadcrumb.

Crowley flicked out his tongue, tasting the energy until he had it memorized. “Make me a hole. I’ll follow the trail.”

Aziraphale stretched out the pendant as if it was a wand. He touched it to the faint trickle of energy.

“I can feel the sword,” he murmured distantly. “It’s trying to respond. If… if it cuts from its side… and I cut here… all the pieces are in one place… come on… meet me in the middle…”

The tiniest pinprick of light appeared around the pendant. Bit by bit, it widening into a blinding blaze emanating from the smallest sliver.

Crowley surged forward, nudging his head into the crack. Size didn’t matter. He could have danced on the head of a pin with all the hordes of Hell along for the party. In a blink of an eye, he’d flung himself into another reality.

Too slow! A hand closed around his tail as he plunged between realms. Except this time, the one holding the tail was trying to accompany him.

You idiot! Crowley would have liked to scream, but in an instant he was occupied trying to keep them both alive.

There was a reason he made all his trips solo and arrived too exhausted to move. Reality wasn’t meant to be crawled through like a rodent in a wall. If he pushed, existence pushed back. If he fought, it battered him senseless. The only way was to slide unnoticed, nudging reality aside and finding a path through the impassable.
It was hard enough alone. With a passenger, nearly impossible.

He’d managed well enough with Lucifer clinging to him back in the days of the Garden. But Eden had been a shorter trip. It hadn’t required bending nearly as much reality. And things had been more fluid then. He’d been able to slide from Hell into Eden, bypassing the walls and guards entirely. And he’d taken the time to plan.

This wasn’t Eden. This wasn’t a reality he understood. And Aziraphale was certainly not Lucifer. Maybe it was a demon thing, but Lucifer had understood how to hunch up and let reality flow around them. And Crowley had explained as best he could ahead of time. Aziraphale felt larger. He was also well out of his depths and responding with bewilderment to the overcrowded nothingness around them.

Crowley struggled to keep them from being bombarded and reduced to nothingness. He lost the trail immediately, too desperate to protect his companion to hold the frail scent. He tried to turn them around. If he could get them out of this madness, maybe he could try again.

But where was the opening?!

The unknown assaulted him in every direction. He found no compass, no guidance.

And without direction, he knew the nothingness would swallow them sooner or later.

He wrapped himself around the angel, protecting him as best he could. He sent out a soothing burst of emotions, hoping Aziraphale might sense something through his naked panic.

He had to find an escape. For Aziraphale’s sake. There had to be…

**Peace, my children.**

The voice came from everywhere at once. Crowley clutched tighter to the angel, hissing threat to whatever lurked in the unknown.

And then, like the flick of a light switch, the pain and buffeting was over. They stood… on nothing. But nothing with secure weight to it. A sense of safety.

Crowley gripped his coils around Aziraphale and displayed his fangs at the unknown. Whatever had them, they’d pay dearly if they came near the battered angel.

**It’s alright, my dear,** the voice murmured. **That’s what he calls you, isn’t it? How lovely.**

“Who are you?” Crowley demanded, whirling and seeking something to fight.

**You know me. You’ve known me since the beginning.**

“Crowley,” Aziraphale whispered. “I think they were right.”

“About what?”

“Our Creator.”

The serpent whined and pressed closer against the angel. “Are you…?” He asked helplessly into the nothingness.

**Oh, children.**
Warmth enveloped both of them. The gentlest of hugs. From someone who knew them more intimately than they knew themselves. Who loved them deeper than they could understand.

“I don’t understand,” the demon protested. “All their talk about a goddess…”

The voice laughed. *It’s hard for anyone to understand. Try as I might, I’m never quite as approachable as I’d wish. Even to the first of my children.* The sorrow was palatable in the reality around them.

*I put myself into terms they could comprehend,* the voice continued. *It wasn’t always clear. Even to me. I’m afraid I forgot some of myself at times. It’s taken this stretch of quiet reflection to remake myself into understanding again.*

“How…” Aziraphale sounded adrift. He gripped Crowley like a drowning man clutching a rope. “How did you… come to be like this?”

*My children grew up,* the voice said softly. *Some wanted something different. They wanted to find their own path. But I couldn’t bear to be separated. Even if they didn’t want guidance any longer, I wanted them to know I was there. So, I divided myself. And a part of me joined my children Below.*

“We treated you badly,” Crowley recalled. He could protest he’d had nothing to do with it. He hadn’t known some piece of their Creator was held in a Loop. But… no. He’d been part of it if only through carefully chosen ignorance. He'd dismissed any rumors he'd heard as none of his affair after all.

*Children lash out. My human children had a similar reaction when I came to them. That doesn’t mean I don’t stop loving. And look around. One of my sons gave me a gift. Something new. Somewhere to begin again. And someday, maybe all my children will be together again.*

Something touched them both. A kiss of sorts on both their foreheads. A kiss both could feel on themselves and each other.

*You’re my hope. You overcame a divide. And look what you’ve found together. You’re beautiful.*

They stared into the unknowable for a long stretch.

“I…” Aziraphale said weakly. “I came for my sword.”

*Of course. It’s time for that now, isn’t it? I always knew you’d need it again one day. It’s been waiting for you a long time.*

Crowley felt the unknowable briefly envelope Aziraphale. The voice which whispered might have been for the angel’s ears only, but it came to both of them.

*You have a new task ahead. But don’t fear. You’ve known it for a long time.*

*And you…* The presence closed gently around the demon.

He tensed. Demons weren’t supposed to feel this anymore. This closeness to their Creator. Yet… yet it still felt right somehow.

*You’ve been carrying messages. Can you carry a few for me?*
He nodded.

Tell Linda, I’m so sorry. I have no excuse for hurting her. I can never make up the pain I caused. But, I rejoice she endured. The alternative… it would have been an unspeakable loss.

Tell Amenadiel, I don’t have favorites. I love them all. No matter what riddle they’ve become.

“What?”

He’ll understand. And Lucifer… My poor, troubled boy. Tell him he’s worth being loved and loving in return. And I never stopped loving him. No matter who I was and am. I’m so proud of what he’s becoming.

And as for you… You know how to find the way. Even back to the beginning. Don’t fear. You’ll know where to go when the time is right.

Now, children. The force pushed them abruptly through the unknown. Your place is elsewhere and it’s time you returned. Thank you for visiting me. It may be eternity before I see my children again. If you don’t mind, I believe I’ll keep Charlotte’s body. Maybe it can be a new Eve. I hope one day you see what I’m going to build.

~

They awoke in a sprawl of wings and limbs on a deserted beach in the predawn darkness.

Crowley sat up first, spitting sand out of his mouth and wiping his hair back into place. “What just…?” He clutched his head, struggling with the sudden impossible duality of knowing too much and too little at once. He spat out a garbled string of blessings and swears in every language he’d ever learned. By the time he was done, his head had stopped spinning and his eyes were beginning to focus again.

The first thing he saw was a dolphin leaping a caper out at sea.

“Big brains, dolphins,” he mumbled groggily. “Right, Angel?” Silence made him turn to his companion.

Aziraphale sat hunched and shaking. The Sword of Eden lay whole and gleaming across his lap. Crowley crossed his legs and sat facing him. “Look at that,” he breathed.

A shudder ran through Aziraphale. “It’s different.”

“Looks the same to… Oh... how about that?”

On the blade shone the name of its wielder. The symbol of the one it had been forged for, and forged from. But the name was not quite what it had been.

Names were tricky. Names meant things. And the meaning of this name had changed.

It was still Aziraphale – however it pleased him to have it pronounced. But Aziraphale didn’t mean what it had before.

“I can’t,” the angel panted helplessly. “That’s too much.”

“What do you mean?” The demon countered. “It’s what you’ve always done.”
“I just guarded the Eastern Gate,” Aziraphale protested. “And I’m just a principality. Cherubim - they’re the ones who do this sort of thing. I shouldn’t have even been there. Not with my status. If it wasn’t for the sword…”

“But you had the sword. Your essence created one of the most powerful weapons in the celestial arsenal. Why do you suppose that was?”

“An accident, I suppose.”

Crowley snorted. “You know that’s not true. You were always that. Maybe it just took you a while to be ready.”

“But what am I supposed to do now?”

“Exactly what you do now. You know that, too. Adam’s right. The world spins on without us doing anything. You just get to be ready to step in if the big one comes along. You may not even have to swing it. But you’ll have your sword if the moment comes.”

Aziraphale lifted his terrified eyes. “I can’t… I can’t do it alone.”

Crowley covered Aziraphale’s hand with his.

The sword blazed to life, flames rushing down the blade from hilt to tip. Except the flames weren’t as they had been when they’d burned with Heavenly righteousness. Now celestial blaze and hellfire wove an intricate, serpentine dance over its length, flaming together in perfect unity.

“Who said you’d be alone? Look at the hilt.”

Aziraphale’s eyes dropped to what lay below their joined hands.

The hilt was solid celestial steel. The grip was a spiral of subtly carved images. Angel feathers curled with serpent scales. Leaves brushed against a tumble of papers. The emblem on the end of the pommel was a book.

Crowley bumped his forehead against Aziraphale’s. “No matter what, Angel. When the worst times come, we’re going to be together.”

They stayed in silent communion for a span of minutes. Then, Crowley pulled the angel to his feet. “Come on. You need breakfast. A cup of tea to stop your mind from spinning.”

The Serpent of Eden walked away from the beach. Clinging to his hand was a dazed and slightly overweight principality. One wouldn’t have known from looking at him that his name declared him the Protector of Life and the Guardian of Earth.

But, Crowley thought with a smile, he couldn’t think of anyone he’d trust more.

Chapter End Notes

Do I need a blasphemy warning on this? I had to explain the goddess somehow, but there wasn’t a way for this not to go strange places.

Next week: A long-awaited trial in Hell.
“The hardest part was convincing Aziraphale to play the part of the ape-man,” Crowley said. “After that, human imagination took over and a legend was born.”

Lucifer laughed. “And that’s how these things get started.”

Crowley grinned. “He never wanted to owe me a favor again after that.”

There was no mail coming or going this evening, nor was trying to write his feelings a current priority in Lucifer’s mind. He was tired. He needed a distraction. And he’d found the Serpent of Eden to be worthwhile company. If only to discuss favorite movies. Or embarrassing moments in history.

Lucifer topped off two drinks. “I once managed to pull enough flight feathers off Michael to leave him stranded in Mexico until they grew back. After a couple years, Amenadiel was demanding to know what I’d done with him. I went to check on him. He was having a lovely time. Enrolled in a university. Drinking obscene amounts. Playing in a band. Hadn’t even noticed his feathers were back.”

“The only angels worth knowing,” Crowley said. “Are the ones that figure out humanity’s way better than we give them credit for.”

They clicked glasses.

“And how are my favorite humans?” Lucifer asked.

“Well, Ella took us to the Pride Festival.”

“I wasn’t aware Miss Lopez liked the ladies.”

Crowley shrugged. “She likes supporting people and massive parties. I don’t know if it was more than that for her. I didn’t ask. Mazikeen loved it. Even for a demon, she managed an excessive amount of sex.”

Lucifer smiled. “She does believe in living fast. Although…” His gaze turned more thoughtful. “She seems to have found more to life than that at times.”

“Well, she was back to old habits for a day.”

“We all need that. How did your angel manage?”

“He had this whole gaggle of teens crowding around him while he talked them through informed consent, and lasting relationships, and handling hate speech. He’s spending the week coaching a couple through coming out to their parents.”

“And where were you while this was going on?”

“Helping the protestors call AAA.” Crowley’s eyes turned wide and innocent. “Imagine every single one of them locking their keys, phones, and signs in their cars. Good thing I came along to help, right? And crazy how much hotter the parking lot got than anywhere else. And their water
bottles all being empty or missing. By the time we’d finally gotten them into their cars, most of
them just went home.”

“And the ones that didn’t?”

“There was a small accident involving a burrito truck and a grease fire… The truck’s fine. After
that, I found out there were some ICE agents sniffing around, so…” He grinned broadly. “I had a
great day.”

Lucifer shook his head. “And this is your version of spreading evil in the world.”

“Hey, I made sure some very specific people went home with their souls quite tarnished.” The
demon shrugged. “Not my fault if I may have done more good than harm. Completely
unintentionally, of course.”

“However did you manage to stay assigned on Earth so long?”

“Oh, you should read my reports! Did you know I caused World War II?”

“Since I spent some time in Germany around then watching while humanity made a series of
increasingly bad decisions, I can be quite certain you did not.”

Crowley’s eyes twinkled. “But Dagon doesn’t know that. The field office thought I could be their
top agent if I really put in the effort.” He sighed. “They were always disappointed I never lived up
to my full potential.”

“It’s a wonder I never ran across you on Earth. We do enjoy the same sort of scenes.”

The demon looked away. “I made sure you never saw me.”

Lucifer’s smile faded. “Indeed.” He took a long drink.

Crowley’s tongue flicked a few anxious darts. “Charlie’s saying a few new words,” he said at last.
“Dr. Martin’s upset he already knows ‘knife’.”

“Maze will have him prepping for armed combat before he’s housebroken.”

There was a knock at the door. “Sire?” Called one of Lucifer’s servants. “Kings Egyn and Oriens
request a moment of your time.”

Crowley vanished beneath the furniture.

Lucifer idly pulled the second glass closer to himself. “Enter.”

Several of Lucifer’s personal guards filed in, taking up serious and protective stances around the
room as the kings of the northern and eastern region of Hell entered followed by several of their
court. The group bowed low before the devil.

Lucifer came around the bar. He was tired, that was the simple truth. Every day was a fight to beat
some semblance of new order into Hell while the nobility fought him tooth and claw. There was
proper decorum to follow when the kings came calling. He should offer them a drink. Definitely a
seat. Instead he leaned back against the bar and spoke a single word. “What?”

They knew they’d been insulted. Egyn rose from her bow, fighting down the flicker of fire in her
eyes. “Lord, we have heard rumors we beg you to tell us are untrue. They say you would change
the division of the regions.”
“It has crossed my mind.”

“But…” Egyn took a step forward, halting at the warning hiss of obsidian blades from the king’s guards. The guards could read their King’s mood. If these intruders weren’t welcome, they’d make his wishes clear with blood.

Lucifer held up a hand and the guards drew back. “Go on,” he prompted.

“H-Haven’t we been loyal?” Egyn stammered. “We’ve done all you commanded.”

“You have. And this is what I wish now.”

“But… why?”

“It seems sensible. The lines were drawn long ago. Things don’t entirely fit within the grid they once did.”

“But we know what is ours,” Oriens protested.

“Do you? Then why beleaguer me with infighting and complaints so often?”

“We…” Oriens and Egyn looked at one another with a burst of alarm. “We only wish to keep you abreast of our activities. We are quite comfortable working together. Our houses are in order.”

“Are they?” Lucifer asked, watching one of their retainers with an interested gleam. He sauntered closer. “Tell me,” he hummed. “You’re an ambitious-looking young Lilim. What do you desire?”

The demon didn’t even try to resist the satanic prompting. The answer came out without a second thought. “To murder King Oriens and become king of the eastern region.”

The kings whirled on the demon in horror.

“Perhaps your houses are not so in order after all,” Lucifer murmured and turned away.

“That was unnecessary!” Egyn snarled.

Lucifer looked back at her. “Excuse me?”

The king advanced, ignoring the guards. “We are loyal to the throne. To you. We have been so as long as the realm has existed. Yet you insult us. You take from us. Now you humiliate us before our underlings? What have we done to deserve this? We held our regions in your absence. We held to the hope and promise of your return. And you repay our loyalty with… disgrace? With undermining us? Why?”

Lucifer’s face transformed in a rush of fury. With a flap of leather wings, he was on Egyn, assaulting with claw and hellfire. “How dare-?!” He roared. “You’d dare question me?!”

The violence was fierce and in no way targeted. He pursued demons at random – even his own guards bore the wounds of his rush of temper.

Swiftly he had the kings pinned to the floor, both cowering beneath the snarling devil. “You would question your king?” He demanded, receiving panicked negatives and placating gestures in response.

“You will rule what it pleases me to grant you,” he snarled softly. “If this is too difficult for you to comprehend, I will find others who can obey. Is that clear?”
The kings whimpered assurances of their compliance. He let them up slowly.

The entire crowd fled.

It took several long breaths to restore his face. There wasn’t much hope for the shirt. “Crowley,” he called.

The serpent crawled out of concealment.

Lucifer’s tone became calmer. “Would you like another drink?”

Crowley looked between him and the door. “…Can I go?”

Lucifer raised his eyebrows.

The serpent flattened himself fretfully.

Lucifer sighed. “Very well.”

A moment later, he was alone.

Alone.

Wasn’t that typical?

He went to the window and looked out over Hell.

This was how it had always been, hadn’t it? Followers. Not friends. Not companions. Not equals.

There were those to whom he was kind. There were those he granted favor and status. But he would always see them as belonging to him.

He was King of Hell. More powerful than any other. He could crush any demon with utter impunity. He could treat them however he wished. He’d fought his way to the throne and he held that position with might and fury. Their lives were his to control.

Chloe wouldn’t thank him for thinking that way.

Neither would Linda.

…and neither would Aziraphale.

He pulled the letter from amidst the others. It was easy to find – humming with divine fury as it was.

It had made him laugh when he’d first received it. Now he read the angel’s tirade in a more somber mood.

*To the Lord of Hell, The Angel of the Bottomless Pit, The Great Adversary, Lucifer Morningstar*

*Greetings from Earth and from Heaven Above,*

*Having dispensed with pleasantries, I must demand an explanation.*
The humans of Los Angeles speak so well of you. They say you have shown them kindness and courtesy. They say there is untapped goodness springing up within you.

If they speak truthfully, explain then why you have the audacity to maim and wound one who is no threat to you.

