![Ill Begotten](http://archiveofourown.org/works/20143195)

**Summary**

Seven years after the failed apocalypse the earth keeps turning on its axis. Heaven and Hell are back to a stalemate and it seems like the world will keep spinning for a bit longer.

Enter a new faction with an unknown goal and a origin that was lost to the ages.

**Notes**

Here I am. Back on my bullshit.

See the end of the work for more notes.
The second thing that God ever created was paperwork. She probably didn’t actually intend this to be her second creation but, with angels stretched across the rapidly forming universe, a way of organizing and keeping track was needed. It quickly got out of hand and only got worse after the Rebellion.

Michael and Metatron normally had meetings twice weekly to discuss assignments, forms, paperwork, and the like. It had gone on this way like clockwork for nearly two thousand years with only The Rebellion causing an unplanned meeting.

Until today.

“Are we sure?” Michael was asking, shocked and livid. “How could something like this happen beneath our noses? Beneath HER nose?”

“I highly doubt She didn’t know. She knows everything.” Metatron shuffled the papers on his desk, trying to decide what needed to be tackled first. “She no doubt wanted to see how it went. She hasn’t been a big fan of doling punishment since the Rebellion, you know. She lost some of her favorites in the name of keeping Balance.”

Michael knew this. They had all lost friends in the Rebellion. Only eight million officially rebelled but a Balance was to be maintained. Two million of the ones that had only ever had innocuous thoughts had gone Down Below in the name of Balance.

Michael sometimes wondered how the Almighty made that choice. Who was just good enough? Who was just bad enough?

She decided long ago it didn’t matter. She had been deemed worthy and others had not been, therefore she was better than them. It was a great comfort to her in her brief moments of doubt.

“Who discovered it?” She asked, preparing her clipboard for notes.

“Gabriel.” Her pencil nearly snapped in her hands.

“The Courier?!” Gabriel had been climbing the ranks rather quickly since his conception. A simple Choral given a mission to communicate between all of them. In the rebellion he had stepped well above his station and capabilities in the name of delivering the Almighty’s message and had been given a promotion as a result.

Michael did not approve.
“Yes. Though he isn’t a Courier anymore, remember? He has others under him now.” The Metatron sighed and pushed out his first form of the day. “He injured the Western Guardian. It was quite a fight, I believe. He...isn’t handling it well. He’s asked permission to drink from the Lethe.”

Michael rolled her eyes dutifully. “Fool. He already drank after the Rebellion! He won’t have two brain cells left to rub together!”

“He was given permission to have another draught.” Metatron informed her without looking up. He missed her shock, tapped the form he was presenting. “He’s being promoted. Archangel.”

Michael blustered. “A Choral?! An errand boy! He’ll have the same rank as Raphael and myself!”

“If this is going to get your hackles up, Michael, you’ll absolutely loathe the other news I have,” Metatron huffed, irritated with her. “He’s earned it. He’s well liked among even the Seraphim. The Almighty likes him, thinks he has that ‘something’. Besides, it will leave you to handle the important work.”

Michael sighed, took the form, made a note to file it. “What of the Guardians, then? I suppose all four are-”

“Three. Only three. The Almighty has deemed the Eastern one clear of misdeeds.”

“...three. Are we imprisoning them? If there are to be no more Fallen then…?”

“The three guardians are...missing in action. Along with Eden.”

There was a beat of silence as Michael waited for the punchline.

“...I’m sorry, what?”

Metatron sighed heavily, ceasing his endless shuffling of papers. “After Gabriel returned Raphael went to...negotiate. To reassure them that everything will be handled fairly. He hasn’t returned. I sent Uriel next and they have said...said the there’s a crater where Eden was. We haven’t felt Raphael or the Three since. The Almighty has been quiet but said to not expect to see Raphael for a very long time...if at all.”

There was a chair in the Metatrons office. It was meant for Michael during their meetings. Not once in her life had she sat in it, preferring standing on alert and ready. It was her way of showing how dedicated and prepared for anything she was.

Michael sat. “Wh-why would they...why would they…?”

“An unforeseen design flaw. Or foreseen. Only She knows.” Metatron hummed thoughtfully. “They were willing to do whatever it takes to protect what they loved. Going forward it won’t happen again without Her blessing. As it is, though, Eden is lost and She has decided to let it be.”

“That...that seems-”

“It seems nothing, Archangel.” Metatrons voice rose slightly, threatening to boom. “You are not to
She did not. “...the Fourth one, then. Aziraphale. I shall have him recalled...?”

“No. She wants one of us on Earth and he’s been there since the Beginning.” He chuckled slightly, shaking his head. “He’s been promoted to Principality. She signed the papers herself. Not a top shelf one, mind you. We can’t have fully fledged Principalities just waltzing around humans! Just...enough power to do the good work and guide.”

