Lie Back And Think Of Dinner

by jessthereckless

Summary

"Crowley, this is a disaster. This is everything I ever wanted. We’re in love. And there’s a picnic. And we don’t seem to be able to get…amorous without causing earthquakes."

Aziraphale attempts subterfuge. Crowley sees right through him.

Notes

See the end of the work for notes.

On Tuesday morning it had rained halibut in Brighton.

Wednesday had been uneventful, but Thursday had started out with a bump when there was an earthquake in the middle of Oxfordshire and Wiltshire broke out in the kind of rash of crop circles that hadn’t been seen since The X-Files first aired. As Aziraphale had feared, Crowley was not taking it seriously.

“That’s just psychic background radiation,” he said, as he lounged on a deckchair in St. James’s Park. “Fortean white noise. Nothing to worry about.”

“Yes, but Oxfordshire,” said Aziraphale. “Don’t you think we should go and…check?”

“For what? Earthquakes are natural phenomena.”

“Not always.”
“No, not always, but I heard somewhere that they were fracking in Oxfordshire.” Crowley giggled at Aziraphale’s brief fluster. “FRACK-ING,” he said, in a loud, does-any-one-here-speak-English tone of voice. “It’s not rude. You’re thinking of something else.”

“Oh.”

Crowley paused for a moment, evidently enjoying the idea that an angel had had a dirty word on his mind for even a fraction of a second. “Fucking,” he said, with a grin. “That’s what you were thinking of.”

“There’s no need to be childish.”

“Yes, there is,” said Crowley, sitting back and stuffing his hands under his armpits as though it were a cold night in February, instead of a blazing day in June. “Swearing is funny.”

Aziraphale sighed and glanced over at a couple of young men who were occupying a picnic blanket nearby. One lay on his stomach and the other was sitting up, reading a book. To Aziraphale – whose taste in bathing costumes was distinctly 1920s – they appeared as shameless as mankind hadn’t been since he first met Crowley. He looked over at Crowley, who was still wearing his black leather jacket.

“Aren’t you warm?” he said. The words were halfway out of his mouth before he realised what a stupid thing that was to ask a demon. Warm was a relative concept when the view from your kitchen window was a lake of boiling sulphur.

One of Crowley’s eyebrows made an appearance over the top of his sunglasses, but he didn’t reply. It was hard to tell where he was looking when he was wearing those things, which was one of the reasons why he wore them. Aziraphale had an uncomfortable feeling that Crowley – who had, after all, been sniffing out yearnings for six thousand years – was looking in the exact same direction as he was. Towards the two men, where the one lying down had just raised his head and handed a bottle of sun block to the other. And now he was smoothing sun block all over his boyfriend’s back with the kind of casual ownership that made something in the very core of Aziraphale’s being raise its head and whine like a sad, starving dog.

“I really think you need to come to Oxfordshire with me,” said Aziraphale, almost falling over the words in his haste to speak them. “Just to be on the safe side, you understand.”

Crowley sucked on the corner of his lower lip for a moment, then said, “Yeah, all right.”

“What?”

“I said ‘all right.’ Let’s go. It’s only an hour’s drive away. We can be there and back in time for dinner. I quite fancy the Savoy for a change. I hear they’ve got a new pâtissier who does interesting things with profiteroles.” Crowley waggled a suggestive eyebrow above his sunglasses. His eyebrows were more suggestive than most. They had six thousand years of experience under their belt.

“Stop that,” said Aziraphale, trying and failing to hide his smile.

“Stop what?”

“You’re tempting.”

“Can’t help it. It’s what I do. Anyway, you love profiteroles.”
“I do.”

“There you go, then. Quick drive to the home counties to make sure the former Antichrist is still human…” Crowley glanced at his watch. “And crop circles, earthquakes and traffic permitting, we’ll be back in time for supper at the Savoy.”

“Assuming everything is all right, that is,” said Aziraphale. “What happens if it’s not? We might have to spend the night. Several nights. It might turn into a sort of…stakeout situation.”

“Stakeout situation?” said Crowley, hissing slightly. “Have you been watching television again?”

“A bit.”

“Don’t. It does really weird things to your vocabulary.” Crowley got up from the deckchair and started weaving his way between the sunbathers. It had been six whole millennia, but Crowley still hadn’t mastered the art of walking as though his spine wasn’t about to escape his body, slither up to the nearest human and start enthusing about the flavour profile of a theologically significant Golden Delicious. Or at least, that’s how it had felt to Aziraphale when he had briefly occupied that body. He’d had no idea how one set of hips could be in that many places all at once. Once again he heard that sad dog whine somewhere deep in the centre of himself, and wondered at the irony. Here he was, a being of love, apparently unable to convey that emotion without making it rain fish in East Sussex.

God does not play dice, although She is partial to a game of Charades. In Crowley’s opinion, Heaven lost their gift for not beating around the bush – burning or otherwise – sometime back when the Ten Plagues of Egypt were in full swing. Since then, Heaven had dealt in crying statues and stigmata and puzzling arrangements involving incarnation, telling people to be nice to each other and getting strung up like a side of beef in an abattoir for your trouble.

Say what you like about Hell, thought Crowley, but at least they were direct. When someone told you to prostrate yourself on a bed of rusty nails so that they might ram a red hot poker up your jacksy, you were at least clear in your mind that you had definitely annoyed the wrong people somewhere down the line.

Like most hosts of Heaven, Aziraphale struggled with directness, which was probably why they were once again rattling around Lower Tadfield.

The nearby main road was lined with anti-fracking protesters, but other than that and a new vegan café in the tiny high street, the village looked much the same as it had before Armageddon. Ducks paddled in the duck pond, kids whirred past on their bicycles, and the edges of lace curtains surreptitiously trembled behind black and yellow window stickers that said NEIGHBOURHOOD WATCH.

Crowley had never been entirely clear on what they were watching for, although now that he thought about it, at least one member of the Lower Tadfield Neighbourhood Watch might still have been on the lookout for flaming vintage Bentleys.

Or flaming vintage angels.

The scene of Aziraphale’s ‘stakeout situation’ was a narrow Tudor town house overlooking the
village duck pond. Inside was the kind of chintzy décor that filled Crowley with the certainty that when he looked in the downstairs toilet there would be a crocheted doll demurely concealing the spare bog roll.

“So this where you’re planning on holing up, is it?” said Crowley, glancing around the small living room. Everything about this place screamed ‘holiday cottage.’ There was even a shelf of boring board games – Monopoly, Scrabble, Backgammon – on standby for when the Great British Weather kicked in, but Crowley was not here to play games. Especially not Scrabble. If there was one person you didn’t want to play Scrabble with, it was a polyglot angel who had read more or less every work of human literature and could get very testy when he put down BEE and you followed it up with LZEBUB.*

He followed Aziraphale back out down the narrow hallway, into a strip of a kitchen that opened out onto a lean-to conservatory.

“I thought it was quite cosy,” said Aziraphale, leafing through the box of complimentary tea bags like it was a library card index. “Kitchen’s a bit small, but you know what they say. It’s not size that counts, but rather what you do with it.”

“You do know when people say that they’re not talking about kitchens, don’t you?”

“Sorry?”

“Nothing.” Angels are sexless unless they want to make an effort. If putting an end to six thousand years of pining didn’t merit making the effort, Crowley didn’t know what did. He slipped out into the conservatory, leaving the door open. “Ooh, they have chamomile,” Aziraphale was saying, but Crowley wasn’t here for herbal teas and stakeouts. He watched the angel through the windows and wondered if Aziraphale had made the effort. And if he had, how big an effort were they talking? It was hard to tell in those trousers.