Is this how you treat all you consider beneath you? Does it amuse you to work them to exhaustion and mutilate them for your own pleasure? Do you receive sadistic delight to carve your name upon them as if they were a hapless park bench and you a childish miscreant?

Perhaps you view all demons as minions to be crushed for your pleasure, but Crowley is far more than that to me. I would carry him away where you could never harm him if it were within my power. I would tear down the gates of Hell and defend him from your machinations. I would see you as beaten and bruised as it seems to give you pleasure to see him.

I know his heart. He loves the Earth just as I have been told, you do. I see your plight and I sympathize that duty keeps you from true love. That is no excuse to respond with cruelty to those who stand innocently in your path.

Crowley tells me demons are focused in their fights and know better to involve bystanders. Do you, King of Hell, know less than your minions? You strike cruelly at one who could never do you harm. What, then, do you do to those you to perceive as threats?

Beware, oh King. I have watched tyrants fall on Earth for lesser crimes. When your people rise against your brutality, who will stand with you?

Aziraphale, Former Guardian of the Eastern Gate of Eden, Now of Fair London Town

It had arrived concealed amidst the rest of the mail without Crowley being aware of it. The demon had, of course, panicked at the sight. Lucifer had simply found it overly dramatic and amusing. Why was the angel so uptight about a little brand? Calling it mutilation. Overreacting, posturing swan. Featherbrained fool. The mark was an honor. A kindness.

Everything he’d done since his return had been meant in kindness. In a way. Organize Hell. Improve it. Fix deep-seeded problems. He could do it. He could force the change…

…He’d never explained himself. He’d never asked anyone’s feelings.

He didn’t have to! He was the King of Hell. For them was to obey. No explanation needed.

…And that left him drinking alone night after night.

And this was the life he’d wished on Chloe?

“I’ve treated you poorly,” he murmured to the realm at large.

He called for a servant.

“Go to the kings of the regions. Say I send my apologies for my fit of temper. Ask them to dine
with me on the morrow. I will better explain myself then and hear their concerns.”

Hell had been his since the first day he’d gained the shore of the burning lake. He’d been opposed, but he’d never really been challenged. Hell responded to him. Hell became an extension of him. Hell had offered itself and he’d accepted the power.

But he’d never valued any of it. The realm. The power. His subjects.

He only hoped it wasn’t too late.

Chapter End Notes

Welcome back to another week. Usually Monday is the slow day. This week, we're jump in with both feet. I hope you're ready for the ride.
“Ella, do you have the results back on… oh, sorry. I didn’t know you had company.” Chloe checked herself as she strode into the lab.

Ella looked up from her microscope, her eyes flitting between the two figures in the room with a look of shock. “You can see her?!”

“It’s cool, El,” The girl in the cat shirt said as she held out her hand to Chloe. “She’s engaged to my brother.”

Chloe took the hand awkwardly. “Right… More of the family.”

“This is Rae-Rae,” Ella explained. “Well, Azrael, actually.”

“Rae-Rae’s fine,” the angel assured her with a friendly smile.

Ella jumped as information registered in her mind. “YOU'RE ENGAGED TO LUCIFER?!”

Chloe stumbled back as Ella slammed her in a hug. “It’s… complicated. I didn’t think we were telling anyone yet.”

“Sorry.” Rae-Rae blushed. “He sent me a letter.”

“Of course…” Chloe extracted herself from Ella's enthusiasm. "...How does one get in contact with you?"

Rae-Rae laughed. She reached into a pocket and unfolded a large printed sign.

‘Seeking Angel of Death,’ it read. ‘Please Corporate. – C’

“He hung those in every hospital in LA until I got in touch.” Rae-Rae grinned. “I think Lu just needed to tell somebody.” She sighed. “I really need to visit him. Work just never takes me to Hell. Speaking of which, I should go.”

“Good seeing you, Rae-Rae!” Ella embraced the angel.

“Smell you later!” The girl called. "You know how to get in contact with me now if you need anything." She was gone the moment the humans looked away.

Ella whirled on Chloe. “Chloe! This is huge! When did it happen?! Why haven’t you told anyone?! We should celebrate! We should get everyone together and go out!”

Chloe laughed a little awkwardly. “I… don’t know how to explain it. And the last time I was engaged…”

“Right… that was a mistake. But Lucifer’s way better than Pierce. I mean…” Ella held up her hands as balancing scales. “Immortal serial killer verses King of the damned… I’d go with Lucifer. Wait! Does this mean he’s coming back?!”

“No… Seems like work will be keeping us apart for… a while. This was more of a… promise for what eternity’s going to look like.”

“Good enough for me!” Ella declared. “We’re having an engagement-or-whatever party!”
“Can it wait until I’ve at least told Trixie?”

“What?! She doesn’t know? Does she know any of it?”

Chloe slumped on the counter. “I have no idea. How do you ask… or explain any of this?”

“Aww, Trix will be fine. She’ll think it’s cool.”

Chloe studied the scientist. “How are you so okay with this? I had an absolute crisis when I found out about Lucifer.”

Ella shrugged. “I don’t know. I was a little freaked out. But, I was just so glad I wasn’t crazy. I mean… Rae-Rae’s been a friend for so long. Finding out she was an angel… it was weird, but it made sense. And she’s my friend. I still trusted her. Same for Lucifer. I mean it might be hard to see him with… does he have the whole horns and hooves and pitchfork like in pictures?”

“No… But he does have wings.”

“That is so cool! Don’t you think it’s cool?”

Chloe laughed weakly. “Okay… yes. They’re beautiful.”

“See? Don’t you think we’re lucky? We’ve got friends who can fly, and turn into snakes, and were around for the whole Book of Genesis!” Ella’s grin widened. “It’s worth being a little freaked. Trixie’s gonna love it.”

Chloe sat with bowed head on the edge of the couch, playing the ring between her fingers. She’s strung it on the necklace Lucifer had given her alongside the bullet she’d once shot him with. She wore it beneath her clothes, enjoying the feeling of closeness. But… maybe it was time to show it in the open. To one person at least.

The front door opened.

Trixie rushed inside, Whiskers bounding on her heals. “Hi Mommy!”

Chloe caught her in a hug. “Hi Monkey. Did you have fun with your daddy?”

“Yes! We went surfing!”

“That’s great. Come tell me about it.”

They sat on the couch, Trixie prattling gleefully about their overnight in the hotel and the waves they’d caught. The girl trailed off far too soon. “What’s the matter?”

Chloe smiled weakly. “You’re too smart. There’s something I need to talk to you about. It’s… something big.”

“Okay.” Trixie put an arm around Whiskers, who’d draped herself over the girl’s lap. “Is it bad?”

“No, no nothing like that. It’s… a little strange. See, Lucifer and I… you know we like each other very much…”

“Are you going to marry him?!” Trixie’s face turned bright and eager. “Is he coming home?” She faltered. “Or are you going to Hell?”
Chloe jumped. “You know what he really is?”

The girl gave her mother the most scornful of childish looks. “Mom. He gave me a magic cat.”

Chloe grimaced. “I know… I know he always told you he was… the devil… I didn’t know you believed him.”

“Lucifer doesn’t lie, Mom. He always told me the truth about everything.”

“Did he… show you his face? His real face?”

Trixie shook her head. “No. But I saw Maze’s.”

“What?!”

“She called her Halloween costume. But I knew it was real.” She grinned. “We got so much candy!”

“Trixie.” Chloe took her hand. “Weren’t you scared?”

The girl looked baffled. “Maze is my friend. She might be mean sometimes when she forgets, but she’d never be scary.”

“Trixie…” Chloe put her arms around her daughter. “You’re incredible.”

“Why? Were you scared?”

“…Yes. I was very scared when I found out he was telling the truth. It took me a long time to be not scared.”

“But you love him?”

“I do, yes.”

“So… are you going to marry him?”

Chloe took a long breath. “Someday, maybe. But he can’t leave where he is. So… someday I’ll go to him. But not soon.” She squeezed the girl close. “I promise I won’t leave you.”

“But you and Lucifer get to be together later?”

“Right.”

Trixie considered. “Will he ever come visit us?”

“I hope so… I know you miss him.”

“He should come back and live with us.”

“He wants to, Monkey. But his job is very important.”

The girl’s voice was small. “More important than us?”

Chloe felt the tears in her eyes. “No… But part of his job is keeping us safe. And he has to stay away to do that.”

Trixie was silent for nearly a minute. “I’m glad you’ll be with him someday. Do I get to be with
“You then too?”

“Trixie! You can’t want to go to Hell!”

“Why not? Maze and Lucifer live there.”

“I don’t think they like it very much.”

“We’ll help them make it nicer.”

“Grandpa’s in Heaven. If you don’t go to Hell, you’ll get to meet him. He’s going to love you.”

“Is Grandma going to Heaven?”

“I don’t know. I’m not sure any of us can know that.”

Trixie was silent for another long moment. “Lucifer should come back and visit. I’ll tell him. We’ll make it so he can. And then you can get married.” She grinned broadly. “I’m going to have a step-dad and a step-brother!” She ran off.

It took a second for that to register.

“Trixie! What do you mean a brother?!”

~

“Who told Chloe about Adam?” Lucifer stared at the letter in front of him as he leaned on the bar.

Across from him, Crowley spat out his drink. “I swear I didn’t say anything!” He flinched. “Uh… you know Linda knows, right?”

“Yes… She had a great deal to say on the subject.” Lucifer continued to read with a frown. “I had intended to explain that whole debacle at some point. The timing just never seemed right.” He finished the letter. “Apparently Trixie overheard it from Linda and Amenadiel. Well… this will be interesting to explain.”

“Hey… About who knows what…” Crowley swallowed hard, his hand shaking as he gripped the edge of the counter. “So… um… back at the apocalypse when… uh… Adam first came into his powers… he… might have… read my mind.”

Lucifer looked up sharply.

“I mean, not all of it… but what I was thinking about right then… He said he stopped doing that after that day because it wasn’t right.”

Lucifer stared at him. “How involved exactly were you with the apocalypse?”

“I dropped the baby off at the convent.” Crowley had a look of general nerves about him. “I was supposed to keep an eye on him growing up, but I kind of… lost track of him. So, I didn’t see him again until Armageddon.” His tongue flicked. “But after that… you know… he had questions. So he’d come by the bookshop.”

“How much contact have you had with him?”

“Not… that much. We’d visit once or twice a year. And he’d come up to London on breaks. We sent him holiday gifts. And went to some of school events. Until he went to uni. Then he’d stop by
if he was in London. Last time was… well… the day you… brought everyone back here.”

Lucifer covered his eyes. “He knows?”

“He never… said anything. But… I mean… probably?” Crowley scrunched his eyes shut and trembled in a ‘please-don’t-kill-me’ sort of way.

Lucifer took a few long breaths. “I suppose it doesn’t matter.”

Crowley opened one eye.

“Settle down,” the devil rumbled. He picked up an unopened envelope.

“He’s a good kid,” Crowley said in an anxious rush. “He’s a teacher in-”

“Crowley,” Lucifer said sharply. “I don’t want to know.”

The demon flinched.

“I was never his father. I’ll never be his father.” The bitterness was heavy in Lucifer’s tone. “It’s too late. He wouldn’t want to see me.” He shredded the envelope ruthlessly just to keep his hands occupied. “Go get some rest,” he said gruffly to the demon.

Crowley nodded and headed for the door. He paused and looked back. “Hey, Boss? If you ever do change your mind… He might surprise you.”

Lucifer was left with a throbbing heart and pounding head.
“…So she’s running for the door and I…” Maze broke off the story of her latest bounty hunt and rose warily to her feet.

Beside her on the couch, Chloe had been enjoying turning her brain off after a long day of work. Now, she tensed and followed Maze’s gaze.

Whiskers stood on the threshold of Trixie’s room. Her fur stood on end and her eyes were dilated. A low rumble sounded in the back of her throat.

Maze drew a Hell-forged knife.

Chloe reached for her gun. She wasn’t entirely sure if it would do any good, but she’d taken out possessed demons with it at least.

Whiskers stalked toward the front door, tense as a bowstring, her tail lashing furiously.

Maze followed behind. She reached slowly for the doorknob and threw open the door.

The evening view of darkness and streetlights was all that lay beyond.

The hell-cat stepped outside. She paced a tight circle, her muzzle raised to the wind. Still agitated, she crossed back into the house.

“What is it?” Chloe whispered.

Maze shook her head. Her eyes scanned the darkness. At last she turned back to Chloe, an uncertain look on her face. “I’m calling Linda,” she said, grabbing for her phone. “Just in case.”

She put the phone on speaker, still staring out the door.

“Maze?” Linda’s voice called over the baby’s wails. “I just got him to sleep.”

“Did I wake him?”

“…No… He started crying just before you called. Is something wrong?”

“I don’t know. The hell-hound’s signaling danger. But I’m not…”

“Hold on,” Linda’s voice moved away from the phone. “Someone’s at the door.”

“Linda!” Maze’s voice rose in alarm. “Don’t open it!”

“Aziraphale?” They heard Linda say. “What are you doing here?”

“Is everything alright?” The angel’s soft cadence caused Mazikeen to slump in relief.

“Why wouldn’t it be?” They heard Linda ask.

Chloe stared in concern at the demon. “Maze? What’s going on?”

Maze ignored her. “Linda! Is Crowley with him?”

“Yes.”
“Put him on!”

There was a murmur, then Crowley’s voice came over the phone. “Did you sense that?”

“No. But the hell-cat’s freaked about something.”

Chloe and Maze glanced to Whiskers, who was still pacing stressed and angry circles.

“What was it?” Maze demanded.

“I don’t know. Some sort of wave… I thought someone might have gotten out. We flew over to check on Charlie.”

“More demons?!” Chloe asked.

“Aziraphale’s calling a witch. She’ll be able to tell us. Till then… sit tight.”

Chloe’s phone began to buzz. She stared at a rapid string of text messages. “I’ve got a murder… maybe more than one.” She glanced helplessly at the bedroom door. “Can you stay with Trixie?”

“You shouldn’t go out there alone,” Maze protested, trailing Chloe as the detective collected her badge and jacket. “At least take Whiskers!”

“I’m not taking a cat to a crime scene!”

“Leave her in the car with the windows down! But she’ll be able to sense if something’s wrong.”

Chloe was surprised by the genuine worry in the demon’s eyes. “What about you and Trixie?”

“We’ll go to Linda’s. Aziraphale’s got the toughest sword on Earth. We’ll be fine.”

It took a little prodding, during which Trixie came out to see what the fuss was about. Eventually Chloe found herself driving away with a very delighted cat riding shotgun.

~

Police often spoke of Halloween as the worst night of the year. Or sometimes Christmas. Or evenings when sporting events turn to riots.

This felt like all three combined.

Chloe slumped at her desk in the early hours of the morning, her mind utterly spent.

Whiskers sprawled beside her, sound asleep.

“Hi, Detective. Mazikeen said I should bring you this.”

Chloe looked up blearily as Crowley set a very large coffee in front of her. “Oh, thank God.”

“Who I’m apparently on speaking terms with again,” the demon muttered as he sat down. Louder, he said, “I’m guessing it was a bad night?”

Chloe groaned. “The hospitals are overflowing with overdoses… assaults… attempted suicides. So is the jail. I’ve been booking people all night.”

The demon frowned. “What sort of crimes?”
“Just… people turning on each other.”

“Like in a rage?”

“No… just…” Chloe leaned forward. “Like, the last one? This woman got out a gun and started shooting her entire family. She was sobbing and saying there was no point. That they were all going to die anyway. She might as well do it. It’s been like that all night. No mystery… just people… choosing to die.” She studied the demon. “Is it connected to what you felt?”

Crowley shrugged with an uncertain shake of his head.

“But you felt something?”

“Something,” he echoed slowly. He sighed. “It was… a wave? Just this wash of energy.”

“Maze didn’t feel anything.”

“She’s a fighter. I’m a coward. The one advantage to that is an enhanced sense of danger. Not as good as hers.” He nodded at Whiskers. “But enough to know something was happening.”

“Are there more demons loose?”

“Anathema – she’s a witch – did a scan for us. She says Maze and I are still the only ones.”

“Could she be wrong?”

“She’s the best I know. And nothing’s getting out of Hell right now. Not with the guards on high alert.”

“Is everything alright down there?”

“It was two days ago. The boss was pretty hopeful, actually. He’d… had a bit of a tantrum recently…but he’d gotten himself together and was really trying to play nice. He said if the trial worked out the way he wanted, things would really start changing.” Crowley tilted his head thoughtfully. “There’s been plenty of push-back. But… half the council’s onboard and the boss was working pretty hard on the kings when I left.”

His frown deepened. “It could be ethereal. Angels are harder to scan for. And the big guys feel about the same when they get like that.”

“Like what?”

The demon looked further unsure of himself. “What I sensed last night? It was familiar… but it’s been thousands of years.” He leaned forward on her desk. “Back when there were bigger presences on Earth, you’d feel it sometimes. These… washes of energy. When the big guys would fight with each other. Sometimes there’d be an echo of their power. Even if they weren’t on Earth. You’d feel it coming off their worshipers. And there’d an after-effect in the humans – an increase in theft, or lust, or whatever.”

“It forced people to do things?”

“No… just increases the chances of the ones already leaning that way would go through with what they were already thinking about. And sometimes you’d get a rush of emotion attached. Whatever the big guys were exuding. This felt like…” He trailed off.

“What?” Chloe prompted.
“…Triumph.”
The wolf-demon’s tail twitched with barely concealed enthusiasm as he paced before the court. Marchosias was in the spotlight, the multitudes of Hell fully focused upon him as he at last recounted the tale of those who’d fled Hell’s justice.

On his throne, Lucifer concealed his smile. He’d seen enough of human entertainment to recognize Marchosias trying out his best Atticus Finch and Jack McCoy impressions. He kept waiting for the demon to shake his head and murmur that he was just a simple country lawyer. If Marchosias could have found a way to don a pair of suspenders, he would have.

As trials went, human justice would have called it a mockery. Lucifer sat as judge, jury, and executor. Marchosias spoke for both prosecution and defense. The condemned were not permitted to say a word. But, as justice in Hell went, this was the fairest trial the realm had ever seen.

The condemned were not on trial, truthfully. Hell was. Could the hordes of Hell believe in a new form of justice? Could the demons be swayed toward softer emotion?

Marchosias told the tale beautifully, his language none too subtly on the side of the condemned. Lucifer already knew what he’d say. He watched the crowd with hope in his heart.

The condemned demons had murdered one of the judges of the damned. This was a known fact. Marchosias had found the why.

Both were demons under the judge’s control. The judge had been ruthless and vicious in dealings with their underlings, one of the condemned in particular. The brutality had reached a point at which it was sure to be fatal.

Under the law of Hell, the judges were untouchable. No demon challenged one that high unless they worked their way up through the ranks and engaged in proper challenge. Certainly no demon would dare stab a judge in the back.

But the condemned had found love in one another, loath as they were to dare admit it in the darkness of Hell. And for love’s sake, one had murdered the judge to save the other from certain death.

By law that one’s life was forfeit. Yet for love’s sake they’d fought their way free of the guards who’d come for the one. They’d fled together, intertwined their fates together, flung themselves on their king’s mercy together. And here they stood on trial, prepared to accept mutual fate.

Marchosias made ample eye-contact with the crowd, seeking out any sympathetic expression as he asked the demons to dig into their essence and find their kinder emotions. Wasn’t it noble to protect a companion? Wasn’t loyalty something to be treasured? Didn’t those in power have an obligation to the demons beneath them? Defending one’s own life was considered justifiable killing. Wasn’t this the same?

At last the orator concluded his argument and took his seat. Lucifer could see Decabra giving him a look of triumph as he leaned close to her.

The crowd of demons murmured amongst themselves, many casting long and thoughtful looks at the prisoners.

Lucifer rose and the crowd dropped to silence. “You have heard the tale of the accused,” he said,
looking out over the assembly. “What have you to say of them?”

There was silence. Then murmuring. Gradually the murmuring swelled into chatter until the crowd was shouting. “Death! Death to the killers! Traitors to the throne! Death!”

Lucifer paled.

Marchosias’ ears went flat.

Decabra cried out angrily.

The condemned moaned and clung together.

“Justice!” Belial roared out mightily. “Justice for the throne!”

Lucifer opened his mouth to respond, but a hand fell on his arm.

“My Lord,” Beelzebub murmured. “May we address you in private?”

The devil and his councilors soon stood in a private room.

“Sire,” Beelzebub began. “You cannot pardon them.”

“Can’t I?” The devil snarled.

“Think of the repercussion!” Mammon protested. “You asked the will of the people. Consider the response if you go against it.”

“Hell’s will is mine,” Lucifer rumbled.

“You insist you wish to change the old ways,” Mammon continued, shivering to face the incensed monarch but speaking anyway. “To pardon them now will be to violate everything you’ve said since your return.”

“The killing was justified!” Marchosias insisted.

“Not according to the law,” Beelzebub shot back. “Judges are untouchable. Even if they deserve their fate.”

“Then the law should change!” Decabra insisted.

“You can’t change the law to fit your need,” the lord of the flies buzzed. She turned back to the king. “And think of what will happen if you allow those demons their freedom. They killed their lord! Every demon in Hell will see this as license to rebel against any above them.”

“This wasn’t a case of minor cruelty,” Marchosias protested. “The judge would have tortured them to death for no reason but that they could. They had before. I found ample proof of killings.”

“But will the commoners see it that way? Will the nobility? Sire, you’ll lose both if you judge against the people’s will.”

“Lord, please!” Marchosias surged forward, his ears splayed at distressed angles. “They don’t deserve to die! Not for defending themselves!”

“The law says they must!” Mammon insisted. “And the people have ruled against them.”
Lucifer’s fists clenched. “They should not die for this crime.”

“They betrayed the laws of Hell!” Beelzebub practically screamed. “Why do you continuously defend traitors and punish those faithful to you?! This is not justice, Lord!”

Lucifer stepped back at the intensity of her words. He’d not expected this resistance… with reasonable arguments no less.

“The people are beginning to see you as weak,” Mammon pressed. “They’ll challenge all the laws unless you show them proof the laws still mean something! You have no choice!”

“No choice?” Lucifer snarled, his wings flaring out.

Mammon held firm. “Sire, you asked and the people responded. What sort of ruler will you be now?”


“Get out!” Lucifer roared at last. His council departed, leaving the devil to claw at the walls.

His souls broiled with agony. This was supposed to be his victory. Proof kinder feelings could be found in Hell. Proof the possibility of change lay within reach.

But… they were right. Terribly, terribly right. If he didn’t want to be a tyrant…

But this wasn’t justice!

But… what else could he do?

His soul still churned in misery as he stood before the assembled hordes of Hell and listened to their eager and bloodthirsty chants.

The prisoners lay chained before him.

He unsheathed his blade.

He looked out at his councilors.

He saw the betrayal and pain written on the faces of the new advisors. Their belief of his desire to alter Hell shattered.

He saw doubt and scorn in the faces of his old councilors. The belief he was weak. That this was further proof he was no longer fit to hold the throne.

And as he brought down the sword in two successive strikes, he knew he’d made the wrong choice.

And he knew there had been no right choice.
The King roamed the long tunnels beneath the castle where none but him ever tread. These were dangerous places to any not the Lord of Hell – regions so steeped in his power that most would be repelled just trying to enter the tunnels. It was a good place for quiet reflection.

His mind was elsewhere, his feet following memorized trails without his notice. He only realized where he’d come when his journey was halted by a door. He stared at it a long time before reaching out to touch the stone. It vanished at his touch, leaving a bare room exposed to sight.

The room was empty stone, rounded at the edges as rooms holding Hell-Loops tended to be. This one was dormant for the moment. Special. He’d created the room himself. Only two besides himself had ever entered this place. The other two had been inmates.

He walked inside on slow and heavy footfalls, his eyes turned to the ground.

In the center of the room was a small depression in the floor where the room’s first captive had once writhed in terror and pain with intensity enough to scrape away stone. Lucifer could still see the imprint of scales against the rocks. It had been a convenient spot to lay the room’s second inmate, although nothing lingered from that.

Lucifer circled the small space, feeling the emptiness weighing down on him.

Why was it so hard to see the way forward? He knew what he wanted. He knew the transformations he wanted to see. But every hand seemed against him. And if he pursued his plans, it was his life he risked. And the people closest to him. And the world as well. If he fell, who took the throne? What would it mean for humanity?

He slid down the wall, leaning his head against his arms. Was this the choice? Become the cruel and calculating ruler of Hell once more and thus protect the people he loved? Or strive for change and risk the lives of everyone dear to him?

If he’d succeeded, it could have brought hope to so many. And a future he would have gladly shared with Chloe.

But failure loomed imminent and certain.

He closed his eyes and let the silent emptiness of the Loop take him.

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“I said to myself, ‘If I was stuck in Hell, and feeling more depressed than ever before, and wanted to make myself even more miserable, where would I go?’”

Lucifer turned his head lethargically to look toward the door.
The serpent lay across the threshold. “And then I thought – you and me – we might have something in common.”

“How did you get down here?” Lucifer asked sluggishly.

“You invited me once upon a time. I guess the hallway still remembered.” Crowley’s tongue flicked in and out, testing the feel of the room. Apparently satisfied, he slithered inside and coiled beside the devil. “I’m not positive it’ll let me leave, though.”

Lucifer leaned his head back against the wall and studied the ceiling. “How long have I been here?”

“Long enough for the council to start to sending out search parties.”

The devil sighed and didn’t move.

“Marchosias told me what happened,” Crowley said after a long pause.

“I shouldn’t have expected otherwise.”

“I don’t know about that. There are some out there agreeing with what you’re trying.”

“Not enough.” The Lord of Hell closed his eyes. “I’ll lose my throne if I’m not careful. There’s too much talk against me. Mammon, Beelzebub – they’ll stir up the generals against me this time.” He sucked in a painful breath. “I can feel the dissent. It’s seeping through Hell. Every shadow questioning my choices. Every whisper asking if I’ve gone mad.”

“Well… you’ll be in good company if you do.”

Lucifer snorted. “How did you stay sane?”

“Me? Sane? Aziraphale would laugh in your face to hear that.”

“I’m serious. You Fell with the rest of us. You endured this misery. You went through pain enough to break far stronger demons. How did you survive?”

“I don’t know. I’ve always been good at finding my way out of things. I guess I… never lost hope. I just held on… and things improved.”

Lucifer was silent. “You were supposed to die in the field, you know.”

“Yeah… I figured that out early on. I may have bargained for my life, but I knew too much to keep around, right? But I was never good at following directions, was I?”

Lucifer looked down at him at last. “You’re calmer than I’d expect, considering where we are.”

Crowley’s tongue flicked as he glanced toward the depression in the floor. “I figure you’re probably not going to lock me up again.”

“I shouldn’t have then.” He slid a hand beneath the serpent and lifted him onto his knees.

Crowley adjusted his coils to wrap around the perch.

“I’m sorry,” Lucifer said with heavy weight to the words. “I wronged you… brutally. You didn’t deserve the blame. You didn’t deserve what I did to you. Back then… or much more recently.”
The serpent ducked his head with an embarrassed air. “Well... we were both pretty different back then,” he said dismissively.

“No.” Lucifer reached out slowly and rubbed the serpent between the eyes. It was far too familiar a gesture for anywhere else. But here he could let all his defenses and facades drop. “You understood right and wrong even then. You were right in the Garden. You gave humanity the tools to understand the world... and I blamed you for getting in my way.” He snorted. “And then took the credit when opinions changed.”

“I never needed the credit.” Crowley leaned into his hand, calm and unafraid. “And it took both of us. I might have pointed them to the tree, but you taught them to hunger for more. And it probably would have happened without us. They were always going to find knowledge.”

Lucifer scoffed. “Just puppets in our Creator’s ineffable plan?”

“Something like that. Our roles always seemed pre-scripted.” He tilted his head meditatively. “The only wild card was Aziraphale and that sword. Or maybe that was part of the plan too. It does keep showing up where we need it.”

They were silent for a time.

Crowley turned his head toward the center of the room. “Did you ever come back here after that night?”

“Sometimes.” Lucifer studied the depression. “Stared at that little time bomb and wondered if what I’d set in motion would be worth it in the end.”

“And now?”

Lucifer shook his head slowly. “Do you know what the humans call the gap between the first and second half of the Bible? The Years of Silence. The centuries when the prophets didn’t speak.” He was quiet for a time longer. “That’s where we are once again. Drifting past prophecy into the unknown.”

“I’m okay with that,” Crowley replied with a chipper cadence. “Maybe there’s no burning lake in our future.”

Lucifer snorted and rose, shifting the serpent to his shoulder as he did. “And maybe it’s something worse.” He started for the door.

“You’re going back?” Crowley asked.

“If they want my throne, they’ll have to fight me for it,” Lucifer said grimly.

“That’s what I like to hear.”

They made their way to Lucifer’s chambers in silence.

Lucifer took a seat at his desk, pulling a parchment to him. In his mind was a list of the people he needed to write to once more. The things he’d left unsaid too long. He dipped his quill and began with a name he’d never put to paper before. That small act done, he turned to the serpent who’d slid down his arm and lay pooled on the desk. “Tell me,” he said slowly, “about my son.”

Chapter End Notes
Amazing fanart by by onecoolcactus
Original Post
This is so perfect to show off these two in this quiet moment! I love it! Thank you!
Chloe played the ring between her fingers and pretended she wasn’t trying to suppress an overwhelming desire to panic.

The first two weeks of silence had been difficult, but she’d held on to logical thought. Something may have happened Below to delay Lucifer writing. Maybe he was waiting for events to finish playing out. Maybe Crowley had needed a rest. She reminded herself repeatedly he deserved far more of a break than he was getting, desperate as she was to hurry him along every time she finished a letter. She had an uncomfortable feeling she’d pushed him to strain his endurance as much, if not more, than Lucifer.

She was aware something had shifted on the day she’d accepted that ring. Crowley had been reserved around of her before. Now his demeanor had shifted to something even more cautious and deferential. She wasn’t sure how she felt about it, and part of her was acutely aware she’d accepted a future which would contain with quite a lot of demons looking upon her with fear and… devotion? Loathing? How would Hell react to what she would become?

That was part of why she’d avoided telling anyone. She wasn’t sure she was ready for the reaction of her supernatural friends. Would Maze bow? Would Amenadiel question?

It was easier to wonder about such things instead of the silence. They were on week four without any word. Too long to write this off as a longer-than-average break between letters. Something was wrong. Something had to be wrong.

Chloe stuffed the ring beneath her shirt as the door opened and Maze let herself in. Aziraphale followed, smiling calmly. They were here to assure her everything was fine. With their more eternal view of time, they saw nothing amiss in a month passing without word.

“Time doesn’t move the same way there,” they’d reminded her repeatedly. It might not have been nearly as long Below.

“But how would we know if something happened?” Chloe demanded tonight. “How would we know if something went wrong?”

Aziraphale’s hand strayed over his heart and rubbed a methodic circle. “I believe I’d know if Crowley was gravely wounded.” Concern showed on his face, replaced quickly with calm. “Fear not. The king of Hell isn’t easily troubled.”

“But his letters… the trial. What if something went wrong? What if…” She clutched the necklace beneath her shirt in a knuckle-white grip. She turned to Maze. “Can’t you find out?”

“I can’t go back on my own,” Maze replied. “And they won’t let an angel through the gate.”

“Amenadiel, maybe,” Aziraphale added. “But we’ll have to wait for him to return from the Silver City.”

“Why can’t you go there and get him?” Chloe demanded.

Aziraphale winced. “There is a very good chance I’d be incarcerated on sight without a chance to find Amenadiel.”

“Then… can’t you fly Maze to Hell? Wouldn’t they let you in if she tells them to?”
The angel and demon exchanged looks.

“Chloe.” Maze spoke with surprising gentleness. “If something’s gone wrong in Hell, it won’t be long before Lucifer’s enemies come here. They’ve targeted Charlie before. They may come looking for you too. If only for that ring.”

Chloe jumped and gripped her necklace tighter. “How did you…?”

“Trixie,” the angel and demon said together.

“Also, Ella,” Maze added.

Chloe rubbed her eyes. “Does everyone know?”

“Probably,” Maze admitted.

“I think Miss Lopez has avoided telling anyone in the station,” Aziraphale ventured. “But she assumed we already knew.”

“But word’s getting around, Decker,” Maze insisted, giving Chloe a protective look. “So, until Amenadiel gets his feathery butt back here, or we know things are desperate in Hell, we’re not leaving you and the twerp alone.”

Chloe tried to smile her gratitude, even if her worries were much less for herself. “Thank you… I just wish we knew what was going on.”

“Well,” Maze shrugged. “There aren’t possessed people in the streets, so I think we’re okay.”

The front door flew open.

The group surged to their feet as Linda stumbled into the room, half dragging Crowley with her. The demon’s arm was over her shoulder. His wings were out and limp. His eyes were unfocused and glassy.

Aziraphale swept him into his arms with an alarmed cry.

“He fell out of the sky and said he needed to come here,” Linda explained helplessly. “I left Charlie in the car!” She called over her shoulder as she hurried out the door.

“My dear,” Aziraphale crooned as he dropped onto the couch, the demon draped across his lap. “What happened?!!”

“Neither snow, nor rain, nor gloom of night…” Crowley rasped with a weak grin.

“This is no time for jokes,” the angel grumbled. “Where have you been?”

“Vegas… Cardiff… Israel… Somalia… Babylon… all over LA…” His head lolled back. “Faster than a speeding bullet… that’s me!”

“Is he hurt?” Chloe asked.

“I think he’s just exhausted.” Aziraphale’s hands still ran urgently over the demon.

Chloe hovered, trying to suppress her impatience. “Does he have any letters?”

Aziraphale glared at her and squeezed Crowley in a protective embrace.
Linda arrived, a fussing baby under her arm, and a handful of letters extended to Chloe. “He gave these to me before he passed out in the car.”

Chloe snatched them from her, ripping at the first envelope without a thought.

Maze yanked it out of her hands. “Check the name!” She snapped, doing a quick sort of the mail and passing letters to Chloe, Linda, and herself.

Chloe scanned the letter with her heart in her throat. “What’s he talking about?” She demanded. “A fight for the throne? I thought that was over when he went back!”

“I think this is my fault,” Linda murmured helplessly, her eyes on her own letter. “I suggested new management structures. I know old regimes don’t always like changes… but I forgot we were talking about demons!”

“They usually just do what Lucifer says,” Maze said. “If he says things will change, most everybody falls in line.”

“But not this time.” Chloe’s hand clenched around the letter. “Why not this time?”

“He was gone too long…” Crowley murmured groggily. “…And came back all human-i-fied… princes don’t like it.”

“My dear,” Aziraphale soothed. “Please rest.”

“Can’t.” The demon gestured vaguely at the remaining letters. “Not done. Gotta find Lopez… and Amenadiel… couldn’t find Eve. Changed jobs again.” He half pulled himself up on his elbow, then collapsed face-first into Aziraphale’s lap.

Chloe tore herself away from the letter and into professional mode. “Aziraphale, there’s a spare bedroom. Why don’t you put him there? We can hand out the rest of these letters.” She looked at Maze. “Do you know where Eve is?”

Maze shook her head. “The redwoods… maybe? She said she had a lead on something that paid, but she hasn’t gotten in contact since then.”