“You know,” Crowley said, half thinking aloud. “If you wanted to bring me here for some reason you could always just…”

Something landed with a soft thud on the semi-translucent plastic of the conservatory roof. Then another. And another. Crowley took off his glasses and squinted upwards through the plastic. The things were moving up there. Several more fell to earth and he saw what they were. Frogs.

Aziraphale heard the noise and stuck his head out of the kitchen door. “I’m sorry, did you say somethi…oh. Oh.”

“It’s raining frogs,” said Crowley.

“So it is. That seems very…”

“Portentous?” said Crowley.

“I was going to say ‘biblical’,” said Aziraphale. “But yours is better.” He waved a hand at the blizzard of startled amphibians piling up in the garden. “See what I mean about the phenomena?”

Crowley nodded, going along with it for now. “No, fair enough. You’ve made your point.” He scrunched his lips in thought. “So what now? We pay a visit to the kiddo?”

“No! You can’t…you can’t just go over to his house, knock on the door and ask his parents if he’s behaving like the Antichrist.”
“No. You’re right. How old is he these days, anyway?”

“Twelve, I think.”

“Eek,” said Crowley. “Isn’t that around the age that most human children start behaving like the Antichrist anyway?”

“Yes. I believe so. Hormones or something.” Hormones or something, he said. Like he wasn’t here on account of his own hormones, or whatever substance it was that fizzed through the brains of amorous angels. Crowley wished they could get to the point, but to push – from his perspective – looked a lot like temptation. He’d tempted Aziraphale before, of course, and the success of these temptations usually saw them absolutely snockered in the back of the bookshop. But this was different. He knew he could tempt an angel to lust, but in this case he didn’t want to. It felt cheap. It was a point of pride that he didn’t.

Besides, it was about fucking time that Aziraphale met him halfway.

“Well, we’ll just have to do this from a distance, I suppose,” said Aziraphale. “Just…watch.”

“Watch?”

“Yes.”

“Two grown men stalking a twelve year old boy? That’s a good look.”

“It’s not stalking,” said Aziraphale. “It’s the Neighbourhood Watch. They’ve got stickers and everything.”

Crowley laughed too hard and too loud, prompting Aziraphale to do that pursy thing with his lips. “And what’s so funny?” he said.

“No, nothing,” said Crowley. “Just the idea of you as a suburban curtain twitcher. Started out guarding the Eastern Gate of Eden and now you’re peering through the nets to make sure nobody’s defacing the war memorial. Quite fitting, really.”

The angel was not amused. His lips got even pursier and his scowl deepened. “Fitting?” he said.

“Oh, come on. You can be a bit…pokey.”

“Pokey?”


“I am not prim,” said Aziraphale, slapping away Crowley’s hand. “Mind the bow tie.” Leaving Crowley still giggling, he bustled back down the narrow hallway towards the living room. “Not everybody’s hips do what yours do, you know. I don’t know what kind of user manual came with your…form, but the human pelvis is not supposed to be in five different places at once.”

Crowley followed, enjoying himself by now. They hadn’t talked about that. Or the penis. Demons came from the same stock as angels, but they liked genitalia. Made so many sins much more interesting, not to mention fun. Crowley had heard through the infernal grapevine that when ‘he’ had been dumped in a bathtub full of holy water he’d been wearing the kind of bathing suit that Harry Houdini used to wear for his water torture cell escapes.
“How did you find it, by the way?” he asked. “My…form?”


“You know what yours was like?”

“I have no idea.”

“Your flesh,” said Crowley. “ Comes with a huge side order of yearnings. Did you know that?”

The angel’s eyes widened slightly, and Crowley couldn’t resist. Just a smidgen of temptation. His fingers skated across the tight back of Aziraphale’s waistcoat. “You’ve been treating your vessel a little bit too well, haven’t you?” he said, leaning in. “Giving it a taste for the finer things in life? Sushi dinners, vintage wine, deviled eggs…” Aziraphale loved deviled eggs, loaded with smoked paprika and chili pepper flakes, and topped off with a slice of pimento stuffed olive or an oily sliver of salty anchovy.

“Your flesh…” Crowley went on, lowering his voice. “Felt incredibly hungry. I tried to get some sleep that night, but your body just wouldn’t shut up. It was pining.”

“You’re tempting again.”

“I’m not, I swear,” said Crowley, who totally was. “I’m just saying. It felt as though every cell in your body was screaming for a drink. Yearning. That’s why I had to crack open that bottle of Chateau d’Yquem I borrowed from you a while back.”

Aziraphale’s mouth fell open. “Crowley, no! Not the twenty-one? That was my last bottle.”

“Oh yes. Chateau d’Yquem, 1921. The colour of dark honey, and twice as sweet. Perhaps the greatest dessert wine ever invented by humanity.”

Like most angelic types, Aziraphale had removed his shoes upon entering the house. Crowley looked down and noted with satisfaction that the angel’s socked toes were already curling into the pile of the carpet.

“The perfect dessert wine,” Crowley continued, his voice slipping lower into the silky register he’d employed to such devastating effect in the garden. “Just crying out for the right dessert. All that heavenly sweetness, designed to accompany the perfect…” He leaned even closer, his lips almost brushing Aziraphale’s ear. “…pud.”

Aziraphale made a high soft sound in the very back of his throat.

“Perhaps a dark chocolate mousse that coats your tongue when you lick the spoon? A sweet pastry tart filled with crème anglaise and fresh, June-ripe strawberries. Or a raspberry topped panna cotta flavoured with a delicate almond whisper of amaretto…”

“…stop it…”

“…and then to follow, perhaps a sorbet? Champagne and peach. Limoncello…”

“…don’t make me thwart you.”


“You’re being very naughty,” said Aziraphale, deliciously flustered.
“Um, demon?” Their eyes met. Crowley’s gaze slid irresistibly to Aziraphale’s lips. He’d seen all kinds of interesting things pass those lips over the years, and had frequently yearned to be one of them. *Come on, he wanted to say. Come on, angel. I know what we’re really doing here.*

Aziraphale licked his lower lip. Crowley edged closer. He was used to taking things slowly, but this thing of theirs moved along at the pace of a narcoleptic snail with an inner ear problem. The only thing that stood between him and slinging this fluffy host of heaven over his shoulder, carrying him up to the bedroom and doing things to him that would leave him singing celestial harmonies for the rest of eternity was permission. Crowley was big on permission. Temptation only worked if the tempted was – on some level – up for it.

They were inches apart. Finally, Crowley thought, as the angel’s gaze drifted to his mouth, then flicked back to his eyes. At long fucking last.

He looked deep into Aziraphale’s eyes, his lips parting, but in that same split second Aziraphale’s gaze switched to a spot behind Crowley’s head. And his expressive face lit up. “Oh look,” he said. “They have Monopoly.”

It was a beautiful sunny afternoon on the downs. The Youngs had come up here with a kite, probably for Adam’s benefit, but the parents seemed to be enjoying it more than Adam, who was absorbed in energetic game of fetch with the former hellhound. The little dog appeared to be having the best time of all of them.

Aziraphale and Crowley watched the big pink and blue kite loop and twist on the light summer breeze. There wasn’t a cloud in the sky. “Well, it all looks perfectly normal to me, dear,” said Crowley.