Chloe forced her mind to focus. Maybe she couldn’t help, but she could do small things. Already she was making plans. Send out the messages. Suggest Linda and Charlie stay with her until this blew over. Maybe acquire some holy water. Ask Maze what else would work if she had to battle demons.

If she couldn’t help Lucifer, at least she’d protect herself and those they both loved.

~

It was well after dark, but still too soon for Aziraphale’s taste, when Crowley began to stir.

“No need to get up,” he mumbled and squeezed Crowley a little tighter. “The humans are dealing with everything. You just rest.”

Crowley continued to struggle.

Aziraphale gave up and let him rise.

Crowley went to the window and pulled it open. He punched out the screen, wriggled out the hole, and dropped to the ground.
Aziraphale followed, taking time to fix the screen, before trailing Crowley on a silent walk up the street.

Crowley halted in an empty side street. He gave Aziraphale a long look over his shoulder and spread his wings.

With worry in his heart, Aziraphale unfurled his wings and followed.

They flew as close as wing-span and air currents would allow. Crowley led a slow flight northward. He followed the coastline, seeming in no hurry to touch down.

They alighted at last, Crowley choosing an inland ridge for their roost. It held no particular view, but it was a quiet and lonely spot. In the night’s shadow, they seemed alone in creation.

Crowley wrapped his arms around himself and sat in a silent, compact bundle.

Aziraphale sat beside him, not touching him yet, badly as he wanted to enclose his wings around the downcast demon.

Crowley spoke at last, his voice slow and soft. “I told you once I don’t lie to you. I just don’t tell you things.”

Aziraphale nodded. They both had their secrets – even now. Secrets had piled up over years of animosity. They both knew it. They just didn’t speak of them unless relevant.

“There’s a big thing I never told you,” Crowley went on. “About Adam. About the first time I met him.”

“At the convent?” Aziraphale prompted when the silence had gone on for a stretch.

“No… Before that.” Crowley hung his head. “Way before that.”
Midnight in the Garden

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

6000 years ago...

This was not how he’d imagined he’d get to try out this new body.

Crawly ran as if the hosts of Heaven were on his tail. Which they were. And had been for days now. He’d tried every trick he could invent, shifting liberally between forms and always running as if his life depended on it.

Which it did.

He’d thought he was clever. He thought he knew how to survive. He thought he could outwit anyone.

But Uriel…

Clearly Uriel was still miffed about the Garden. Fine. Understandable. Crawly had slipped repeatedly past the angel who was supposed to anticipate everything. It was his job. It wasn’t personal.

Apparentely Uriel felt otherwise.

Crawly had outdistanced and outmaneuvered the rest of Heaven’s representatives, but this one he just couldn’t shake. And time was running out.

He hadn’t been aware until two days before how long it had been since the Garden. Three months shy of a year of Earth-time, he’d since been informed.

For him it had been an eternity.

Heaven was enraged at him. Hell might have celebrated him for that. But Lucifer was furious. And that was Crawly’s downfall.

Hell-Loops had been a theoretical concept until nine months ago. They weren’t now. Crawly could confirm that first-hand.

It had been an eternity. And he’d remembered every second of it. He’d been the experiment. The plaything. What hurt most? Physical? Emotional? What could draw out the worst screams?

And then… then his King had offered him a slim chance at redemption.

Of course he’d taken it. Self-preservation was his paramount instinct.

So they’d given him a new body and dumped him back on Earth.

Which brought him to his current misery.

Becoming a serpent, he dove into a burrow, hoping the growing darkness would hide the maneuver. Not for long, likely. The angel was sure to spot the opening and guess where he’d gone.
From inside the tunnel, something hissed and stalked toward him.

Crawly bunched and hissed back. Just what he needed. Escape Heaven and Hell only to get eaten by an owl.

The owl fluffed out her wings and bobbed her head at him, looking for opportunity to strike.

He could kill her, he thought. He had poison aplenty for this fight. But then there’d be blood in the air. He couldn’t risk it.

He dove at the owl, darting between her talons.

She snapped at him and missed.

In the narrow burrow, he could whirl about faster. He struck at her from behind, using his tail as a lash in a most un-snake-like manner.

Startled, the owl leaped away from him.

He pursued, driving her from the burrow.

Confused, she took flight. He heard a single wing beat before the darkness swallowed her.

Good. Something else for the angel to chase. Maybe buy him a brief distraction. He crawled deeper into the burrow.

Whatever had dug these tunnels before the owl had left ample passages. He found one headed in the direction he wanted, then encouraged it to continue for long miles of underground protection.

He couldn’t stay a serpent for long – not with the Earth so full of predators. But he’d slither as long as he could. Throw off his trail perhaps. Play a proper snake long enough to make his pursuers search elsewhere.

Perhaps it worked. Perhaps something had distracted his pursuer. Perhaps luck took effect. But when he finally surfaced, his pursuers were absent from the sky. They’d be back, he suspected. But he’d cover as much ground as he could before they picked up his trail again.

He ran as long and as fast as his new form would allow. It would be tonight by all guesses. He’d likewise guessed where they’d go.

Of course they’d try to reach the Garden. In fear and uncertainty, where else would they go? Never mind it was long gone. Like birds returning to their nesting ground, they’d sought the comfort they once knew only to find barren land and briars.

He heard her screams long before he saw them. Muffled by something, but as unimaginable pain wracked through her, she couldn’t hold back the wails.

He scrambled out of the bush to behold the sight.

The woman lay on her back, her hands clasped around her naked and swollen belly. Her head arched back at an impossible angle, her teeth on clamped a stick so hard that it was splintering.


The first husband to have no idea how to help with labor.
Crawly shoved Adam away, taking stock with equal bewilderment. He’d had the pleasure of witnessing a few births in Hell. They were awful.

And he wasn’t sure a human could endure what a demon went through in the name of labor.

Adam sat down hard and broke into bewildered sobs.

So much for him.

Eve was mostly delirious from the pain of contractions. If she was even aware of Crawly, she didn’t show it.

Crawly took frantic stock. What did he have? Dead plants. Burnt sticks. Animal hide…

…And a celestial blade.

The sword lay where the humans had dropped it, glittering and deadly despite a lack of flames. Broken? In need of a celestial recharge? It didn’t matter. Even if it didn’t flame, it was still sharp.

Crawly snatched up the sword and gritted his teeth at the prickle of celestial power which flickered through him. But he endured the contact and turned to study the expectant mother.

Guesswork was all he had. Make her as comfortable as possible on a pile of leaves. Find a piece of hide for her to bite. Check if the baby was coming.

He had no clue how to be a midwife.

But if the size of her belly was any indication, the child inside was too large for the exit.

He racked his brain for memories of human anatomy. Heaven had been a long time ago – before time, actually, but he’d seen the blueprints then. Desperation ignited celestial pathways in his mind he’d thought the Fall had closed forever. Yes… he knew where to find the baby. He knew where to cut.

It was a terrible job. A massive and unwieldy sword was the absolute worst tool for precision cutting. Eve was beyond knowing what was happening. He couldn’t explain why he was slicing her open. He straddled her legs, doing his best to hold her steady as he carved through her skin.

Slow, careful cutting – as much as that was possible. Blood… So much blood. He was splattered with it. Eve was drenched. The baby…

The baby!

He dropped the sword and tore the baby into the world. The infant flailed and choked, threatening to drown in fluid before Crawly could scrub his mouth clean.

The first born son of the mother of humanity opened his lungs and wailed.

The baby would live.

But the mother…

…So much blood.

Crawly set the baby against his mother’s side and snatched up the sword. How did it work? Would it even flame for him?
I need fire, he begged whoever was listening. Would the distant Almighty even hear the prayer of a Fallen?

Maybe the sword responded on its own. Maybe Someone heard the desperation. But the sword began to glow. Not the dancing, warning flames it had sparked when it guarded Eden. It was red-hot, the flames barely visible against the super-heated metal.

Holding Eve’s skin together with one hand and the sword in the other, Crawly cauterized the gaping wound back into something he hoped she’d survive.

Eve passed out at the first burning touch. It was amazing she’s stayed conscious as long as she had. Crawly whispered words of peaceful dreams. Of a Garden she’d once loved. Of when things had been simple.

He picked up the baby when he was done, bouncing it gently until the cries ceased.

Baby in one hand, sword in the other.

Crawly felt a stab of elation. He was holding his ticket to safety! Not just the baby, but the sword which could cleave the gates of Heaven!

He saw himself presenting them to Lucifer. His past misdeeds forgiven. Elevated by success. A title. A legion under his command. Protected within Hell at last.

The smell of blood brought him back to the moment.

The ground was awash with it. Eve was stained and saturated. And Adam…

…Was in no condition to be useful.

The man huddled in a ball, rocking helplessly, practically catatonic with fear and helplessness.

Crawly looked down at the sword.

The blade’s flames had come alive in a flickering dance. But it wasn’t as he’d seen in the principality’s hands. There was celestial blaze, but it was being choked out…

…With hellfire.

He closed his eyes, thoughts warring within his mind. He needed this. He couldn’t go back to the pain again. Self-preservation was his first instinct. What did humanity matter? The Almighty could just make more.

Somewhere nearby, he thought he heard a lion cough.

He dropped the blade at Adam’s feet and touched the man on the forehead. “She needs you,” he whispered. “Step up already.”

He glanced down at the baby with a heavy sigh. “Let’s get you to your father.”

He fled into the night.

Chapter End Notes
Surprise? I saw one correct guess in the comments a while ago, so congrats if you figured out this twist!

According to *Paradise Lost*, Uriel guarded the way between Eden and everywhere else, making him the first and last line of defense into the Garden. Since on *Lucifer*, his ability is to see and manipulate patterns, his powers and Crowley's would run rather counter to each other, making Crowley the only one who half a chance to get around him.
Darkness Before Dawn

There was silence between them when Crowley finished.

Aziraphale spoke after a long pause. “Is that why you don’t like swords?”

Crowley’s head shot up. “That’s what you got out of that!?”

“I’m still processing the rest of it.” Aziraphale wrapped his wings and arms around the demon. “You did the right thing.”

“Stealing a baby? Leaving them in danger? Sealing a woman’s womb with Hellfire?” Crowley hung his head. “I always wondered if Cain was my fault because of that.”

“I meant leaving them protection.” Aziraphale pulled him closer. “What happened next? How’d they keep him a baby for so long?”

“Hell-Loop. Lucifer put him in one. Not torture. Just... froze him in time until he was needed.”

Crowley studied the horizon for a moment, then spoke wearily. "That's why Adam's so special. Not just for being his father's son. He was conceived in the Garden. Back when humans were different. You remember. They were just bundles of potential back then with nobody really sure what they'd do. He was supposed..." His face flickered with pain. "...He should have been conceived before they got at the tree. Then he would have been more... malleable. Not so clear an idea of good and evil - just following what he was told. But..."

"You showed Eve the tree."

Crowley looked away. "I didn't know what Lucifer was up to. There was a prophecy about the end times, I guess. The same one with the 6,000 year date everyone got excited about. Something about the offspring of the first woman bringing about end... or change... I don't know. Nobody ever really explained it to me. I just... didn't think she should have been messing around with him without knowing what she was doing."

Aziraphale took his hand. "You did the right thing."

"And got in a lot of trouble for it." Crowley smiled sadly. "I wondered that from the start. I didn't know what I'd interrupted until I went back to Hell."

“And what happened to you? After you brought them Adam?”

Crowley sighed and leaned closer to the only comfort he had. “It got me out of more torture. But it didn’t exactly endear me to the boss. Plus, I knew too much. I got pushed into the field office. He figured Earth would be the death of me.” He laughed humorlessly. “But I’m rubbish at doing what’s expected of me.”

“You seem forgiven now.”

“Yeah, well. Humanity did a number on Lucifer. Not that I’m complaining.”

"Eve doesn’t know?"

Crowley shook his head. “It was their first baby. THE first baby. They didn’t know how things worked. All that blood. They just assumed it had turned to goo or something. I managed to be
lurking around a few years later when Cain was born. By then they’d watched enough animals go at it to have the labor process figured out. Adam didn’t lose his mind that time, and they planned ahead. All the rest of their kids came out fine. They just assumed the first time was a mistake. I think the pain pretty much wiped her memory of that night.”

“Is that why you were handed the antichrist assignment?”

“I think that was just bad luck. There weren’t many field agents by then. I just happened to be in the wrong place.”

“Or right place.”

Crowley leaned against him with a snort. "I knew I should just play along when they gave me the baby. But... I liked Earth too much by then. And... why learn from your mistakes when you can just try them again in more spectacular fashion? So, I went against the boss again. And brought you down with me."

Aziraphale rested his forehead against the demon's. "You did the right thing."

They were silent for a long stretch until Crowley abruptly arose and shook out his wing. “Right. This was fun.”

“Where are you going?” Aziraphale demanded.

“Back to Hell.”

“Crowley… you can’t fly Below in your condition.”

“Too late,” Crowley sang as he launched himself into the air. “Already gone!”

Aziraphale caught up to him. “You can’t leave yet! Don’t you need to wait for replies?”

“Got the replies I was sent for,” Crowley called, pumping his wings harder. “Boss wanted information, I got that information. Gotta get back before something stupid happens.”

“Stupider than you trying your idiotic passages when you’re barely in condition to fly?!”

“You’re right! Maybe I should take the Bentley!”

“Crowley!”

Despite his protests, Aziraphale did not tackle the demon from the sky, although he did hover overhead as if he was contemplating exactly that.

They reached the fissure far too soon.

Aziraphale picked up the serpent the moment the demon transformed. He held him close, pulsing out desperate waves of healing and love.

Crowley wriggled beneath his chin. “Easy, Angel. They’ll feel that all the way to Manchester if you keep that up.”

“I don’t care! I’m worried about you!”

Crowley head-butted his chin. “Don’t. I’m a survivor. And a coward. First sign of danger, I’m back here and you and I are drinking sake in Kyoto while the big boys fight to be king-of-the-
Aziraphale hesitated, then spoke in a low voice. “Do you promise?”

The serpent looked up at him. “Really?”

“I don’t care about Hell,” Aziraphale whimpered helplessly. “I care about you. I can’t help you down there.”

“Please. If came down to it, you’d be storming the gates.” Crowley burrowed once more beneath Aziraphale’s chin. “It’s better for the Earth if Lucifer wins,” he said quietly. “And for the sake of all your sushi restaurants, I gotta go back.” He squirmed.

Aziraphale reluctantly put him on the ground. “Why did you tell me that story?”

Crowley managed a smile full of false confidence. “Just wanted you to know my secrets.” His smile broke. “I love you, Angel.” He dove between realities.

Aziraphale stayed frozen beside the fissure for a long time after. When he did rise, he unfurled his wings to their fullest, and flew Upward.
Adam walked into the headmaster’s office in his usual slouch. “So, I think I should take a few
weeks off from teaching,” he announced with a disarming smile. “I’ve made up individual lesson
plans for all my students. They’ve agreed to follow them unsupervised. Everything’s all set. You’re
okay with this, right?”

The headmaster found that, yes, yes that was fine.

Adam packed a few things in a knapsack, hitched a ride to the airport, and was on his way across
the Atlantic within hours.

He sat by the window with Dog in his lap.

“When did we last go to America?” Adam mused to Dog. “Must have been when Greasy Johnson
became a pro footballer, wasn’t it? Imagine. Liking American football more than proper football.”
He shook his head regretfully. But then, if the dice had been cast differently, Greasy would have
been the son of an American ambassador, so perhaps the sport was in his blood.

In the knapsack at Adam’s feet lay a letter. He’d only read it once, but the words were emblazoned
in his mind.

He was surprised his father had contacted him. And it was rare anything surprised Adam.
Generally, he saw the swirl of patterns around him, and nothing occurred without him reading the
anticipatory clues.

His father, though, had always been something of a mystery.

He’d known when his father moved to Los Angeles, but as Lucifer seemed content to stay on one
corner of the planet, Adam let him alone and tried not to wonder about the other odd flashes of
supernatural strangeness flickering around the City of Angels. America was a weird place. He felt
it was easier to leave it alone and not ask questions.

And then, in a flash, his father was gone and all the demons of Earth with him. Adam had awoken
long enough to keep Dog from being recalled to Hell, and that was his only reaction. Much as he
liked the one demon in his acquaintance, the demons were his father’s affair and he’d not start a
family quarrel over them.

And then Crowley had arrived with the letter. Well then. This had just become his affair.

The first half of the letter had been nothing surprising. His father had introduced himself. He’d
explained Adam’s origins which was information Adam had long ago siphoned out of Crowley’s
mind.

At age eleven, frantically trying to get a grip on the strangeness whirling around him, it had been
effortless and almost unintentional to get a look inside the heads of the first angel and demon he
came across. Only skimming the surface had left him with a tidal wave of information about
Warlock, bookshops, antique cars, the Spanish Inquisition (not at all like he’d thought!), Heaven,
Hell, Eden, and unsaid feelings. The barest glance had been brimming with reasons to never try
that again. Too much information, too many emotions. Too much both would have rather kept
hidden from everyone, including each other.

He’d stayed out of his godfathers’ heads after that, and everyone else’s, but he’d seen enough to know his origins.

The rest of the letter had been more interesting. About his father’s life in Los Angeles. What he’d learned there. The humans he’d decided were worth something, and what he’d gained from their acquaintance. Adam had felt a flicker of kinder feelings toward his father for the first time.

And then had come Lucifer’s difficulties in Hell and current predicament. And an apology. Of sorts. Which didn’t quite blame Lucifer’s nonexistent parenting on his own poor upbringing.

And then - ‘If all goes well, there is no fear for Earth. I will hold the throne and nothing will change. If I fail, there will be threats to the world. The Earth is yours, whatever you may say. Protect it.’

Strange instructions from one who’d once wanted him to destroy the planet… or had he?

And if he hadn’t, if his father’s intentions were true, defending Earth meant supporting the non-existent parent in his life.

Adam had felt the stirring of something ominous from Below. He’d awoken to the wash of emotion and the confused growling of Dog some weeks before. He’d felt the rise of something across the planet. Something seeping from Below and affecting this world as its power grew. And that was the thing his father tried to prevent? Curious.

Adam climbed off the plane and onto the nearest bus. A brief conversation with the driver resulted in the bus deviating from its intended path to stop at a nightclub.

The door was opened at Adam’s disarming smile. No one halted the man and dog as they made their way to the elevator and up to the penthouse.

Adam strolled around thoughtfully. So, this was the world his father had chosen. The throne he’d picked upon walking away from Hell. Curious. It almost felt like Tadfield. Not in any tangible way. Just in a simple love of a place and a life.

Satisfied, Adam strolled onto the street. He had a ride in minutes and traveled across the city, following a sense more than actual directions.

The woman-shaped being who opened the door at his knock stared at him with a bewildered frown, clearly trying to place why he seemed familiar.

Adam smiled his winning smile. “Hello. It’s Mazikeen, yeah? I need some information about demons and both my godfathers seem to be away from the planet. May I come in?”

Chapter End Notes

Very short chapter which mostly just exists so the finale will fall nicely next week, and because it did not work combined with yesterday's. Tomorrow's chapter is more interesting, honest.
The angels at watch on the walls of Heaven opened the gate for the principality who flew at them with the speed of a battering ram. Aziraphale suspected they assumed he carried an urgent message from the way they hurried toward him with a worried air. Worry turned to shouts of surprise as he blazed past them as fast as his wings could carry him.

It had been long years since he’d been to Heaven, and the sight of angels in their true forms of many-eyed beings and flaming wheels was disorienting. Aziraphale’s shape had been relatively human to begin with, and self-belief shaped form, leaving him very human in comparison to the guards now shouting at him to stop as they rushed after him with drawn weapons.

If Aziraphale had had a plan or destination, they might have caught him. But as they rushed to head him off from reaching important buildings or logical thoroughfares, he escaped through utterly random choices.

One didn’t hang around humanity, and a very resourceful demon, without learning a little about creativity.

To say there was no imagination in Heaven or Hell wasn’t quite true. There had been quite a lot of it back in the beginning when angels were helping work out concepts like ‘green’ and ‘aardvark’. It was just that creativity had been discouraged on both sides after the rebellion. Heaven insisted there was nothing new to create after their Maker’s great work came into being, and the denizens of Hell were otherwise occupied trying to stay alive, not exploring more creative concepts than where they could stab one another.

Aziraphale was not a creative soul. But he was a reader. And he’d memorized the works of some of the most creative minds in human history.

At the moment his was living the works of Lewis Carrol.

Size was relative in Heaven. Angels could dance on the head of a pin if they wanted. Stuffy angels, steadfastly restricting themselves to their Almighty-given shape and size, tended to forget their bodies were quite ethereal and could rush through phone lines or crevices in buildings just as easily as a demon.

It didn’t hurt Aziraphale’s zig-zag flight through Heaven that he was carrying a sword which could carve him an escape route through absolutely anything.

Leaving the guards somewhere behind flying systematic grids in search of an angel who declined firmly to do anything systematically, Aziraphale skimmed the ground in search of direction. He knew what he needed. To guide his way, he just needed… there!

He alighted and jogged toward a group of human souls who’d just moved away from an informational assistant system. The system turned to Aziraphale with a bright smile. “Hi there! How can I help you?”

“Amenadiel,” Aziraphale panted. “Location.”

“Amenadiel is located in the central council building,” she replied.
“Thank you!” The angel took wing and rushed away.

“Okay.” The system poofed back to her void with a soft ‘bing’ noise.

Aziraphale tried not to look with longing at the gardens and sculptures of Heaven. He couldn’t get distracted, no matter how badly he wanted to walk slowly along the shores of the glass sea, drinking in the melody of the spheres. The scents he loved best washed over him – old books, hot cocoa, snake skin. The last reminded him of his purpose and he flew onward.

Structures in Heaven weren’t built – they’d grown and they continued to grow, flourishing with flowers and fruits which formed into rooms when need befell. Aziraphale flew straight through a cascade of pale gold water behind which rose a whirling spiral tunnel. It carried him through the halls, depositing him in an open-air room. The windows were wide arches with no glass. The wind blew softly. Moss crinkled under his feet as he hurried forward.

A dozen angels whirled at Aziraphale’s sudden appearance, and the curl of their lips was not at all welcoming.

“What are you doing here?!” Metatron, the mouthpiece of the Creator (despite having quite a lot of opinions of their own), demanded.

“Guards!” Shouted Gabriel, ever to the point.

Aziraphale ignored both, and the rest of the Very Important angels gathered in the room. He stepped immediately up to Amenadiel. “There’s trouble in Hell,” he said flatly.

The first-born’s face was permanently serious, but he looked immediately more grave. “What’s wrong?”

An owl-winged angel Aziraphale didn’t recognize pushed forward with a look of alarm. “What’s happened in Hell? Is Lucifer in danger?”

“Yes,” Aziraphale replied, blinking at the star-eyed angel. “At least I think so.”

“That’s not our concern,” Gabriel snapped. Guards had materialized behind him. He pointed at Aziraphale. “You’re under arrest for…” He broke off with an unangelic fit of swearing.

As the guards stepped forward, Aziraphale drew his sword, and abruptly every angel in the room got a first-hand reminder of how the principality had earned a place among the cherubim of Eden.

Swords were born from their angel’s essence. There’d been quite a lot of resentment once upon a time when one of the most powerful weapons of Heaven was forged out of a rather bumbling and low-ranking being. Resentment had certainly increased to find Aziraphale didn’t consider the sword much of an honor, or even seemed the least bit thrilled to wield it on the battlefield. Despite his reluctance, he really was an incredible fighter. As the guards found out a second later.

With a cry of ‘Tally-ho!’, Aziraphale brought up his flaming blade and threw himself into the fray. Eight guards stood against him. Eight guards were disarmed and sent scrambling for cover before they could register what was happening.

“Stand down,” Amenadiel roared, planting himself fearlessly between Aziraphale and the guards. “Don’t!” He snapped at Gabriel before the Archangel could shout for more defenders. He turned to Aziraphale. “What’s happening Below?”

“Rebellion,” the principality said flatly.
“Nothing new,” Gabriel grumbled.

“This is different,” Aziraphale insisted. He turned back to Amandiel. “You know Lucifer’s been trying to improve things. There’s resistance. A lot of resistance. He’s at odds with the dark council. If things get worse, he could lose the throne.”

The owl-winged angel gasped, then snarled a demonic hiss of outrage.

“This could be serious,” Amenadiel looked to the others.

Gabriel scoffed and looked elsewhere. “It’s hardly our affair who controls Hell.”

“But Lucifer keeps the demons from overwhelming Earth,” Aziraphale insisted. “Think what would happen without him.”

“Exactly,” Gabriel purred. “We could finally get on with Armageddon.”

“That’s not happening,” Amenadiel snapped. “The council agreed…”

“The council was divided! And Uriel would have been in favor of progressing the End Times if Lucifer hadn’t killed him.”

“He was interfering with mortals! In ways we’d outlawed centuries ago. Lucifer was within his rights. Uriel should have been stopped before he left Heaven.”

Gabriel crossed his arms and looked away, muttering in self-righteous indignation.

“Amenadiel,” Aziraphale pleaded. “This is serious. You know I wouldn’t risk this place otherwise.” He cast a glare at Gabriel.

“And why should a field agent care what happens in Hell?” Metatron demanded.

“I care how it affects Earth!”

“And about your demon lover,” Metatron sneered.

Aziraphale’s wings bristled like briar-bushes. “Crowley’s caught in the crossfire, yes. And I’d fight all of Heaven and Hell for his sake. Alone if I must.”

“Filthy traitor,” Gabriel hissed.

Aziraphale bridged the distance between them with an unangelic snarl. “I love my Creator. That has never been in doubt. And I stood faithfully with Heaven right up until Heaven went against the Ineffable Plan!”

“Blasphemy!”

“Is it? Has our Maker indicated otherwise? We’ve been left to guess their mind. To me, it seemed the signs indicated they had no desire for Armageddon. Why would the Creator want their greatest creation devastated in our war?”

“To rid Creation of evil once and for all! To prove the triumph of Heaven and bring glory to the throne!”

“And how would that have succeeded?” Aziraphale tried not to think hard about where he was or who he was standing against. “We might have destroyed Hell, but humanity chooses its own side.
They’re no more swayed to Hell’s machinations than they are toward our revelations. If Hell was no more, they’d prove themselves just as capable of evil without a single demonic whisper.”

“Then they ought to be wiped out as well!” Gabriel’s eyes were wide and burning with righteous fury. “As in the days of the flood and of Sodom! The Earth should be cleansed of its blight! All stamped out and Heaven shall reign supreme. The new king of Hell shall see the Earth scourged. Then we’ll crush the demons and begin anew.”

Amenadiel glared at him in horror and fury. “You know who it is,” he growled. “You already know what’s going on Below.”

The Archangel sneered. “Lucifer has proven ineffective. You should have returned him to his throne while there was still hope for him. Now he’s been tainted by humanity as badly as…” He glared at Aziraphale. “…This fool. So, the devil has to go. Another will properly show the sinners the error of their way. When all of humanity cowers before Hell’s torture, then they will know how they have wronged their Creator.”

“You’re insane,” Amenadiel spat. “The rest of the council won’t stand for…”

“The rest of the council will say nothing. Raphael’s so far among the stars, she won’t wake up in time. And Michael’s wandered off again.”

“You let him go back to Earth?!”

“He heard some rumors of Armageddon.” Gabriel smiled sweetly. “Of course he had to rush down there to check. A shame he took a bit of a blow to the head on the way. It’ll be a decade or so before he remembers what he is, if the pattern holds. And until then…” Gabriel traded smiles with Metatron. “…The council’s been short on members for too long, wouldn’t you say? I think it’s time to choose a few more princes of Heaven.”

“You wouldn’t dare.”

“Why not? And it’s not like you have much support. Failing to keep Lucifer contained. Running off to Earth for years. And creating that… half-human travesty.”

Amenadiel slammed Gabriel up against a wall. “Don’t you DARE speak about my son!”

“Son? Listen to yourself! You’ve fallen, Amenadiel. You’ve lost yourself. You’ve forgotten the glory of Heaven in pursuit of Earthly pleasures. You consort with demons, traitors, and humans.” (He made the last of those sound the most disgusting.) His voice took on a gentle, pleading tone. “You know this isn’t what our Creator wants. We were made first to stand above them. Not walk on their level.” He put a tender hand on Amenadiel’s shoulder. “Please, Brother. Can’t you see how blinded you’ve become?”

Amenadiel shook him off. “We’re all blind, Brother. We’re all scrambling in the dark to make sense of what little we can find. But my path seems clearer now.”

The first-born spread his wings. “If the gates of Hell open, I stand with Earth. If Lucifer fights for his throne, I stand with my brother.”

“And against your brothers in Heaven!” Gabriel protested.

“No. Only you.” Amenadiel turned to Aziraphale. “I’ll fly with you. We should return to Earth before he calls more guards.”
The owl-winged angel caught Amenadiel’s arm. “If Hell is in danger…”

Amenadiel nodded. “Of course. Come with us.”

Three figures spiraled away from Heaven.

Chapter End Notes

It was important to me to write a version of Heaven I'd actually want to visit. With that in mind, I went to the park, sat by the playground, and watched the kids play while a flock of geese grazed nearby. This was the result.

Some Heavenly imagery (and one random cameo) taken from Gaimen's Murder Mysteries, Schur's The Good Place, and Bosch's The Garden of Earthly Delights.

Next Week: The troubles in Hell reach their epic conclusion! (For those of you who groan every time I end on a cliffhanger, you're going to hate next week!) I'm so excited. Seven chapters left - Eek!
Loyalties

On Earth Lucifer wore a body which desired such human trivialities as food and sleep. In Hell, he rarely needed mortal essentials, but even a being of his type sometimes felt the need for rest. On Earth, Lucifer rarely slept alone.

_Some things don’t change_, Lucifer thought with amusement as he awoke and looked around. Although, the serpent coiled at the foot of his bed was hardly his usual type of bedmate.

Crowley had arrived days before, barely awake enough to gasp out his messages before lapsing unconscious.

“Stay in my rooms,” Lucifer had told him. “It’s the safest place.”

Since then, all Crowley had had energy to do was occasionally shift from one piece of furniture to another and drop back into slumber.

Lucifer barely had more energy than that. Things were going from bad to worse, and he felt the walls of Hell closing around him.

There’d been only one council meeting since the trial. But Belial had fallen into maddening chants so early on that Lucifer had been able to say little in his defense, and the council had slunk away in frustration. He’d tried to arrange another, but he’d arrived at the meeting room to find it eerily deserted.

He’d made no attempt to summon the council since then.

The entire castle was growing more deserted. Repeatedly, he found doors unguarded or no servants answered his calls. He’d ascended to his throne once to hear the complaints of the realm, but the hall had been thin of supplicants and attendants.

In Hell, the scent of weakness was second-nature to sniff out. Weakness meant opportunity to attack. Or, in this case, weakness surrounding the throne meant get far, far away from the throne.

For the first time, Lucifer felt a flicker of fear to leave the castle.

He’d resolved not to go down without a fight. There would be no safety on Earth if he lost the throne. He knew the gates of Hell would open and the demons would pour free. He’d keep them contained until his body was drowned in the burning lake.

But to fight, he had to know his enemy.

He’d sent Crowley scouring the Earth for answers. The raven-winged demon had flown to the broken altars of Beelzebub and Mammon from times long past when they’d held power on Earth. When Crowley found no sign of awakening there, he’d hunted up the temples of the lost princes of Hell. But there was no sign Moloch or Asmodeus or the others had survived their attempted Armageddon and hid yet in shadows. Even the lost mines of Solomon held no scent that Marchosias or the other demons who’d been the downfall of the wisest of kings had recently tread those buried storehouses.

Lucifer had searched books of prophecy, giving up almost as soon as he’d begun. Prophecy was a muddle which helped no one except those who turned around to look back in hindsight.
(Actually, Agnes Nutter could have given him some insight into his current difficulties, but her book was burned and the soul of the clear-sighted witch roamed where she pleased, bound neither to Heaven or Hell.)

So Lucifer clung to what was his with no idea who would stand with or against him.

Well, he knew one at least.

He pulled himself to a sitting position. The serpent looked backwards at him with a sleepy blink.

“I should get you a terrarium if you’re going to live in here,” Lucifer teased.

“Already have one,” Crowley replied. “It was Aziraphale’s idea of a housewarming gift.”

The devil snorted.

“I think he meant it as a joke,” Crowley went on. “But it gets cold in London.” His eyes unfocused. “A nice heat lamp… not as good as cuddling up to an angel… but, sometimes, I just can’t get him to hold still.”

“You could bite him. The venom ought to keep him still for a while.”

“I’ve thought about it. But I feel like he’d be grumpy.” Crowley sighed a long-suffering note. “And his wings get all prickly when he’s grumpy.”

Lucifer rose and stretched.

“Feeling any better?” The serpent asked. “You were kind of dazed before.”

“Were you standing guard?”

“I mean… I was sleeping. But I probably could have woken up and screamed if someone came in here.”

“You are ridiculous,” the devil sighed, but there was affection in his voice. What an odd ally the serpent was. And yet, loyal in a rather human sort of way. Whether it was a common affinity for Earth, or Lucifer’s far-too-late apology, but Crowley seemed resolutely on his side. Lucifer felt a flicker of suspicion that the demon might be a good influence on him. A reminder of the unfortunate choices he’d made in the past. Something to encourage him to do better.

“Get out of here so I can change,” he said.

“Modesty?” The demon snorted. “Detective Decker told me about the pants you wore to her crime scene.” Never the less, the snake dropped to the floor and crawled from the room.

When Lucifer came out, Crowley had transformed and was studying the documents strewn across Lucifer’s desk.

“You seem to be feeling better,” the devil observed. “I thought you’d sleep another week.”

“Stress is a great motivator, isn’t it?” The demon said cheerfully. “Once this is all sorted out, I’ll hide out somewhere on Earth for a few weeks whether you give the go-ahead or not.”

Lucifer quietly resolved to find a few alternative ways to keep in touch with Chloe. He’d still want the mail, yes. But maybe he could reduce the letter exchange to once a month. Pity there weren’t other demons he could send, but he had a hard time picking trustworthy subjects in the best of
times, and this was far from that.

“See anything I’ve missed?” He asked.

Crowley’s eyes flicked across the notations. “You’re absolutely sure someone’s working against you?”

“There has to be someone, doesn’t there?”

“I don’t know, Boss. Could just be loads of random stuff piling up. Lots of nobles are grumpy about the changes you’re making.”

“It’s possible,” Lucifer agreed. “But I need to know who’s on which side.” He leaned on the desk, feeling the helplessness of his position. “I don’t know if my messages are going astray or if they’re being ignored. I don’t know where the kings stand. Or the generals. If I’ve lost the army…” He clenched his fists.

Crowley shook his head. “I don’t know anything about anything, but I can’t believe all of Hell’s out to get you. And if they are…” He looked up at the devil. “…You built this place out of nothing. You got everyone thinking your way once. Seems like you can do it again.” He looked back at the sea of documents. “And if it doesn’t work out, you can bunk at the bookshop if you need somewhere to hide for a while.”

Lucifer snorted. “Your angel won’t object?”

“Don’t touch his first editions and you’ll be good. And don’t sell books to customers.”

“What’s the point of a bookshop if you don’t sell books?”