Dear? When had that started happening? Aziraphale turned. Crowley was lounging. He lounged all the time, of course, but today he was lounging with a purpose and intent. He lay stretched out on the tartan blanket like Goya’s *Maja*, and last night he’d been every bit as nude.

Crowley, as it transpired, not only slept, but slept naked.

When Aziraphale had knocked on his bedroom door that morning, Crowley had opened the door half asleep. And half…well…erect. “Oh, why are you going all pink?” he’d said. “You woke me. And what’s with the prudery? Have you even seen the Sistine Chapel ceiling? It’s got burly naked men flexing all over it. That Michelangelo certainly had a type.”

And then later, when he was a little more dressed: “You’re doing the pleasures of the flesh all wrong, angel, if you’ve never slipped naked between cool sheets. One of the nicest things you can do with a human body. Almost made the fourteenth century bearable. Almost.”

Now he was lounging. On purpose.

“You’re not still sulking are you?” he said, seeing Aziraphale’s expression. “About last night?”

“No. Of course not.”

“It was creative accounting,” said Crowley, with a insolent tilt to his lips. “That was all.”
Aziraphale glared. “It was embezzlement,” he said. “Plain and simple. Embezzlement and arson. You emptied the bank and then incinerated all those lovely expensive hotels I put on Mayfair and Park Lane.”

“I did warn you that it might be in your interest to take out fire insurance if you couldn’t be persuaded to sell me Bond Street.”

“What, and give you all three of the green ones? Second highest rents on the Monopoly board? Not pygmalion likely.”**

Crowley smirked. “‘Not pygmalion likely,’” he said, rolling it over his tongue like a purloined Chateau d’Yquem 1921. “There’s an expression I haven’t heard in the wild for the best part of a century. I was beginning to think we’d have to start the sad but inevitable paperwork to have it declared extinct.”

Annoyed, Aziraphale reached for another deviled egg. He’d been fantasising about this for over sixty years now. An angel, a demon, a picnic blanket. Surely his intentions were obvious by now? He had a strong suspicion that Crowley was being deliberately obtuse.

“Not much of a stakeout, is it?” said Crowley, after a while, watching the boy and the dog frolic happily on the grassy slope below.

“Why do you say that?”

“I thought there’d be coffee. And doughnuts. Isn’t that traditional?”

“There’s mille feuille,” said Aziraphale. “And a nice Pinot Grigio blush.”

“Yes, there is. And deviled eggs. And cucumber sandwiches with the crusts cut off.”

“Mmmh.”

“And smoked salmon and watercress. Chilled black grapes. Ripe stilton…”

“Is there?” said Aziraphale, who knew exactly what there was on offer. He’d agonised over every last ingredient.

“Aziraphale?”

“Yes?”

“Is this a picnic?”

“Sorry?” said Aziraphale, pretending cluelessness.

“I said ‘Is this a picnic?’” said Crowley, waving a hand over the blanket, the wine cooler, and the beautifully arranged cheeseboard. “Are we, right now, picnicking?”

“Well…yes. I suppose it might be a bit of a picnic. Now that you mention it.”

Crowley sighed, reached for the Pinot Grigio and sloshed out a generous glass. “All right,” he said. “We need to have a conversation.”

“I don’t know what you’re talking about.”

“Yes, you do. Just because you took a holy water bath in Hell and cracked wise about a rubber
duckie doesn’t mean you’ve suddenly become a master of subterfuge, you know. You’re still rubbish at it.”

“I’m not.”

“You are,” said Crowley. “I know about the fish, angel. And the crop circles. And the frogs.”

Aziraphale felt his cheeks burn. “I would never…”

“You would. And you did. You want to know how I know?” Crowley swallowed half the glass in a single gulp and poured out some more. “Half an hour after your frog stunt, I looked outside. There wasn’t a single frog out there. Or a trace of one. Now, it stands to reason that if a large number of frogs appear at any given time, something quite bad is going to happen to at least ninety per cent of those frogs. Predators, cars…” He nodded down the hill. “Curious young humans like Adam down there…”

“…oh look, a plague of locusts,” said Aziraphale, but Crowley wasn’t buying it this time.

“…they’re not all going to hop off safely to an idyllic pond full of lily pads and live out their froggy days in perfect, unpolluted peace, are they? Unless of course there’s something looking out for them. Something that feels responsible for them. Someone…” Crowley slid into song. “…to watch over me.”

“You’re reaching.”

“I’m not,” said Crowley. “Something was looking out for those frogs. Same thing happened with the halibut in Brighton. I looked it up. Not a single live fish was harmed in the production of this Fortean phenomenon, although I did hear that one trawler off the coast near Grimsby reported its entire day’s catch missing. Weird business. Apparently there was a flash of celestial light and ka-pow – what was once a boat full of halibut is now a fish free zone.”

“What are you saying?” said Aziraphale, growing impatient.

“I’m saying that there are easier ways to get my attention than invoking the Ten Plagues of Bleeding Egypt. If you want me to go on a picnic with you, just ask.”

“I did!”

And there. There it was. Crowley looked blank. The absolute bastard. “When?”

“I don’t know. Sometime in the Sixties.”

“Which Sixties?”

“Nineteen Sixties,” said Aziraphale. “You had that terrible moustache and you were asking me for holy water. Again.”

“Well, that’s probably why I don’t remember. Had a lot of other stuff on my mind at the time.”

Aziraphale snorted. “I can believe that. You can be very self-centred, you know.”

Crowley got to his feet. “I can be very self-centred?” he said, gesticulating wildly and sending a graceful pink arc of Pinot Grigio blush into the air. “That’s rich coming from Mr Tickety-Boo Fucks Off Into His Bookshop And Doesn’t Tell Me Anything.”

“We were on opposite sides,” said Aziraphale, standing up. “Everything is different now.”
“Is it? Is it really? Because you still don’t tell me anything.”

“Don’t I?” Crowley clutched his hair in frustration. “Are you joking right now? You made it rain fish. Frogs. You kept up this charade of a supernatural stakeout to get me to go on a romantic picnic with you. In what universe is this effective communication?”

“Fine,” said Aziraphale. “I’m aware that I might have…wait…did you say romantic?”

“Yes,” said Crowley, visibly seething. “For the record, it’s a lovely picnic.”

“Well, thank you.”

“No, thank you. Could have done without the shenanigans that it took to get me here, but otherwise —”

“—shenanigans?” Aziraphale started to say.

Crowley cut him off with a look that would make a hellhound think twice about what it was doing. “Stop,” he said. “I know it was you. One of those crop circles in Wiltshire was in the shape of a heart with an arrow through it.”

“I…”

“In the middle it said AZP IV AC.”

“Sounds like an occult thing to me,” said Aziraphale.

Crowley drew closer and sighed. “It’s not, is it? It’s ethereal. It’s you, angel. Only you would use Roman numerals in a schoolboy mash note.”

Aziraphale reached out, his fingers brushing Crowley’s. “Oh, my dear,” he said. “I’m afraid I’m…” He looked up into those yellow eyes. Their fingers twined, and Aziraphale felt his heart swell and swell, and rise up until…oh dear. Too many feelings at once. Six thousand years of them, to be precise. It felt like a tsunami pressing up against the underside of his diaphragm, and he was powerless to stop it. His wings unfurled with a great thwoosh sound and then it roared out of him – the light and love of a heavenly being, given free rein at last.

The resulting earthquake clocked in at a solid five point three on the Richter scale, destroyed the church tower in Lower Tadfield and vindicated the anti-fracking protesters beyond their wildest dreams.