Crowley sighed dramatically. “That is the deep mystery which is Aziraphale.”

The devil rose with a stretch. “It’s time I got to work.”

“What’s your plan?”

“Sit on the throne. Talk with anyone who comes to me to start with. See where their loyalties lie. Try and get the councilors alone and sound them out one by one. If I can find someone to get a message to them.”

“…I could help you out with that.”

Lucifer’s eyebrows went up. “You’ll brave Hell?”

“For the new council, yeah. I really don’t want Beelzebub to see me.”

“You’ll be safe from her if you stay with me. Beelzebub won’t attack outright. It’s not her style.” Lucifer started for the door.

“Really? Cause I was there when she marched an army to the gates of Hell.” Despite the doubt in his voice, Crowley came along with him.

“She had the backing of Heaven and much of Hell in that little adventure,” Lucifer muttered dryly. Crowley looked suspiciously at him as they walked the deserted hall. “Why didn’t you stop that?”

“I was still playing my assigned role then,” Lucifer rumbled, his hands clenched in fists. “It was
another decade before I decided to stop playing by any of my parent’s expectations.”

Crowley frowned and studied the ground. “I keep thinking they didn’t want it any more than we
did. The way things went down…” His voice trailed off as he lifted his head. “There’s that smell
again,” he murmured.

Lucifer looked curiously at him. “What?”

“Do you smell it?” Crowley’s brow furrowed deeper. “It’s been nagging at me for months. I keep
getting flashes of it - mostly on Earth… but there it is…” He looked around, his tongue flicking
rapidly. “It’s like… what is that…?”

Something was beginning to creep into Lucifer’s senses. Not a scent exactly. A feeling. Something
he’d known. Mostly on Earth. Something which had been teasing at his senses for months, growing
steadily heavier and more oppressive without him properly noticing the change. Now...

They stepped into the throne room.

“…Like the trenches during first world war…” Crowley murmured. “Or the terminal cancer ward
at a hospital. Or…”

“…The last sip in a glass when you’ve had too many, but you know she’ll never love you,” Lucifer
murmured.

Crowley glanced at him. “Yeah… that sort of scent.”

Lucifer’s skin prickled. A thousand senses were screaming at him all at once. A thousand
warnings he should have heeded days before. And now… Now he stood in a hall lined with guards
who didn’t wear his mark. No servants in sight. No supplicants. No attendants. Every door in the
hall was shut fast. Silence. Too much silence in the palace.

“Crowley,” he hissed urgently. “Run.”

The demon glanced at him, not registering the cause of Lucifer's sudden tension. “What?”

“Get out. Before…”

The throne room door slammed shut behind them.

Crowley jumped and whirled.

Lucifer stayed still, his eyes fixed forward.

A rustle of wings. A stale scent of despondency and loss.

With eyes clear of all madness and steps as certain as a victor’s, Belial stepped from behind the
throne.
Ensnared

King and prince surveyed one another as Lucifer felt the trap close around him.

The guards advanced on measured steps with weapons drawn. Doors opened. Ranks of armed warriors joined the legion, flooding the hall with their show of might.

Lucifer’s sword flashed from its sheath, warning the guards to stay beyond his reach. “Crowley!” He snapped to the stunned demon. “Get out of here!”

Crowley hesitated a second longer, reading the terrible-terrible odds. In a flash, the serpent shot through the ranks, making for a not-quite-closed door.

Several guards lunged for him, but Crowley was nothing if not agile. He dove clear of their talons and vanished.

“Let him go,” Belial commanded, her voice clear and steady. All trace of murkiness was gone from the hate-filled gaze she locked onto the Lord of Hell. “The castle is ours. There’s nothing he can do.”

Lucifer glared back at her, hellfire blazing in his eyes. “So… it was you.”

“Of course,” Belial purred as she descended the steps. “Who else would work so long for a throne so often denied me?”

“The throne was vacant, Belial. You could have taken it anytime. I wouldn’t have stopped you.”

“I know.” She drew closer.

The warriors had stopped advancing, despite closing five-deep rings around the King. They still held fear enough of him to hesitate to strike.

Lucifer studied the guards from the corner of his eye, seeking the most likely to be made to bend and break.

“You might have surrendered the throne,” Belial continued. “But there were others to consider.”

“Who?” Lucifer snorted. “Were you afraid Mammon and Beelzebub would fight you for it?”

“Fight?” She laughed and circled around him. “No, my Lord. They’d stand between me and it for eternity. And the kings of the regions. And your generals. No… You might not have been sitting in the throne, but it was still yours.”

“I see.” Lucifer turned with her. “So you undermined my authority until the way seemed open?”


Between the army and the throne stood a row of Hell’s nobles. The many who’d expressed anger at traditions broken.

Lucifer counted them swiftly, totaling in his mind how many legions they commanded, and how many demons he was now facing alone. Little doubt his palace staff and guards were dead or
locked away. And the throne room doors were shut and locked. Once the bolts were drawn, nothing could open them from the outside.

“You’ve made it easy, my Lord,” the demon prince purred. “All I needed to do was provide a few whispers. Encourage gatherings. See that certain messages went astray. It took very little to isolate you. To make you despair.”

His odds were infinitely terrible. But he was still the King of Hell. He’d held the throne by strength and wiles since the Fall. He wasn’t beaten yet. Not until Michael chained him in that burning lake.

And he’d never back down while he clung to the certainty that everything he held was for Chloe.

“So, what’s your plan? Kill me?” He chuckled contemptuously. “Who’s your champion?” He raised his voice. “Who will fight the King of Hell?”

More than a few soldiers drew back. He heard one weapon drop. But the rest held their ground.

“A champion?” Belial laughed. “Do you know who I am?”

She spread her wings, the scent of stale beer, abandoned buildings, and rotting trash billowing through the room. “I am the prince without a throne. Never was there an altar laid in my name. Never did humanity fall in worship at my feet. But still, I was once, and am, of their gods.”

She launched herself over her supporters and landed on the dais just beside the throne. “I am the darkness of the city streets. I am the broken buildings where the desolate sleep. The needle to bring forgetting. The bottle which is comfort and weapon and poison. I am the desperate who scrounge the gutters. I am the rats who tear down the foundations of greatness. I am the forgotten soldiers who curse the country which turns against them. I am crumbling pavement, rusting iron, empty bottles, spilt trash. I am everyone who has ever cursed those above them. I am the entropy which will take every throne in the end.”

“Interesting,” Lucifer said dryly at the end of her speech. “So you’re easily defeated by conscientious city planning? It seems all it takes to topple your kingdom is regular trash pickup, homeless shelters and a tolerance of native predators.”

Belial hissed at him.

Her troops took a step closer.

“Your time grows short, my Lord,” Belial declared. “I hold your castle. And now…” She put her hand on the throne’s arm. “I take your throne.”

Lucifer crossed his arms. “Go ahead then.”

The demons glanced up at Belial.

The prince froze. “What?”


Belial didn't move.

“Ohhh…” Lucifer smiled toothily. “There’s a problem, isn’t there? Because the throne is attuned to me… And you’re afraid it’ll incinerate you if you try. Well, a hot bottom’s worth the risk, isn’t it?
Go on. Take your throne... your majesty.” He spread his arms and dropped a mocking bow.

Belial’s lips curled back. “First you die. Then the throne is free to be claimed.”

“And you’ll claim it?” Lucifer clicked his tongue. “What of your loyal followers? Some of them are Fallen too. What if one of them wishes the throne?”

Indeed, some of the nobility were looking as if the idea had already occurred to them.

Belial flapped her wings. They rattled like glass shattering on concrete. “It is hardly your concern. When you’ve fallen to our strength, what will you care who holds your throne?”

“Well I don’t particularly care now,” Lucifer sighed. “But I’d rather remain alive, as it happens. And what’s more, I know what it will mean for humanity if you command Hell.” He shook his head sadly. “And unfortunately, I’ve become rather fond of humanity. So…” The obsidian blade flashed in his hands and he stared down the ranks of demons. “…I’m afraid I must refuse to die quietly.”

He gave his wings a swift flap and sprang over their heads. A dozen bold winged demons launched themselves at him. From the ground others flung up their weapons.

Lucifer cut them down with ease, but as he alighted on the dais, he was met with true resistance. Belial and her allies launched themselves at him. He was attacked on every side and forced to frantically defend himself from a dozen swords at once.

Sheer numbers were going to be his demise, he realized with alarm. This was no fair fight. They weren’t being careful not to harm their own. Projectiles flew at him from the army below the dais, some striking his opponents. But he was being struck again and again. For as many as he brought down, he was wounded in a dozen small places. At some point, small wounds were going to become too much.

What an undignified way to die, he thought.

But… if this was his last chance to protect humanity…

I love you, Detective, he whispered, then flung himself into battle and prepared for his end.

From a thousand miles of Hellscape away, came a sound never heard before in the land Below. It rang from the frozen pathways beyond the gates to the burning lake of tormented screams. An impossible sound. Of something untouchable which had just been destroyed.

Lucifer knew the sound with cold certainty.

It was the shattering of the gates of Hell.
At the distant crash, there was a pause from the masses. Then, they threw themselves back at the devil with increased vigor.

Above their roars and strikes, Lucifer thought he heard an answering roar.

And… was the room shaking?

With a wrenching of the impossible, the doors of the throne room were shattered and thrown asunder.

Rank upon rank of slavering, roaring demons poured into the hall.

Belial’s forces gave a cry of welcome, then horror, as the new horde came at them with blood in their eyes.

The generals of Hell rode at the head of the teeming mass. Mammon and Beelzebub flew low over the soldiers. The kings of the four regions and the other three princes charged into the room with their legions behind. It was a sight to strike alarm into the rebel demons.

But what really broke the usurpers' resolve were the four angels who shot across the room to land in a defensive ring around the King of Hell.

In the lead was a slightly-overweight principality whose tartan bowtie hardly implied ‘warrior’. But in his hands blazed a brilliantly flaming sword, and on his face rode the deadly expression of one who knew his business. The sword burned dual fire – an impossible interweaving of celestial blaze and hellfire. The cause of the duality could only be the demonic serpent looped around the angel’s neck who hissed warnings to demonkind at large.

Next to him alighted the first-born of Heaven. With his massive wings spread wide and a celestial blade in hand, the favored of the Almighty looked every bit the Heavenly general he was.

As he landed, a demon dropped from his back and into a fighting crouch. Half her face was human-beautiful. The other half was a decaying feral guise. She twirled twin scythe blades in her hands and faced down the usurpers with a snarl.

Third came an angel borne on the silent wings of a grey owl. He carried no weapons and looked slightly lost, but his eyes fixed on Lucifer with a gaze of a fanatic who’d just discovered religion.

A hell-hound the size of a tank, but still giving off the impression of being a rather small dog, sprang up the stairs, scattering demons behind him. Off his back slipped a young man. He stood in slouch, his hands thrust indifferently into his pockets. Yet he still managed to look like a statue of Apollo come to life.

But the figure who truly struck fear into the demon horde, who truly made them panic and run, was the fourth angel.

Wings the color of creation’s shadow. A face which might have been that of a teenage girl, or a skeleton’s death grimace, or something else entirely. She held no weapon, yet every demon who
looked upon her flung up their hands as if afraid of being struck.

The rebels reacted in the only sensible fashion – they bolted.

Some threw down arms. Some turned on their fellows. Most simply ran as if the hordes of Hell were after them. Which they were.

Belial wailed her fury. She whirled and made a bold lunge to gain the throne.

*If you’re going down anyway,* Lucifer thought with a surge of alarm as he reacted too slowly to stop her, *might as well go down in style.*

It was a gamble of absolute desperation. If the throne accepted her, the fight was won. If it didn’t… well, she was about to die anyway.

But between Belial and the throne stood a slouched and thoughtful figure.

Adam looked ridiculously out of place standing in Hell’s audience chamber. But his so very human appearance didn’t seem to bother him in the slightest. He cocked his head and studied Belial. “I know you,” he said slowly.

She stepped back, hissing a warning.

He didn’t move. “You’re the shadow in my student’s eyes. When they’re beaten at home, or so hungry they can’t concentrate in class. You’re the people who say the planet’s hopelessly ruined and we shouldn’t bother trying to fix it. You’re the people alone on the street corners who get passed by.” He took a step toward her and the demon prince gave ground. “You’re the ones who just give up.” He pushed his hands deeper into his pockets. “Seems to me you’re not doing much good up there, or down here. Seems to me we’d be better off without you.”

She’d been called many things over the years. Sloth. Decay. But Adam named her Apathy now. Hopelessness. Despair. He had no power to unmake her. Not in this place. But he had the power of a human standing up and saying they’d take a stand against her whispers.

Belial shrieked and shrunk into herself. She wavered and struggled within her own mind, then leaped from the dais and fled the hall. What remained of her broken and desolate army fled with her.

The loyal armies of Hell swarmed the hall as the princes and kings came to stand at Lucifer’s side.

“Orders, Lord?” Asked General Baal, a talons raised to hold the armies in place until a word from their King should guide their actions.

Lucifer considered swiftly. Justice had to be harsh. But a show of mercy was necessary as well. “Those who fight or flee must die. Those that lay down arms will be confined and left unharmed until I pronounce judgment.”

“And Belial?”

“Death.” He let the sentence fall with quiet force. No discussion.

The general dipped his head in acknowledgment. Then he was at wing, the leaders of the legions closing briefly around him to receive the command. Several full legions remained to guard the throne. Much of the nobility of Hell took up stations around the dais, displaying their loyalty with a show of weapons and force.
Lucifer sheathed his sword and stood statuesque for a beat. He had wounds aplenty and he could feel the blood trickling from a multitude of stabs. He couldn’t give any indication of weakness. Not at this moment. He’d been wounded before. He would endure.

There was a game to play. A necessary show to strength.

He turned to those on the dais, greeting them in carefully deliberate order.

“Brother,” he said in friendly chiding to Amenadiel as he held out a hand. “Is this what it takes to convince you to visit?”

The first-born of Heaven took his hand. “I’d have been here sooner if I knew you couldn’t rule without me.”

Lucifer clapped him on the back. “You're always welcome in these halls.”

He moved down the row. “Sister.” He kissed her cheek. “Thank you for coming.”

Rae-Rae looked at him with affectionate eyes. “I have to go,” she murmured apologetically. “But I’m never far away.” She stepped back and spread her wings.

A wind of endless darkness and peace washed over the gathered demons. Then she was gone.

Lucifer resisted smiling wistfully after her as he turned to the young man beside the hell-hound. His smile and certainty faded. “Son,” he said quietly.

“Father,” Adam replied. He didn’t bow. He didn’t look awed. But… he didn’t seem angry.

Lucifer took a breath. “Do you wish to talk?”

Adam considered. “Not yet,” he said at last. “But… we’ve made a start.”

“We have,” Lucifer agreed. “Thank you for coming.”

“I’d like to see Hell.”

Lucifer made a gesture to the realm at large. “You're free to explore.” He singled out a guard, who hastened at once to the dais. “Accompany him and answer any questions he has.”

The young man gave his father what could almost be a smile. He climbed on the back of the hell-hound and jogged from the room.

Lucifer waited until he was gone, then turned to his princes, his face serious with just the slightest smile of approval. “Lords.”

As one, the five princes of Hell and the four kings of the regions knelt before him.

“I had thought,” Lucifer murmured. “You did not approve of my new laws.”

Mammon dipped his head lower. “We are you advisors, my King. We are sworn to give our counsel, even if it runs contrary to your mind. And we are sworn to serve our Lord and enact your word, even if it runs contrary to our thoughts.”

“Forgive us for doubting you, Lord,” Beelzebub droned. “We are faithful to you always.”

Lucifer raised the princes and kings up one by one, thanking them with a quiet murmur as they
pledged their continued service.

“I suppose I have you to thank,” he said clearly, turning his attention to the serpent now coiled around the angel’s arm.

“It’s amazing how fast you can get out of Hell and back when you really try,” Crowley said carelessly. “And you had lots of friends waiting in LA for just this moment.”

Lucifer nodded and shifted his gaze. “And you must be Aziraphale.”

The angel looked uncomfortable. “Oh, my… I’m terribly sorry. I broke your front door getting in… and also a gate.” He looked ruefully down at the sword.

Lucifer followed his gaze. “I thought I got rid of that.”

“We sort of got it back, Boss,” the serpent hissed.

Lucifer turned away with a snort. “You’ve been busy.” He turned to the crowd, calling up the gate’s architect. “Take a team and see the gate repaired. We can’t have any hell-hounds wandering out.”

The orders were obeyed at once.

Lucifer gestured at the serpent. “Stand up. It’s impossible to have a conversation with you like that.”

Crowley reluctantly changed shape, still clinging to Aziraphale’s arm.

Lucifer allowed a small smile to play on his face. “I believe any past misdeeds can be overlooked in the light of this service to the throne.” His eyes met Beelzebub’s.

The prince dipped her head reluctantly. “As my Lord commands.”

Crowley grinned. “Thanks, Lord.”

“No!”

A demon shoved their way up the stairs, bristling furiously. “Justice, my Lord!” Hastur spat, pointing an accusing claw at Crowley.

Hastur found himself staring at the business end of a flaming sword.

“Aziraphale,” Amenadiel said quietly. “Sword down.”

The principality hesitated, then took a reluctant step back. “I won’t let him hurt Crowley,” he grumbled.

“It’s okay, Angel,” Crowley murmured. He released the angel’s hand and stepped forward. Glancing up at Lucifer, the demon went to his knees at the King’s feet.

Lucifer suppressed a grin. So the serpent had finally learned enough of etiquette to at least beg for protection. He turned calmly to Hastur. “What have you to say?”

Hastur wavered. He wasn’t the brightest demon, but it was clear even to him that the mood of the assembly was very against him. “Murder!” He sputtered. “He murdered Ligur!”
“Under what circumstances?” Lucifer asked.