Crowley was back in Italy. He was standing in a studio, breathing in marble dust and gazing up at a vast hunk of rock from which the folds of a robe were still in the process of emerging. He took a swig of Chianti, handed the preliminary sketches back to Bernini and said, “I dunno, Gian. Just my two florins, but I’d go with more ecstasy in her expression. Make it clear.”

Or less clear. Thanks to Crowley’s intervention, Bernini’s St. Teresa of Avila had been the subject of irreverent ‘I’ll have what she’s having’ jokes long before Harry ever met Sally. It was one of those tiny, blink-and-you-miss-it touches of soul tarnishing that had always delighted Crowley in the past.
Only now the joke was on him, because if anything Bernini had *downplayed* what it felt like when an angel singled you out for heavenly rapture. He heard Aziraphale’s wings open in slow motion – *thwooooooosshhhhh* – as he fell forever onto the warm grass, belly up, spine arched, arms outstretched. Love. *Love.* Oh God, so much love. He swore he could feel his ribs creak as it swelled inside him and realised he’d made a terrible mistake, because he was going to burst. Actually burst, and worse – he was going to enjoy it.

He saw himself through Aziraphale’s eyes, a skittish zoetrope of self-portraits dancing around the inside of his head. He saw himself laughing, drinking, singing, offering delectable bites on the end of his fork, and all through it the blinding love of this heavenly creature sizzled through his demonic flesh. He could smell burning.

*Well, I’m* *fucked,* he thought and then his overheated brain shorted out and everything went dark.

“Crowley? Crowley?”

He lay still on the singed grass, his eyes closed, the inside of his jeans sticky with at least five consecutive orgasms and his brain steaming gently inside his skull like the liquid centre of a soup dumpling. Tears ran from the corners of his closed eyes. They sizzled. He hadn’t felt this cooked since that time he’d driven a blazing Bentley to the end of the world.

“Crowley, *say* something. Are you all right?”

Slowly, Crowley opened his eyes. Aziraphale was gazing down at him. The angel’s wings were folded once more, and his face was a study in anxiety, apology and acute embarrassment. “I’m so sorry. Are you all right? Can you talk?”

Crowley moaned. His tongue tasted scorched and his lips wouldn’t behave, but he managed to force a noise from the very back of his dry throat.

“…uck,” he said.

“Is that what we just did? I’m not sure about how these things work.”

Neither was Crowley. But if that was what sex with an angel felt like, no wonder the Nephilim were so bloody weird. Being the product of a bunk-up like that had to leave its mark on you. He sat up very carefully.

“Why is the earth moving?” he said.

“I think it’s supposed to do that,” said Aziraphale. “Or at least it does in books.”

“What books?” said Crowley.

“Not very good ones,” said Aziraphale, and it was the strangest thing, because Crowley recognised the flicker of shame that skittered across his face. Somewhere in that deluge of feelings had been strange tinglings, associated with books with sexy pirates on the covers. And sweetness. For some reason he now knew that Aziraphale always had marshmallows in his cocoa whenever he curled up with a pirate book.

“You’re smouldering,” he said, and poured Crowley a fresh glass of wine. “Have some more Pinot blush.”
Crowley’s hands were shaking, so Aziraphale held the glass to his lips and tilted it so that he could drink. Crowley hesitated for a second, because it reminded him of a well-known Christian rite, and he’d often speculated – in darker moments – what might happen to a demon if he could kneel on consecrated ground for long enough to sip the sacred wine. It had never been done, and he suspected it would have made a shot glass full of holy water look no more potent than a paper cup full of the weak orange squash inevitably served at Church of England picnics.

The glass tilted. The wine touched his lips. Crowley sipped, then gulped, then gazed into the angel’s worried eyes and waited for his head to explode.

It didn’t, although he was conscious that the burning smell currently wafting around the edges of his nostrils might have had something to do with why his eyebrows felt so hot. His heart was still full of wings and light and felt large enough to make the inside of his ribs ache, and it was all because of him, a small blond glimmer of a warmth that Crowley had imagined himself cut off from forever.

“You love me,” he croaked.

“Yes,” said Aziraphale. “Very much.”

Crowley leaned forward over the rim of the wine glass and did the thing he’d been thinking about doing every time they got drunk together. Aziraphale’s lips were warm and parted easily, but he stiffened almost imperceptibly when Crowley’s tongue brushed against his.


“A little bit,” said Aziraphale, reaching out to touch Crowley’s hair. Crowley felt something crispy fall away from the side of his head. “I’m so sorry. I had no idea that was going to happen. It just sort of…poured out of me.”

He looked so mortified that Crowley took pity on him. Besides, there was only one thing he could say, after that.

“I love you,” Crowley said. Aziraphale blushed harder than the wine. He had a gift, the angel, for doing a thing with his eyes that Crowley had only ever seen done in Tex Avery cartoons. While Aziraphale’s eyes didn’t exactly shoot out of his head with a loud ‘awooga’ sound effect, he somehow managed to turn his pupils into hearts without actually changing their shape.

He was doing it now. Heart-eyes for days. The ground shook gently beneath them. “Steady,” said Crowley.

“Sorry,” said Aziraphale. “I get a bit excited, you see.”

“I can see that.” Aziraphale got a hold of himself. The earth shuddered to a halt. “What are we going to do now?” he said, his heart-eyes dimming somewhat as he realised the depth of the new problem that had presented itself to them.

“Well, under normal circumstances I would suggest we take this back to the nearest bedroom,” said Crowley.

“And then?”

“Then we’d tear each other’s clothes off and do a bunch of things that wouldn’t look out of place in the sauciest corners of a Hieronymus Bosch triptych.”
“Ooh,” said Aziraphale, his eyes widening.

“You should see your face right now.” All that light. All that purity. On one hand the thought of messing up that perfect, heavenly purity made the demon part of Crowley snort and eagerly hoof the dirt, but as he gazed into the angel’s blue eyes another part of him – the one that had meant to have burned away forever when he fell – stretched open its trembling, atrophied wings and tried to remember how to sing with a pitch and beauty that would have made a human head explode.

Aziraphale’s mouth tasted of wine and sugar. This time he didn’t stiffen when his tongue brushed against Crowley’s. Entwined, they slid down onto the sun-warmed grass and rare wild flowers immediately bloomed where Aziraphale lay. Under normal circumstances Crowley would have questioned the good taste of such a Disney display, but these weren’t normal circumstances and the demon part of him was now rampaging through the streets of Pamplona like it had an entire nest of wasps up its arse.

“I want you so much,” said Aziraphale, between kisses, and Crowley lost it. He usually worked slowly, at a trickle. After selecting his victim, he dragged it out, releasing into their minds a thin but potent stream of darkness – sweet and irresistible as chocolate. The stream would eventually form a sticky pool of Want and Yes and Thou Shalt Not (But Thou Art Going To Anyway) and by that point it was like a kind of delicious quicksand. Impossible to get out of, and the more you struggled, the deeper you sank. And you liked it.

Over the centuries, Crowley had developed exquisite control, but it turned out that all it took to shatter it completely was a horny virgin angel moaning ‘I want you’ in his ear. He snarled and dragged a forked tongue up the side of Aziraphale’s cheek, all his worst, hellgoblin lusts pouring out of him and into Aziraphale, a wild, sticky sweet cascade of things so dirty and sophisticated that they’d make The Story Of O look like a wet weekend in Slough. Tiesy upsies, tiesy downsies, spanking, flogging, edging, fisting, frottage, fingering, breath play, face sitting, groping, voyeurism, watersports and indecent acts with a squeezy bottle of Tate and Lyle’s Golden Syrup. Thunder rumbled above them. The wildflowers ignited and burned away, scorching the shape of Aziraphale’s wings into the grass.

“So hot…” Aziraphale whimpered.

“Yes. Yes, you are…”

“No, I mean literally…”

Shit. Aziraphale’s bow tie was smoking around the edges. With a herculean effort of will, Crowley managed to rein himself back in. The sky above them was dark, and he couldn’t be completely sure he hadn’t caused a small solar eclipse.

“Oh dear,” said Aziraphale, sitting up. He looked scorched and rumpled and (oh dear) completely sexy. “Golden syrup?” he said, after a short, confused pause. “Really?”

Crowley shrugged. “Takes all sorts.”

“I suppose so.” Aziraphale glanced down the hill towards the village and groaned. “Oh no,” he said, spotting the destroyed tower. “That beautiful little thirteenth century church.”

“Wasn’t me,” said Crowley.

“No. I know. Oh, I feel awful. Do you think I should—”

“—no—”
“—just a little one. I’d only be fixing the damage I’d—”

“—no—”

“—one of those teeny tiny, everyday mira—”

“—no,” said Crowley. “I think we’ve caused enough supernatural happenings for one day, don’t you?”

Aziraphale wilted. “Well, bugger,” he said, pinching the bridge of his nose.

“Yep. We seem to have hit a snag.”

“A snag? Is that what you call it? Crowley, this is a disaster. This is everything I ever wanted. We’re in love. And there’s a picnic. And we don’t seem to be able to get…amorous without causing earthquakes.”

Crowley sighed. He needed to think. And also to go off somewhere quiet and isolated where he could wank himself into a coma. “Look,” he said. “There are other ways we can express our affection for each other. We’ve managed so far, haven’t we? All those champagne suppers. Crepes. Small miracles. Averting the apocalypse.”

“Mm.” Aziraphale leaned his head against Crowley’s shoulder. “And the flowers. And chocolates. You know, you really have been a super boyfriend over the centuries.”

“I know. I can keep on being a super boyfriend. Nothing’s really changed. Deep down we always knew we loved each other, didn’t we?”

“True.”

“The only thing that’s different now is that it’s out in the open. That’s all.”

“Yes,” said Aziraphale, with a brave little flash of heavenly serenity. “You’re quite right.”

Crowley wasn’t, and he knew it, but it was no time to point out that he was a) wrong and b) an excellent liar. So he didn’t.

A week later, Aziraphale met Crowley for champagne tea at the Pump Room in Bath. He’d chosen it for two reasons – one because the restaurant was superb, and secondly because it spoke of sedate courtships. Gentle, Jane Austen courtships, where the main considerations were money, property and a settled, amiable compatibility that poured scorn on the wild emotional excesses of the Lydia Wickhams and Marianne Dashwoods.

And where nobody kissed a demon and was accidentally privy to what that demon wanted to do to their bottom with a forked tongue and a squeezable bottle of Tate and Lyle’s Golden Syrup.

They sat beneath the enormous crystal chandelier, Crowley facing the bow window where the famous fountain poured spa water from four mineral encrusted spigots into the mouths of four equally encrusted fish. A sign beside the fountain encouraged people to ask their waiter if they
wished to sample the waters. Nobody did. Aziraphale had tried it once, on the virtuous grounds that if it tasted awful it was probably good for you, but after having sampled it came to the conclusion that nothing was that good for you. Still, he hoped the faint smell of sulphur from the pump water would make Crowley feel at home.

Crowley stood out dark against the pale Georgian décor. Love hadn’t dented his appetite the way it had Aziraphale’s. He was currently deep in raptures over a miniature salmon mousse topped with delicate little red bubbles of salmon roe. “Are you not eating yours?” he said, licking the tiny spoon clean with a distractingly pink tongue. “It’s delicious.”

“Mm.”

“All right. What’s up?”

“Nothing’s up.”

“Bollocks,” said Crowley. “You are sitting in the presence of scones. Jam. Clotted cream. A certified work of Heaven. Angels don’t look jaded when there’s a cream tea in front of them. Just doesn’t happen.”

“Angels don’t fall in love with demons. Except when they do.”

Crowley gave a small sigh. “Come on, now,” he said, with a cajoling tone that Aziraphale hadn’t heard since Crowley’s brief stint as a satanic nanny. “Try the salmon mousse. It’s dill flavoured – your favourite.”

“Don’t talk to me like I’m an invalid, Crowley.”

“Can’t help it. You look lovesick.”

Aziraphale leaned urgently across the table. “You’re damn right I’m lovesick,” he said, reaching out. His fingers twined with Crowley’s over the petit fours. “What are we going to do? I adore you.”

Crowley gave Aziraphale’s fingers a brief, reflexive squeeze, then – catching himself at it – froze. Fingers still clasped, they both sat very, very still for a moment, listening for the rumble of earth tremors. None came. Crowley mouthed a silent, hopeful ‘yay’ and crossed the first two fingers of his free hand.

“Look,” he said, when they were both reasonably satisfied that they weren’t about to destroy one of the most attractive cities in Britain. “I love you, too, but there’s no getting around it. We’re both beings of considerable power. When we get hot and heavy, things…happen.”

“Oh, yes. I’ve been meaning to ask you,” said Aziraphale. “Is that what it means when they talk about power bottoms?”

Crowley looked at him for a long moment and then cracked up. “No, love,” he said, when he could breathe again. “No. Nope. Absolutely not.”

“Love,” said Aziraphale. “You’ve never called me love before.”

“Angel…”

“…darling…” They froze again, conscious that they were getting out of hand. As before, Crowley seemed to take the lead in reining it in.
“I don’t understand,” said Aziraphale. “Why do you have better impulse control than me?”

“Because I’m the tempter,” said Crowley, topping off their champagne glasses. “Half the thrill of temptation is playing chicken with the knowledge that you could restrain yourself at any moment, but you’re not going to.” He reached for Aziraphale’s untouched salmon mousse and scooped up a tiny spoonful. “The longer you hold yourself back from temptation,” he said, offering the spoonful across the table. “The more delicious it is when you...you know. Give in. Open wide.”

Aziraphale gave in and sampled the salmon mousse. “Oh, yes. I see what you mean. Is that dill or fennel in the background?”

“I thought dill, but now you mention it there might be a touch of fennel.” Crowley lounged back in his chair. “By the way, I saw a review the other day for this place in West Sussex. They do a surf and turf that’s supposed to be to die for. Very small, very popular, always packed.”

“The kind of place where you’d need some kind of miracle to get a reservation, you mean?”

Crowley grinned. “You know me so well,” he said, and savaged a petit four. “Oh, and I hear the church tower restoration fund in Lower Tadfield is doing incredibly well.”

“Is it really?”

“Yes. And the damage to the tower wasn’t nearly as bad as they suspected. Thought it had fallen through and crushed the seventeenth century pipe organ, but what do you know – there wasn’t so much as a scratch on the thing.”

“Nobody noticed,” said Aziraphale, rising to the bait of Crowley’s raised eyebrow.

“They did. Conservators said it was nothing short of miraculous.”

Aziraphale waved a hand. “It was just a series of small miracles,” he said. “Ones that could easily be explained away by the solidity of thirteenth century craftsmanship.”