Hastur mumbled bitterly without coming to a response, which was fair indication the death was under acceptable terms. “He killed Ligur,” he protested with the slightest hitch to his voice. “An’…” He looked around rather desperately. “He used holy water!”

“Nice one,” Mazikeen remarked from where she slouched against the throne, her blades swinging lightly in case anyone got any ideas about approaching the seat of power before Lucifer took his place.

Hastur shot a hate-filled glare her way, then gulped as he registered her identity. He turned hastily back to Lucifer. “It ain’t right!” He bawled.

“Hastur.” The strange angel, who’d been staying silent and close to Amenadiel until now, stepped forward. “Hastur… I…” He struggled, one hand to his head as he blinked painfully.

Lucifer scrutinized the angel, then gave a small laugh of recognition. “It seems there is no murder to debate.”

“But my Lord!” Hastur whimpered.

“Hastur,” the angel whispered pleadingly.

Lucifer continued to smile. “Look around, Hastur. Surely you recognize Kokbiel.”

“That’s…” The angel panted. “One of my names… Lord.”

Amenadiel sighed. “We’re still trying to understand what happened, Luci. He showed up in the Silver City like this. He says he can’t remember anything from before twenty years ago.”

Crowley stared. “Adam got it wrong,” he said suddenly. “We always wondered why he fixed everything except Ligur.”

Hastur took a hesitant step toward the angel. “Ligur?”

“That’s… also my name.” The angel looked at him with helpless and haunted eyes. “I know you. You’re important. You’re… you’re who I was looking for?” He stretched out his hands tentatively toward the demon.

Hastur didn’t hesitate. He seized the angel around his middle and squeezed him with brutal affection. “Dun’t matter what you call you’self. Dun’t matter how you look! You’re here!”

They spun around, foolish and happy in one another’s presence.

“Well, that’s dealt with,” Lucifer muttered. “Hastur, are you satisfied?”

Happy and wordless yowls answered his query.

Lucifer looked down at Crowley. “It seems you’re back to being pardoned.”

Crowley rose, staring slack-jawed at Kokbiel and Hastur. “Fine with me.” He retreated back to Aziraphale’s side.

“My Lord!” General Baal flew back into the hall. He flung Belial’s head at Lucifer’s feet.

The King stared down at the offering with a sigh. “And we’re down another prince. Thank you,
Baal. See that the rest of the rebels are found.”

Baal looped gleeful circles around the dais. “Your word is my law, my King!” He sang and flew away just as quickly as he’d come.

“There are many among the loyal nobility,” Beelzebub murmured. “Who would be honored to offer you their counsel.”

“Yes…” Lucifer was still watching Hastur and Kokbiel. “Or perhaps one with a wing in multiple worlds.”

Amenadiel crossed his arms. “He’s an angel, Luci.”

“And angel never redeemed from Hell,” Lucifer countered. “A very unique being, wouldn’t you say?”

Amenadiel let out a breath. “He’s welcome in the Silver City… but you’re right. He’s also welcome here.” He studied the embracing angel and demon. “Maybe this is the place for him.”

“Well, we don’t have to make decisions right away.” Lucifer advanced to his throne.

There was an immediate reshuffling as the King took his seat.

The princes and kings took their seats in a semi-circle around the throne. Mazikeen rose out of her slouch to stand beside Lucifer. The King’s guards assembled on the steps and the nobility took their stance according to their rank upon the floor with their legions grouped behind them.

Amenadiel and Aziraphale stood off to the side in a position reserved for visitors of rank.

Maze caught Crowley’s arm and pulled him behind her. His utter lack of rank offered Crowley no place on the dais, but Mazikeen's action indicated he was under her protection, and trusted enough stand at her back.

Lucifer gave her a nod of approval, then turned to address the court. His gaze swept the room, making eye-contact with as many demons as possible. He’d started a rebellion this way long ago, he thought. Just by talking. Now he needed to bring about order.

He thanked the loyal legions. He assured them of a restoration of order to the ranks. He growled a warning to the guilty and to enemies of the throne. He confessed he’d pushed hard for change in Hell, but he hoped to see a brighter future. He promised to better listen to the protests of the confused, and better explain the reasons of his actions. He listed princes, kings, generals, and nobles by name, aware praise was necessary at this moment. He once again thanked the angels who’d come to the throne’s defense. Speech concluded, he dismissed the horde back to their tasks.

The crowd cheered his praise and shouted their continued devotion as they filed from the palace. The hall thinned down to those of highest rank and the palace guards.

The atmosphere simmered to somewhat calmer.

Lucifer relaxed a fraction now that fewer eyes watched him. He’d be able to retreat soon and attend to his injuries. But there were still too many studying him to display any weariness or weakness. He had to show his confidence for now. “So, Aziraphale,” he said casually. “What do you think of Hell?”

The angel looked around a little uncertainly. “I think I see why Crowley prefers Earth.”
Several princes hissed their disapproval.

Maze laughed openly. She could safely do so.

Lucifer chuckled softly. “To each their own. Stop skulking back there, Crowley. Your boyfriend’s looking twitchy. I’d prefer he didn’t stab anyone.”

The demon hastened eagerly to Aziraphale’s side. They intertwined their arms and leaned together in mutual support.

Lucifer smiled. “Do you ever plan to make an honest angel out of him?”

“Too late for that, Lord,” Crowley said with a shrug.

“We couldn’t think of anyone who could officiate for us,” Aziraphale said. “And we couldn’t really get approval…” He trailed off, eying the company uneasily.

“Well, this is my realm,” Lucifer mused. “I think I’m qualified. If there’s no objections from the opposition.” He looked at Amenadiel.

The angel looked amused. “Heaven can hardly stand in the way of love. No matter how unlikely.”

“What do you say, Angel?” Crowley leaned his head against Aziraphale’s shoulder. “After 6,000 years, should we make it official?”

“Oh…” Aziraphale scuffed his foot. “This is just so sudden…”

“That means yes, Boss,” Crowley said.

Lucifer turned to the princes. “Mammon, can you dredge up a few rings that aren’t cursed for our happy couple?”

The demon dipped his head, looking with surprising interest at the pair. “Lord? Is this one of your changes to Hell?”

“Love?” Lucifer smiled. “I doubt it’s a change I need to make. I think you’ll find it was already here.”

Chapter End Notes

So, AFTER I finished writing the whole story, I found out Beelzebub was supposed to be non-binary in the show. Granted, it’s never stated in the dialogue, and the actor identifies as female, so... oops? I’m on the fence about going back and changing the pronouns. This was the only chapter Beelzebub appeared in after I found out, so I left them as female for now.
“...So then we threw together a wedding,” Maze explained cheerfully to a wide-eyed audience of Chloe, Trixie, and Linda. “We had to clear out the bodies really fast because Aziraphale wouldn’t go for them as decorations... Angels. So picky... And Mammon found some rings which he said wouldn’t bind an angel to Hell – Aziraphale and Crowley ran them through a few rounds of celestial and hellfire just to be sure. And then Lucifer made up a ceremony... It was mostly about him. But still really sweet. And the nerds exchanged rings, kissed, and flew out of there before someone could object. Amenadiel and I hung around a while longer, but Lucifer said he had everything under control, so we came back here.”

“And Lucifer’s alright?” Chloe demanded.

“Oh, sure. It was just a little rebellion. No big.”

“He got locked in a castle and nearly killed!”

Maze shrugged. “We got there in time. And he has loads of very loyal guards who won’t leave him alone for months after this. He knows how to handle this sort of thing. He’s been doing it forever.”

“Did he send us any letters?” Trixie asked.

“Sorry, squirt. He was kind of busy. He’ll have plenty to tell you once he can send mail out again.”

“And everyone else is okay?” Chloe wanted to know.

Maze shrugged. “Everyone on our side. Belial wasn’t looking too good. Amenadiel said he had one thing to take care of and then he’d be back here.”

“So... just another day in Hell,” Linda murmured.

“Did you like visiting your old home?” Trixie asked.

Maze smiled and held out her arms. “I like my new home way better.”

Trixie hugged the demon tightly, and Maze purred with the certainty that she was exactly where she belonged.

~

He found them seated on the shore of the burning lake. Man and dog looked out at the view with equal calm, unconcerned by the writhing water and occasional tortured screams from beneath the waves.

Lucifer forced himself to sit beside his son. He was the parent. He had to make the first move. The silence passed awkwardly until he fell back on speaking about himself. “This is where I landed when I Fell. And where I’ll return to in the end.”

“Seems to me,” Adam said without looking at him. “You wouldn’t have wanted the apocalypse to happen. If this is what you were expecting.”
“No,” Lucifer agreed. “I didn’t.”

Adam skipping a rock across the lake. It bounced twice before melting. “You must have at one point. Back in the Garden.”

Lucifer studied the ground. “I was angry,” he admitted. “I wanted to ruin my parent’s creation. I had an idea of corrupting it from the inside out… It didn’t have the effect I was expecting. But there was a prophecy about an offspring of mine bringing about the end of the world.”

“Is that really what it said?”

“Maybe changing the world is more accurate. Everyone certainly read it as the end. So… I arranged an offspring. And I waited.”

The silence lasted until Lucifer spoke wearily. “But… in the meantime… I got to like Earth. So this… thing I’d made… became something that would ruin something I’d come to appreciate.”

“You resented me.” There wasn’t any judgment in the voice. Just statement of facts.

Lucifer found himself talking helplessly. “I’d look at this… baby. And I’d think about her and how delightful she’d been. And what a child of mine could be like with the world at his feet… and how that would ruin everything…” He broke off, panting weakly. “You don’t remember. But we spent quite a lot of time together long ago. Contemplating. Wanting to see you thrive. Fearing what you’d bring about…”

“Is that why you never came near me? Before or after?”

“Before… because I knew what you were supposed to do. And I couldn’t… influence you. I’d been told to stay away.”

“Seems like you don’t listen to anybody else unless you want to.”

“True… But I believed the prophecies. I didn’t think I had much choice. And…” He studied the ground. “It’s selfish… I didn’t want to get attached. You would have been the first casualty when Heaven swept down. I didn’t want to care.”

Adam’s hand closed around the scruff of the dog’s neck. “But you did.”

Lucifer looked down at the dog. He snorted. “Feeble sort of protection, wasn’t it? Absolute least I could do.”

Dog licked his hand and wagged his tail.

Adam looked at him for the first time. “What about after?”

“I didn’t think you’d want to see me. You were rather… emphatic about it at the airbase.” Lucifer looked out at the lake. “I should have,” he said finally. “It wasn’t for you to make the first move. I’m sorry. For not being there. For not looking after you. For never… this.” He shook his head. “I can make a thousand excuses, but…”

“I get it.” Adam rose to his feet. He faced his father and held out his hand.

Lucifer took it with a frown.

“Hi,” the young man said calmly. “I’m Adam Young.”
“…Lucifer Morningstar,” the devil replied in a bemused tone.

“It’s nice to meet you,” Adam replied. “I look forward to getting to know you.”

Lucifer blinked rapidly. “I’d like that.”

Adam stepped back. “Right now… I think there’s someone else I’d like to meet…”

~

“Trails are marked on the map. Please stay on designated pathways. Pick up any trash. Enjoy!” Eve ushered another guest through the visitor’s center and into the park. She turned with a smile as she heard the door open.

A young man and a small dog walked in.


“Thanks,” the man replied, his accent falling thick and pleasant to her ears.

*Good looking,* she thought. *Why does he seem familiar?*

“How can I help you?” She asked out loud.

The man leaned on the counter. “Well, I’m doing some connecting with my family. This was my next stop.”

“Really? Family reunion?”

“That’s right.”

“Are you meeting some people here?”

“Just one.” He smiled a calm and disarming smile. “My name’s Adam.”

She laughed. “That was my ex’s name.”

“I know. Actually… I was named after him.”

Eve’s smile faltered. “Have we met?”

“Sort of.” The man looked down at the dog, then back at her. “Is there somewhere we could talk?”

~

Gabriel led a procession of handpicked angels down the early morning street of London. Although there’d been no divine command, Gabriel was certain they were doing the work of the Almighty. The traitor had been left unpunished far too long.

Gabriel was aware the bookshop was protected, but he’d brought skilled angels for dealing with any inconvenience. There would be resistance of course. That disgusting demon would probably end up an ‘accidental’ casualty. But they’d have justice in the end.

He was not entirely surprised to find an angel waiting outside the bookshop. He was more surprised by who it was.
“Brother,” Gabriel said smoothly, showing little but a raised eyebrow to mark his amazement to find Amenadiel waiting with crossed arms and a no-nonsense expression. “Have you come to join our errand of justice?”

“Aziraphale’s not here,” the first-born said curtly. “He’s on his honeymoon.”

Several angels whispered disapprovingly. The rest wanted to know what a ‘honeymoon’ was.

Gabriel’s lip curled back in disgust. “Another sin on the traitor’s record.” He gestured to his followers. “No matter. We’ll eliminate the defenses on his stronghold, cleanse it of the taint of evil, and wait for his return.”

“No,” Amenadiel said quietly. “You won’t.”

“Do you propose we hunt him down?”

“I say you’re going to leave Aziraphale alone.”

“It is the Almighty’s will that traitors to the throne be ferreted out and made to know the might of our Creator.”

“Told you that personally, did they?” Amenadiel’s eyes swept the gathering contemptuously. “I don’t believe you’ve had any orders. I think you decided on this grand plan yourself. If you’re that annoyed Luci didn’t lose his throne, take it up with him. You haven’t visited him since our Creator gave him Hell.”

“Gave?!” Gabriel sneered. “It’s his prison.”

“Is it? And if they’d given it to you? Would it have still been a punishment?”

Gabriel sniffed. “I follow our Creator in whatever capacity they desire me to serve.”

Amenadiel smirked. “Right… But you’re not even a little jealous Lucifer got his own realm?” His smile faded. “Whatever you feel, you can’t take it out on Aziraphale.”

“He’s a traitor! He defied Heaven at the apocalypse! He consorts with demons! He sided with the King of Hell!”

“He sided with Earth. That’s his purpose. Or haven’t you noticed?”

Amenadiel traced a rune in the air. Aziraphale’s name hung in celestial blaze between them. The meaning stood with fiery clarity for the whole assembly to see.

Several angels stumbled back with murmurs of awe.

“Do you really believe our Maker wants him punished? After remaking him as that? I’d say he’s the only one of us who can truthfully say they’re following our Creator’s will.”

“But it’s not possible! Our Creator would never defend one who consorts with the Fallen.”

“Wouldn’t they? Funny you’re so certain. Haven’t you always said they’d be welcome back to Heaven?” Amenadiel’s eyes narrowed. “But how would you really feel if Heaven and Hell were united?”

“Blasphemy!” Gabriel sputtered.
“Is it? Is that why you were so eager to see Lucifer usurped when he proposed peace? Our Creator speaks of mercy, but you…” Amenadiel tilted his head. “…You prefer smiting.”

“Evil must be eliminated. You know that as well as I do. The Earth must be cleansed.”

“The Earth will be left alone,” Amenadiel said flatly. “Earth doesn’t answer to us. It has its king - even if he won’t take the crown. And it has a guardian - no matter how reluctantly he wields a sword. We won’t interfere.”

“The council won’t stand for…”

“The council already voted.” Amenadiel cut him off. He pointed at the bookshop sign.

In a neat pattern beneath the shop’s name ran a message declaring it to be the residence of the guardian of Earth and for him to be left alone. The message was signed with four rune names, the blazing signs of three Archangels and one devil all lending their support to the declaration.

Gabriel paled. “You found Raphael and Michael.”

“They weren’t nearly as hard to track down as you implied,” Amenadiel said mildly. “Michael would like to have some words with you about that blow you gave him on the way down.”

Gabriel blanched further. “You’re working against our Creator.”

“I serve our Creator as faithfully as I’m able,” Amenadiel replied steadily. “I don’t always know their will, but I’m through pretending I do. Peace seems like a strong goal to me. The Fallen are our family. If Lucifer wants to work toward unity, I stand with him. If the guardians of Earth want humanity to grow without our interference, I stand with them.”

“You would. The way you defile yourself on humans and demons,” Gabriel muttered darkly.

Amenadiel’s fists clenched. “My son is not an act of defilement. That our Creator allowed him to be conceived is all the proof I need that he belongs. Whether he chooses Heaven or Earth, or something else entirely, I will always love him.” He stepped closer, looming over Gabriel with a fierce ripple of power. “And you will never speak of my chosen family like that again.”

Gabriel backed down and turned away. “We will speak of this as a full council when next we meet.”

“Fine. And I think you’re right that our next meeting will include choosing some new princes to fill out the ranks. Did you know Luci’s put Kokbiel on his council? And several lesser demons? If the Lord of Hell can be more inclusive, I think we can be the same.”

Gabriel whisked back with a snarl. “Don’t you dare suggest Aziraphale!”

“He already turned me down,” Amenadiel replied. He made friendly eye contact with the angels bunched behind Gabriel. “But maybe it’s time for other spheres to be represented on the council.”

Gabriel did not enjoy the sound of intrigued murmuring from the ‘lower’ ranks as he retreated back to Heaven.
The Adam and Lucifer scene was the last thing written for this story. I finished the novel, sat on it for a couple days, and then decided they needed to properly talk. Or at least make a start at it. Unfortunately, it means there weren't a lot of revelations in there, since Crowley covered all of that for the reader chapters ago. But, they talked, and that's what was important.

I debate far too long about whether demons leave corpses, or if they turn to dust or something. I ultimately decided they did because 1, Uriel left a body on Lucifer, 2, Belial's severed head had shown up in the last chapter, and 3, I really liked the mental image of Aziraphale not wanting to get married in a room full of dead demons.