“What, like Notre Dame?” said Crowley. “Oh, don’t look at me like that. That thing where the entire roof burned off but the colony of bees living up there survived? I know that was you. Had your sticky little crème brûlée fingerprints all over it.”

“You noticed.”

“I always notice,” said Crowley, and reached across the table again. They held hands. Beneath the table, Crowley’s foot nudged against Aziraphale’s. For a moment there it had almost been like the old days, but there was no going back from what they had shared. It was like Pandora’s Box, only if Pandora’s Box had been a sort of What The Butler Saw into the filthy mind of an adoring demon who wanted to test the limits of physical love to the point where both of them forgot how language worked.

“It’s not the same, is it?” said Crowley, as if reading his mind.

“It’s not.” Aziraphale leaned closer across the table. “I need to go to bed with you,” he said. “It’s all your fault. You tempted me. You slipped it into my head when you kissed me – that picture of you with your mouth open and your feet in the air and—”

“—steady,” said Crowley, one eye out for earth tremors, but Aziraphale couldn’t stop.

“I want to do so many naughty things with you. Things that Hieronymus Bosch didn’t even think
of. I’m so in love with you and…what?” He trailed off. Crowley was looking at a point just beyond his left ear.

Slowly, Aziraphale turned around. Dark red liquid was pouring from the fountain into the upturned mouths of the fishes.

“So you’re turning water into wine now?” said Crowley.

“Apparently…”?

“Well, I suppose it’s an improvement on the earthquakes, although depending on the reach of your latest miracle, the whole county of Somerset will be pissed as a newt before six o’clock.” Crowley snapped his fingers and a glass of the wine appeared in his hand. He stuck his nose in the glass and took a long sniff. “Mm. Smells like old Burgundy.”

Aziraphale snapped up a glass and checked it out for himself. “Lafitte?”

“Haut-Brion, I thought.”

He rolled the bouquet over his tongue. Memory stirred. Crowley, so drunk that his eyeballs were practically rotating in his head, babbling about birds and beaks, mountains and eternity. Lot of booze that night. Mostly Chateauneuf du Pape, a Pétrus and…”Mouton,” said Aziraphale, triumphantly. “Mouton Rothschild.”

Crowley sipped, groaned and closed his eyes in ecstasy. “Oh, fuck me,” he said. “It’s the 1959, too. You’re just showing off at this point.”

“I can’t help it. It was an accidental miracle. This is why we need to…do something.”

“No, you’re right.” Crowley sat back and sighed. “Upstairs, downstairs – they probably wouldn’t give a toss if we got together. But the accidental miracling? That’s going to draw the wrong kind of attention.”

“Crowley, this is torture.”

“Oh, don’t be so dramatic. You’re just in love. That’s all.”

“It’s horrible,” said Aziraphale. “All I wanted to do was sunbathe in the park with you. Rub suntan lotion on your back. Do the Sunday Times crossword together. I just wanted to…to cuddle. I didn’t realise it would make me suffer.” He tossed his napkin down on the table in frustration. “It’s awful. It’s like I can practically taste the joy I could have, but I can’t…”

“…reach out and touch it?” said Crowley, with sudden seriousness. Shut off forever from the light and love of Heaven – that was the definition of his state, after all. He could make jokes about sauntering vaguely downwards, but he’d been a part of that light, once. And he would always miss it. That was his punishment.

“Is this what Falling feels like?” said Aziraphale. “Oh, my poor dear…” He wanted to wrap Crowley in his wings, cuddle him and croon to him and soothe him with that little piece of Heaven’s light that Aziraphale would always carry around with him. He pictured them naked together, warm in each other’s arms, Crowley’s head resting on his chest, an image of contentment so sweet that a great wave of tenderness swept over him and trembled the crystals of the chandelier above.

“Easy, tiger…” said Crowley.
“Sorry.”

“We need to get this under control.”

“I know.”

“You’re too full of love and it’s…overflowing or something.”

“I’m a being of love,” said Aziraphale. “By definition I don’t think I can overflow.”

Crowley raised his wine glass. “Really?” he said. “Mouton Rothschild ’59? You look pretty overflowy from where I’m sitting.”

“I daren’t look. Has the fountain gone back to normal?”

“Yes, but you need to drink your wine. Seriously. The way this develops in the glass…” Aziraphale lifted his glass and tasted.

“Oh my.”

“I know, right?”

“Good old Burgundy is always such a revelation. Almost makes up for the Chateau d’Yquem.”

“Oh, right,” said Crowley. “About that…”

“Yes. About that. I know I haven’t been very good at conveying it, what with everything else that’s been going on, but I really am still quite annoyed that you did that.”

“If it makes you feel any better, I felt bad about it.”

“Good,” said Aziraphale. “You should feel bad. I always said you had a conscience, deep down.”

“All right, don’t rub it in,” said Crowley, slouching back in his chair. “I must have felt a lot worse about it than I thought, because when the boy did that whole reset thing, he picked up on my guilt. It was one of the things he perceived as wrong with the world and…fixed.”

Aziraphale stared. “Do you mean to tell me I still have a bottle of Yquem?”

“No,” said Crowley. “You have a case.”

Afterwards they walked to the river, and stood watching the swans preen beside the curved weir that poured under Pulteney Bridge. They’d been here before, back in the day. The first time they’d been here, the Roman baths had still been open. Aziraphale watched the evening sun glitter on the Avon and tried to control himself as Crowley came up behind him, arms snaking round his waist.

“Okay,” Crowley said, his lips against Aziraphale’s ear. “Here’s what I’m thinking. We go somewhere. Somewhere remote. Somewhere where we can be completely alone.”

“No,” said Aziraphale, knowing what he was about to say. “I’m not going to Alpha Centauri with you.”

“Not keen?”

“I can do without the mind worms, to tell you the truth.” He gave a small shudder and detached himself, turning around.
“Point,” said Crowley. “All right. Not Alpha Centauri. Alaska, then. Siberia. A yurt in the middle of the Gobi Desert. Pick a romantic setting in the middle of nowhere and we’ll go there and fuck each other silly. You can shake the earth, turn as much water into wine as you like…”

“And what if I accidentally set fire to your head again?”

“That’s a risk I’m willing to take. I’m rapidly running out of skin on my palms. Besides, I’m practically firepro…” Crowley stopped in the middle of the word, and a slow, lopsided smile crept up one side of his face. “Wait,” he said.

“What? Did you just have an idea?”

“I did,” said Crowley, and grinned. “Kiss me.”

“What? Here?”

“Yes.”

“My dear, do you think that’s wise?”

“Well, if the river starts running backwards or turns into Chateau Latour we’ll stop,” said Crowley. “But I want to try something, okay?”

“Okay.”

“Okay. When I kiss you,” said Crowley. “I want you to concentrate on how human you feel, understand? Just let yourself inhabit…” He gestured to Aziraphale. “This. This form. Forget you’re an angel. Convince yourself that you’re just a stuffy second-hand bookseller with nineteenth century taste in trousers and I’ll be—”

“—just an incorrigible poser who wears sunglasses indoors?”

Crowley giggled. “Ow. Waspish. You really need to get laid.”

“I’m trying to,” said Aziraphale.

Crowley’s giggle turned into a full-throated laugh. “I love you,” he said, and – cupping Aziraphale’s face with both hands – bent his head to kiss him.

Aziraphale was so new to kissing that it wasn’t difficult to focus on the sensations. He had an idea of what Crowley’s idea might be, and suspected it had something to do with how Crowley had managed to drive an almost molten Bentley through hellfire, but then the warm, winey curl of Crowley’s tongue against his made sparks flicker and dance in the bottom of his belly and rendered him incapable of any further intellectual effort. He had no idea how simply smashing ones eating holes together could feel so damn good, but he was in no position to question it. Aziraphale reached up and wrapped a hand around the back of Crowley’s neck, holding him in place as he deepened the kiss.

“Get a room!” someone shouted from across the street, and Crowley came up for air.

“Should we?” he said.

“Yes,” said Aziraphale, and Crowley snapped his fingers.

The next thing Aziraphale knew, they were standing in Crowley’s bedroom. He’d been here before. Second door on the left, past that suggestive statue of angels ‘wrestling’. The room was
stark and modern, the houseplants terrified and the bed before them large and white.

“London?” said Aziraphale. “I thought you wanted to go somewhere remote?”

Crowley reluctantly disentangled himself and opened the bedroom door. It opened onto a wide, featureless steppe, a landscape empty except for a couple of understandably baffled yaks. “Ta da,” he said. “We’re actually in Outer Mongolia.”

“You went to all this trouble? For me?”

Crowley closed the door. “Nah. It’s not a big deal. Anyway, I’m good at this. Sexual sins have always been a bit of a hobby of mine. I had a night job as a succubus back in the fifteenth century.”

“Surely you mean an incubus?”

“Nope. Succubus,” said Crowley. “You forget – I can turn into a snake. Changing sex is a cinch compared to that. At least it’s the same species.”

An image flashed into Aziraphale’s mind, a frame from the brief kaleidoscope of filth that had cavorted through his head when Crowley kissed him. Crowley as a woman, walking away from him down a corridor in… dear God, were those the Papal Apartments? He – or rather she – was as naked as Lady Godiva, blood red curls cascading down to her waist. She turned just far enough to reveal the side of a gravity defying breast, winked a big yellow eye and kept on walking, waving her heart-shaped bottom behind her.

“I can slip into something more feminine if you’d prefer?” said Crowley.

“No…” said Aziraphale, making a mental note to explore that at some later date, providing – of course – that they didn’t both immolate in their attempt at relief. “I think for now I’ll just… work with what I’m used to, if that’s all right with you.”

“Fine with me,” said Crowley, and stepped over to join him, standing at the end of the bed. He smiled with an odd, touching shyness and took Aziraphale’s hand. “Ready?”

“As I’ll ever be. Some might say it’s long overd—” Crowley silenced him with a kiss. Aziraphale waited for the kaleidoscope of smut to start whirling through his head again, but of course it didn’t. Crowley – by some stroke of divine irony – had much better self-control than he did. Instead there was just this, tongues and lips and soft licking noises inside his head that made the inside of his thighs feel soft and loose and made him very glad that he’d made The Effort. The Effort itself was also very glad.

Aziraphale reached out, grabbed two hard handfuls of Crowley’s narrow bum and pulled him in. The moan that it drew from Crowley’s throat made the sparks inside him dance all the more wildly. “That’s it,” Crowley whispered, his tongue tracing the edge (and the inside) of Aziraphale’s ear. “Let your body show me how you feel. Humans do this all the time, and they don’t cause earthquakes.”

“Humans aren’t beings of love,” said Aziraphale, who was starting to worry that he was in danger of overflowing again.

“They can be,” said Crowley, smoothing his thumb over Aziraphale’s lower lip, smearing wetness. His pupils were large and dark, like those of a friendly cat. “Would you like to get into bed?”

“Yes.” Crowley gave a deliciously dirty grin. “You’re going to want to be naked for this,” he said.
“All right,” said Aziraphale, and was. It obviously took Crowley by surprise, because he paused in the middle of tearing off his t-shirt and stared.

“Sorry,” said Aziraphale, blushing scarlet. “I didn’t realise you were doing that the human way, too.”

“No, fair enough,” said Crowley, but somehow managed to strip – human style – with remarkable speed. He slipped under the white sheets and held the covers out for Aziraphale. He was lanky and naked and very hard. “Get in, angel.”

Aziraphale did as he was told. His first thought was that Crowley really hadn’t been exaggerating about the pleasure of sliding naked between cool, clean sheets. His second thought was that Crowley hadn’t said nearly enough about the pleasure of stretching out beneath those cool, clean sheets and finding another warm body waiting to enfold yours in its long limbs.

“Ooh,” he said.

Crowley nuzzled his neck. “Good, isn’t it?” Beneath the sheets, his fingers skated over Aziraphale’s ribs, over the flesh at his waist and found The Effort. Crowley’s fingers curled around him, a touch of unbelievable intimacy. They were kissing again and everything was hands and tongues and skin. Aziraphale, light-headed at his own boldness, took Crowley in hand. So hard, and yet so soft at the same time. He was having no difficulty staying grounded in the physical sensations, because they were all so interesting and exquisite. When he mimicked the gentle motion of Crowley’s hand on him, Crowley cried out softly and Aziraphale had a sudden roaring sense of his own sexual power, and of all the divine, dirty things he was going to do to Crowley once he got the hang of this.

The bedroom walls shuddered around them.

“Are you all right?” said Aziraphale, as though Crowley were the nervous virgin here. “Does your head feel like it’s overheating?”

“No more than usual,” said Crowley, and rolled him over between the sheets, his hips doing that thing where they were in about five different places at once, only this time all five of those places were between Aziraphale’s open thighs. “Oh, you are bloody gorgeous.” The earth trembled and he stopped moving for a moment. “Are you all right? You getting a bit…”

“Excited? Oh yes.”

Crowley slowed. “Okay,” he said. His pupils were so large that his eyes looked black. He was flushed and wet lipped and absolutely irresistible. The walls shuddered again for a moment and stopped. “Just slow down,” he said. “I want you to…lie back and think of dinner, okay?”

“Dinner?”

“Yes. Look, I’ve seen you practically orgasmic over a raspberry crème brûlée with shortbread dippy biscuits, right? And yet you managed to enjoy it without setting fire to my head or causing an earthquake.”

“Right,” said Aziraphale, his somewhat scrambled brains catching up.

“There you go, then. Enjoy me, angel. Enjoy me like I’m a raspberry crème brûlée.”

“Crepe Suzette,” said Aziraphale, catching on. “With fresh strawberries.”

“Don’t say that. You make it sound disgusting.”

“It is,” said Crowley, rocking against him. “It’s also lovely.”

“Ooh, yes. Yes, it is.” When they were standing up there was a height difference to contend with, but lying down it didn’t seem to matter. Somehow Crowley had found a spot where his erection rested perfectly alongside Aziraphale’s and the friction was just…good Lord. Was that all it was? Catullus and Lesbia, Romeo and Juliet, Oscar Wilde and Lord Alfred Douglas – in the end, all it was really about was friction?

“Pretend I’m dessert…” hissed Crowley. “A passion fruit and lemongrass sorbet…”

“…mmm…”

“…Torta Caprese…”

Aziraphale shuddered, thrusting to meet him. Turned out that there was a lot to be said for friction.

“…Zabaglione,” Crowley purred, the Italian reminding Aziraphale that he really needed to ask him what he’d been up to in the Papal Apartments that time. “…Baci di Dama…”

“Crowley…”

“Mmm?”

“Shut up and fuck me.”

Two feathers lay crossed on the sheet, one black, one white. It had turned out that it was still quite difficult to forget your divine nature at a moment when you felt that…well…divine. There was narrow but significant crack in the bedroom wall.