I do need to write something kinder about Gabriel some other time. I feel kind of bad for how awful he was here.
“Enjoy your honeymoon?” Lucifer asked the demon who entered the devil’s chambers with an air of feigned calm.

“I mean… it’s not really a honeymoon when you’ve been together as long as…” Crowley’s face split into a massive grin. “Yeah. Yeah, we did.”

Lucifer pushed down any pain he felt. “Good.” He eyed the demon up and down. “Where’s my mail?”

“Oh. I didn’t bring it.”

Lucifer’s eyebrows went up.

“Brought you something else instead.”

“Alcohol, I hope.”

Crowley took a few steps toward the door and looked back. “Have time for a walk, Boss?”

Puzzled, but still buoyed along by enough good humor to indulge the demon, Lucifer followed Crowley to the fissure.

Crowley held out his hand.

Lucifer looked at him suspiciously.

“Just like we did in Eden, Boss,” Crowley said confidently.

“I could use a gate if I felt I could leave Hell,” Lucifer protested. “It’s far more comfortable than your squeezing through holes as if the realms were a cheese grater.”

“There’s a good reason to use this one.” Crowley’s hand hadn’t dropped. “Just trust me for a minute?”

The devil took a breath, then grasped the extended hand. “May I remind you how much I hated this then?”

“You liked what was waiting for you,” Crowley replied cheerfully.

“Until you ruined it for me.”

“Yeah, well, you got a second chance with Eve so I don’t have to feel bad anymore. Ready?” Without waiting for a reply, the serpent plunged between realities.

Squeezed through a cheese grater was not the best analogy, Lucifer reflected. A toothpaste tube? If one already had a splitting headache and instead of being made out of toothpaste, one was made out of marbles all of which were being shoved through an opening less than half one’s body mass.

And Eden had been a much shorter trip.
Abruptly there was what looked vaguely like a door ahead and the serpent was pulling him through realms…

…And into his penthouse.

Lucifer had to look around quickly to assure himself he wasn’t still in Hell. No. There was Los Angeles out the window. There was the bar with drinks which wafted with far more alluring scents than anything in Hell. From outside came the faint sounds of a passing helicopter, not the screams of the damned.

He was home.

He turned to Crowley, bewilderment written in his face.

The demon was grinning as smugly as a cat. “Amazing what you can do with a couple angels, a flaming sword, and the prince-of-this-world.”

“Adam helped you?”

“Adam believes in love. And he wants to properly talk to you soon.” Crowley glanced at the closet door which had become a gateway. “The pathway will get to know you and widen once it does. You’ll be able to go back and forth on your own.” He rubbed the back of his neck. “It’s not perfect. I know you won’t be able to leave for long. Hell can’t really be without a king right now. But this’ll get you a few hours off the clock. And… that’s something, right?” He gave Lucifer an anxious look.

Lucifer nodded slowly. He walked around the penthouse, his hand gently playing along the piano keys, the bar, the fabric on the furniture.

“And when you can’t get away,” Crowley said from behind him. “There’s always the mail.”

Lucifer poured himself a proper drink for the first time in a year. He went to the window and looked out at the city. “You should go home.”

“Right.” He heard Crowley move toward the door. “I’ve got a place across the city whenever you’re ready to…”

“I thought you said you lived in Soho.”

There was a long pause. “You’re letting me go?”

“It’s occurs to me perhaps removing all the field agents from Earth was unwise.” Lucifer didn’t turn around. “Someone needs to report if anything interesting happens. And keep an eye on what Up Above is doing here.”

“Mostly eating French desserts and reading old books,” Crowley muttered. He came to stand beside Lucifer. “I’m still around if you need deliveries… or just someone to talk to.”

Lucifer snorted softly. He took a long sip. “Meanwhile, I return to my punishment.”

“Do you really think that’s what it is?”

“Of course. I rebelled against my parent’s wishes, and I’ll endure the outcome for eternity.”

Crowley turned away from the view. He leaned against the glass and crossed his arms. “I’m starting to think that’s not true.”
Lucifer looked curiously at him.

“After the apocalypse, when Aziraphale and I were trying to figure out what happened… why it happened… why everyone thought they knew the Almighty’s plan and then it just… didn’t happen. I thought then… maybe it’s not a chess game. We always talk like it’s us versus them, right? But… why? There never had to be a rebellion. Our Creator knew what you were up to right from the start. There’s no reason you couldn’t have been whisked off the board and maybe the rest of us wouldn’t have started thinking for ourselves. At least right then. But… you kept talking, and we listened… and we all Fell. But… isn’t it weird that nobody else ever did? I’ve met angels. There’s some lousy pricks up there. But none of them ever ended up at our front door. And none of us ever went back. Marchosias tried. He really wanted back. But… nothing he did got him back there. And, recently, it was important he was where he was. He’s helping make things different Below.”

Crowley studied the floor. “So I thought back then, maybe it’s not a chess game. Or maybe if it is, it’s all of us – Heaven and Hell – against them – humanity. But now…” He shook his head. “Maybe Aziraphale and his talk of ineffable plans is right. Maybe there’s a reason for all of it.”

“For rebellions? For eternal punishments?”

“Boss… if you had to pick… from all of us who ended up in that lake… who besides you could have run the place?”

Lucifer sipped his drink and didn’t answer. The response would have felt too conceited. Even for him.

“It would have been bad for humanity every other way. Strange, wasn’t it? You keeping so much more power than the rest of us. Enough to get some order in that mess. And humans can say, ‘the devil made me do it,’ all they like… but you didn’t. All the way back to the Garden. They always chose. They probably would have ended up kicked out of the Garden even without our help. We just sped them along a little. And that’s all we ever did. Look at their history. They figured out how to be horrible, and how to be incredible, without any of us.

“And you found a place for the ones who were too stuck in their own heads to find the Silver City. It’s torture, sure… but they do it to themselves. And they get out themselves. There’s still chances for all of them. You didn’t have to give them that. Nobody told you to.

“So then… if it’s not punishment… then did we all end up where we were supposed to be? Look at that failed apocalypse. Computers all over the world would have been throwing missiles at each other, except in walks in the one human on the planet with the power to make every electronic die at a touch. What are the chances? Aziraphale calls it ineffable, and something like that kind of makes a believer out of me. Because the way humans were where they were supposed to be – Madame Tracy just happened to be doing a séance right then. Adam just happened to find the perfect humans to counter the Riders. That brainless nun just happened to be the one at the front door.”

Lucifer had absolutely no idea what Crowley was talking about, but he listened anyway.

“And then I think, if they all had free will, but they were all still where they needed to be… what about us? We’re not supposed to… not like they do. But… you started a rebellion. And our Creator didn’t do a thing to stop us. Not either side. We fought it out without a lot of guidance. You said it was because our Creator didn’t care… but what if that was the way to get us where we needed to be? I don’t really remember what I was then, but I got turned into something else on the way down. We all did. We could have just been snuffed out – no need for wars or fighting. Instead we all got a
“new purpose that day. Mine got me into Eden. And into the world. And in and out of Hell. Maybe I was always supposed to be like this.”

“So, you’re saying there’s no free will?”

“No, I’m saying maybe Someone knows us better than we know ourselves. Maybe there was one plan for if you hadn’t started the rebellion. Maybe there’s a version of events out there somewhere where you and Michael are still best buddies and singing praises to the throne together.”

Lucifer scoffed.

“But we picked this. And then we got worked into a new plan in a new way. So… maybe there’s no us against them. Not Heaven and Hell. Not humanity. We’re all just headed toward something. And… I gotta hope it’s something amazing.”

Lucifer was silent for a long time. “Do you know,” he said at last. “Five more sets of demons have asked me to perform marriage ceremonies. Including Hastur and… whoever Ligur-Kokbiel is at any given moment.” He set down the drink. “We thought we weren’t capable of love. Of change.”

A pain constricted around his heart. “I was manipulated into loving Chloe. She was singled out at conception. A human who could make me vulnerable.”

“Oh… You needed someone to help you change. And she was in the right place for you to meet her.”

Lucifer looked thoughtfully at him. “You have some curious takes on life. I’d be interested in hearing your thoughts again.”

Crowley touched the brand on his neck. “You know how to call.”

Lucifer winced. The sight of his mark on this free-thinking demon seemed suddenly as garish as graffiti. “That was just so the guards wouldn’t stab you. It’s not meant to be controlling… or ownership, or whatever else Aziraphale accused me of.” He grimaced. “He wasn’t exactly wrong.”

He reached out a hand, then paused. “I can get rid of that. If you’d like me to.”

Crowley’s eyebrows jumped. His finger traced the edge of the mark, his expression growing thoughtful. To Lucifer’s surprised, he stepped out of reach. “If Hell’s changing, maybe it’s somewhere I can help out. Sometimes,” he added hastily. “Got big important work to do in Soho, you know. Bringing about the end times as the Dark Lord commands.”

Lucifer snorted. “Because you’re so good at apocalypses.”

Crowley gave him a look of mock insult. “I’m practically an expert. I’ve survived two of them on the front lines.” His face shifted to serious. “If you need someone to fly back and forth, I’ll do it.”

Lucifer studied him thoughtfully. “You would make a good messenger to more than just Earth. Nobody finds you threatening.”

“I’m in. But I get holidays and weekends off. And union break rules. And paid family leave…”

Lucifer swatted him lightly. “I regret this already. Now, go on. And try not to cause trouble this time.”

Crowley started for the door.
“Actually…” Lucifer began.

Crowley looked back.

“There is one more thing you could do for me.”

Chapter End Notes

Oh... you thought we were done with cliffhangers? Haha, I'm evil. Last one.

Next Week: Almost done! One chapter and the Epilogue left.
“If you’re through, could we please get off the street?” Aziraphale grumbled.

Crowley, his arms as far around the Bentley’s hood as he could reach, quirked an eyebrow at him. “Would you get between a demon and his true love?”

Aziraphale sighed. “Maybe I need to leave you two alone for an hour…”

Crowley stood up, tenderly patting the car’s hood. “He’s just jealous,” he told the Bentley. “He’ll never have what we have.” He backed away reluctantly. “We’re taking a nice long drive later,” he promised as he turned toward the shop.

Aziraphale abruptly swept him off his feet and carried him, bridal-style, across the threshold.

“Aziraphale!” Crowley yelped with a laugh. “Evil spirits are hardly going to bother me!”

“No chances!” The angel declared grimly. “And now that I know I can chop my way into Heaven and Hell, see if I ever let anyone take you away again.”

“Jealousy,” Crowley purred and burrowed his head against Aziraphale’s neck. “I’ve completely corrupted my husband already.” He grinned at the sound at the word. They’d both been using it as often as possible.

They’d always said a ceremony was just a ceremony, and it didn’t really matter… but they’d smiled like idiots through the whole thing, and neither had been able to take their eyes off the rings since then. By human standards they were quite ordinary – just simple bands of dull-colored gold. But to the other-worldly eye, the bands danced in a mingling of celestial blaze and hellfire. A perfect joining of the two.

The books rustled a welcome, and Aziraphale murmured pleasantries to them. He walked down the rows while Crowley communed with the plants in the front window. It was several minutes before either was ready to mount the stairs for the apartment.

They paused on the second story so Aziraphale could check over the other half of his book collection. He fretted hopes there would be room for the books he’d purchased in America, and Crowley teased about the foreign books bringing unknown maladies to his library until Aziraphale looked pained.

The houseplants practically strained out of their pots as Crowley came into the apartment. The demon prowled the apartment with the plant mister, checking over the whole collection and scolding them gently for their drooping demeanor. “I leave you for just a little while, and this is what I come back to?” He grumbled without the least malice in his voice.

The English ivy just clung tighter to his wrist while the rubber plant and the bamboo leaned in closer to touch their absent deity.

Eventually Crowley extracted himself from the plants.

Aziraphale had been circling the apartment all the while like a fussy mother hen. He’d straightened
absolutely everything, muttering about the lack of cleanliness until dust whisked itself from the tables and scum retreated from the sink. Seeing Crowley seemed finished, Aziraphale offered him his hand. They mounted the last set of stairs to the rooftop garden.

“You lot!” Crowley shouted when he was still out of sight. “You’d better look sharp if you know what’s good for you!”

The plants sprang to attention. Rows of quivering, eager foliage met their eyes as they reached the roof.

Crowley put his hands on his hips and glared at them. “I may have been gone a while, but that’s no excuse for slacking off. And if I hear any of you were troublesome for Newt, it’s the wood chipper for you!”

“Oh, Crowley,” Aziraphale sighed as the demon bore down on a shaking fern. “Do you really have to treat them like that?”

“Spots,” he murmured dourly as he lifted a branch of the fern. “Angel, if you don’t want to see what happens next, you’d better go downstairs.”

Aziraphale muttered his disapproval, and retreated from the rooftop.

The moment he was gone, Crowley transformed and wove his way beneath the plants.

No one could have known how he arranged his garden. “It’s like the Garden of Eden!” Visitors would exclaim when they saw the rooftop.

But unless you’d ever viewed the Garden from the soil looking up, you wouldn’t know how right that observation was.

Even Aziraphale had never noticed how the animal garden stones – mostly birds – were placed in the position where the angels once had stood guard. He didn’t know the plants were angled so that the door from the floor below lined up with a weak place between defenses where a certain serpent had once crawled out of Hell.

Crowley slithered among his plants. The plants knew what the serpent liked and lowered their branches so that he crawled through tunnels of green. Crowley hissed his approval for the garden as he wove a slow corkscrew among the pots and branches until he reached the center of the garden where a dogwood tree sat, guarded by garden stones in the position where once cherubim had failed to guard another tree in the center of a Garden.

Crowley crawled into the branches, finding a comfortable place to perch. The tree rocked him gently as he surveyed his little garden.

“You’re getting big,” he told the tree after a long and sleepy span. “I think it’s time for you to go.”

The tree tensed and and began to tremble.

“Shhh,” the serpent soothed. “There’s no disposal in your future. It’s time you were properly planted. In your native soil. Where you can really sink your roots and spread your limbs.”

The tree listened, though it still quivered. In its woody heart, it knew its pot had been feeling restrictive lately. And it was getting harder to grow without shading out the other plants. But to leave the only home it had known since Crowley chose it so many years before? The tree shivered.
“It’s alright,” the serpent murmured. “You’ll find the wilds to your liking, I think. The others always do.” He leaned close against the tree. “That’s the secret you mustn’t tell the others. That’s where the best of them go. Back to the wild to thrive. But I can’t have my reputation ruined by everyone thinking I don’t have a wood chipper in the cellar.”

The tree was listening, even if it still shivered.

“It’s part of growing,” the serpent said. “No one can stay in the Garden forever.”

Chapter End Notes

Almost done! One last (very short) epilogue tomorrow.
Even for a demon well-experienced at both arranging matters and causing human miseries, it was a
tall order.

It was also one of those times Crowley wondered how he’d ever gotten his job done without email.

It wasn’t easy. But between an email to the janitorial staff that the building was being fumigated
and they didn’t need to come in, another email offering free drinks to cops at the local java station,
three phone calls about sick children in need of pickup, two calls about riots in remote areas of LA,
one threat of a police chief’s car being towed, two exes offering to get back together if their partner
met them immediately, and (when all else failed) locking Dan in a single-stall bathroom in the
basement, the homicide floor of the LAPD was strangely deserted of everyone except Chloe
Decker.

The detective didn’t notice. She was immersed in paperwork at first. When that concluded, she
found herself trying to draft a letter.

Why, she worried, hadn’t she heard anything since Maze had brought word of the failed rebellion?
Was Lucifer alright? Had he decided communication was too risky? Surely he could have sent
some kind of message. If nothing else just to tell her to be patient.

Caught up in worries, she failed to hear the footsteps approaching her desk. She didn't notice the
shadow overhead until the scent of a familiar aftershave reached her senses. She tensed, barely
daring to hope until she heard the soft, purring voice she'd longed for these many painful months.
It flowed through her ears, resounded in her heart, and echoed against her soul.

“Hello, Detective…”

~

THE END

And that concludes Serpent Delivery. This little story which was just meant as a time-
wasting side project ended up consuming my whole summer. And I'm not sorry.
Putting this together has been a real pleasure.

I can't thank everyone enough for the encouragement you've given me while writing
this. Your actions absolutely motivated this story along. Thanks to those who were
here on day one and read all the way through. Thanks to those who saw a daunting
50k+, 80k+, 100k+ word story, and still jumped in to read. Thanks to everyone who
commented, analyzed, spotted errors, posted on Tumblr, translated, drew fanart, liked,
and read along. You've all helped to make this what it became.
There are still questions to answer regarding the story, and some of you have been asking about a sequel for a while. The answer is... yes... probably. I've known what the second half of the story would be for a while, long enough to drop some seeds and foreshadowing. However, I don't have as clear an idea going in this time as I did with *Serpent Delivery*, and writing it hasn't proved as easy, nor am I particularly happy with the pacing so far. Still, there is more of this story to tell, and I would like to tell it.

I'm aiming to begin posting the new story, entitled *The Beginning of Eternity*, at the start of October. Two questions as I work toward that. First, do people prefer a lot of short chapters, or fewer long chapters? Also, I need a title for this as a series. Any ideas?

Teaser for Part Two (Subject to change): *Peace between Heaven and Hell is a lovely goal, but not everyone is onboard. As divinely injured demons are found scattered across Hell, the council wonders if a second war is imminent. Investigating might go better if they weren't trying to hide the troubles from Lucifer. With the devil occupied with his upcoming wedding, all seven councilors are looking to prove their coping skills, even if it means calling in favors from the Endless. With Lucifer and Chloe struggling to understand what a future together will mean, their friends diving deep into wedding planning, and Lucifer's siblings demanding invitations, it's sure to be a wedding for the ages. And why is Crowley obsessively researching Eden?*

Once again, thank you for reading!

Please [drop by the archive and comment](#) to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!