“Oh dear,” said Aziraphale. “I do hope we didn’t cause any natural disasters.”

Crowley couldn’t care less. He was busy, tracing with his tongue the delicate blue veins on the inside of Aziraphale’s wrist. He sucked the tips of the angel’s plump fingers into his mouth like grapes, tasting the faint, wicked trace of salt that clung to them. He wasn’t sure if he was tasting himself, Aziraphale or both. “I love you,” he said, and followed the long blue vein up the inside of Aziraphale’s arm with the ends of his tongue. He reached the silken crook of Aziraphale’s elbow and lingered there, kissing and licking. He’d never done this before. Sexual sin was very much a wham, bam, thank you kind of affair. Once they’d come, that was it. Job done. Soul tarnished.

Except Aziraphale wasn’t tarnished. He lay bathed in the glow of what Crowley had come to think of as his Grace, except now he glowed brighter than ever. It was as if someone had set a dimmer switch inside him and turned up the heavenly light inside him, because all love – apparently even a demon’s – was a work of God. The knowledge that he had been the one to set that dimmer switch was enough to make Crowley’s head catch fire, although thankfully it hadn’t done that, at least not yet. Somehow, Crowley realised, he had managed to do what Milton had asserted he – as a demon
– could never do again: he was basking in the stolen light of Heaven. It was – by both the standards of Heaven and Hell – the worst transgression Crowley had ever committed in six thousand years.

It was also the absolute fucking best.

Dazed, Crowley kissed his way up the inside of Aziraphale’s bicep, his shoulder, his lips. “I love you,” he said, again.

“I know. That’s all you’ve said since I told you to shut up.”

Crowley felt his face split into a huge, drooling, village idiot grin. “It’s all I feel,” he said, and his lovely, fluffy, darling piece of Heaven gazed back at him with equal stupid soppiness. He’d always wondered what it would be like to take the virginity of an angel, but he had never suspected he’d feel that it would go both ways. Thousands of years of inducing people to say yes to things had still left him unprepared for how it felt when an angel moaned “Oh yes,” in his ear at the moment of truth.

He was beyond smitten. He was in deep, deep smit.

They rolled over. He ran his foot down the back of Aziraphale’s calf, eliciting a tiny but oh-so-adorable frown.

“Crowley,” said Aziraphale, glancing down to look. “Did you just make love to me with your socks on?”

Crowley, who had never made love to anyone in his life until now, beamed. “Yes,” he said, proudly. “Yes, I did.”

“Isn’t that considered gauche?”

“Where did you hear that? Was it in one of your books?”

“You forget, Crowley. I’ve read almost every work of human literature concerning the subject of love.”

“I know, but I’m talking about the ones you read on the nights when you put marshmallows in your cocoa.”

Aziraphale did the lip pursy thing, which was so much more fun when he was naked. “Will you please remove your socks?”

He let Crowley up to remove the offending items. Crowley’s feet, like his eyes, were one of those things he couldn’t do much about. Little scales grew on the backs of his toes, spreading up to his instep. In the end he’d just leaned into it and started wearing snakeskin boots.

“Sorry,” he said, lying back. “They’re a bit demonic.”

Aziraphale sat up and stroked the scales. “I don’t remember you wearing socks,” he said. “When you opened the bedroom door in the nude.”

“I was. You just weren’t looking at my feet.”

Aziraphale giggled. It was a whole new kind of giggle – a knowing, naughty we’ve-just-been having-sex-with-each-other giggle – and Crowley loved it. To his delight, Aziraphale leaned over and kissed his feet. He started with each toe, one by one, then – eyes bright with curiosity – worked
his way up Crowley’s shins to his knees. Then his thighs. Crowley shivered, reaching down to pet Aziraphale’s pale curls as the angel planted a shy, lingering kiss on each hipbone, one after the other. He watched, light-headed, as his brand new lover lowered his head and licked.

“I hate to be the one to tell you,” he said. “But these bodies do come with certain limitations.”

“I know,” said Aziraphale, wriggling up to kiss him on the mouth. “I just wanted to know what you tasted like. We’ll come back to that later, shall we?”

Crowley groaned and squeezed him tight. “How are you so fucking sexy?”

“Do you really think so? Gabriel said I had a gut.”

“Gabriel’s an idiot. You’re cuddly.” Aziraphale had the body of a William Blake angel, one who had opened up a second-hand bookshop and developed a serious thing for Battenberg cake. Crowley thought he was scrumptious, and now had a perfect understanding of why they called them lovehandles. Two handfuls of squish to grab hold of when the ride got really interesting. “Good effort, by the way,” said Crowley, who thought he should mention it.

Aziraphale lay back and laughed. “Oh, that. I’ve had that for a while now.”

“Why?”

“You know me and tailoring,” he said. “I used to get so confused when they asked me if ‘Sir dressed to the left or the right?’ I had no idea what they were talking about, so I looked it up, and lo and behold...it was that. Made a whole lot more sense of the way my trousers hung after that.” He chewed his lip in thought. “I think that’s why Gabriel got one. He did say he liked the clothes.”

“Oh, please,” said Crowley. “He did not get that thing with tailoring in mind.”

“You’ve seen it?”

“Could hardly miss it. Ridiculous. Could have someone’s eye out with that.”

“Ridiculous? Do you really think so?”

“It’s a display, angel. Like a baboon flashing its bright red arse.”

“Well, with that personality and sense of humour,” said Aziraphale. “He needs all the help he can get.”

Crowley laughed. “That was bitchy. Well done, you.”

“I have my moments,” said Aziraphale, snuggling up. He peeked up from Crowley’s chest, where his head lay pillowed. “Was I really all right?”

“You were...” Crowley fumbled for the words. “You were...so much better than all right.”

“Are you sure? Because you’ve done so many...”

Crowley shook his head. “Sex, angel,” he said. “I’ve been a sex demon. A tempter. I inflame lusts.”

“Yes, you do, you naughty little serpent...”

“No. Listen. You...you, in the strictest definition of the word, you, Aziraphale, are my first lover.”
Aziraphale turned pink and fluttery. The walls trembled. “Sorry,” he said. “We’re still going to have to watch ourselves, aren’t we?”

“We are, yeah. But at least now we have an outlet. A way to express our feelings.”

“Mm,” said Aziraphale. “I should probably warn you. I have a lot of feelings.”

“Oh, so do I.”

“And I’m a being of love. I’m afraid I’m going to need rather a lot of it.”

“Not a problem,” said Crowley, confidently. “I can handle that.”

“What about the other thing?” said Aziraphale.

“What thing?”

“The thing with the Tate and Lyle’s—”

“—Golden Syrup? Oh yes. We’ll get to that,” said Crowley, as he set about making love for the second time in over six thousand years. “We’ll definitely get to that. Don’t you worry.”

The End

End Notes

* This was before the 2010 rule change that said the proper names of places, people, things and (probably) infernal denizens were now acceptable answers in a game of Scrabble.

** An obsolete avoidance of saying the word ‘bloody’ derived from George Bernard Shaw’s Pygmalion, in which Eliza causes outrage by exclaiming “Not bloody likely!” in the middle of a snooty tea party. Naturally, Aziraphale had attended the premiere, and had earned the lasting friendship of Shaw by agreeing that Eliza would never with Henry Higgins.

Works inspired by this piece: Lie Back And Think Of Dinner by FayJay, Lie Back And Think Of Dinner (Fanart) by penumbra

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