Michael shifted, feeling increasingly uncomfortable. “How do we know he will not follow the same path as the other three?”

This gave the Metatron pause. He glanced about his pristine office as if checking for ears before leaning in slightly. “Well...the Almighty seems to think he’ll keep himself occupied. Not pursuing such...close relations.”

Michael mulled this over. She didn’t know Aziraphale well. He was below her. A strange, silly thing created before the Rebellion, just before the Almighty started on the humans. Michael could see flashes of humans in that one. It unsettled her. Repulsed her, even.

What she had seen of the angel, however, matched up with the Almighty’s perception. He did keep to himself, even from other angels. When she had gone to check on the garden the other three would send messages to each other...but Aziraphale was often watching the first two humans with interest or delighting in the flora and fauna. A loner.

She could respect a loner. She was one as well.

“He must be very confused. His Gate is suddenly gone!”

“Oh Michael. The Lord asked the Eastern Guardian to follow humanity about a long time ago! He isn’t even aware of anything! Did you not know?”

She had not, indeed, known. How strange. These kind of things were usually brought to her attention.

Recovering quickly she plowed on. “Is there anything else? What are we to do with the...the by-products of this?”

The Metatron silently slid a paper across to her. She read. She paled. This couldn’t be right.

“And...and HE is alright with this?”

The Metatron nodded mutely. “He agreed on the condition that he got to have one at some point, in accordance with the plan. God has taken their sides ones already and sent them off in the path of Eden.”

“Then She knows where-!”

“Michael. It’s done. Now. Go see to Gabriel. He’ll have drank by now. You know what the Lethe
can do. He’ll need some help getting himself straight.” There was no room for argument in his tone.

Michael took the paperwork and stood. She needed to get away. To think. This was all so strange and the Lords handling of it…!

Well, Michael wasn’t one to question.

Not out loud, anyways.
Crowley’s favorite place in all existence was the backroom of Aziraphale’s bookstore. The couch here was at least seventy years old, worn in, and just about the most comfortable spot for a day time siesta he’d ever discovered. It was also a great place to pass out after a hard night of drinking but that neither here nor there.

Right now he was listening to music on his headphones, lazed back in a position that suggested sleep aided by his dark glasses. Honestly, he really had planned to nap. It wasn’t his fault that Aziraphale was so bloody distracting! He’d been puttering about all morning, fussing and reorganizing in preparation for his expected arrivals. Working himself into a bit of a tizzy, really.

Crowley had offered to help but was promptly turned down. The demon knew better than to force the issue. This was Aziraphale’s way of dispelling nervous energy, after all. Crowley would have only made it worst.

So Crowley watched, feigning sleep, keeping an eye just in case Aziraphale fussed himself into oblivion.

...and that may have just happened. Aziraphale was standing out in the main shop, shifting from foot to foot and wringing his hands. He looked lost in his own space.

That was the demons cue.

He made a production of yawning and stretching, pocketing his phone and earphones, and stood. “You ever dream about penguins?”

Despite his yawning Aziraphale still jumped when he spoke, blinking. “I--What?”

“Penguins. Weird right? They have knees in their chest.”

“Do they really?”

“Mhm. Attenborough said so.”

A faint smile flitted over his angelic features. “Then it must be true.”

Crowley nodded sagely. “The folks at the BBC are never wrong.”

This earned him a small chuckle. Some tension eased out of the angels shoulders. “I fear I’ve been a terrible host. I’ve just been concerned about making this all...child safe.”

Crowley bit back a retort about him hardly being a guest. Really. As if the angel needed to cater to
him! He spent nearly every day in the back room! “They aren’t children, angel. They’re eighteen. They won’t be putting your scrolls in their mouths or knocking their heads on the edges of tables.”

“Have you seen the fluids teenagers produce?!” Aziraphale huffed, straightened his tie. “A mere touch on the wrong work could ruin the integrity-”

Crowley took a breath. “Adam and the rest are polite. Too polite, really. I don’t think they’re going to snot all over the Wilde or get handsy on the bibles.”

“Oh! Do you think any of them would try to—snog in here? We’re meant to be chaperoning-!”

“I am. Me. They are staying with me.” Crowley wasn’t quite sure how that happened. Perhaps Adam simply wanted it to be that way. More than likely, however, some part of Crowley knew to not piss off his ex-employer by leaving his estranged son in an overpriced hotel.

“Yes but I am the one giving them the tours!” Aziraphale puffed up a little too proudly. It was cute. Crowley didn’t say so out loud. “A young person’s first foray into the greater world deserves to be handled with respect.”

“They are just having a holiday before heading off to uni, angel. One last hurrah, as it were. I don’t think they need us hovering.” Crowley tried to sound annoyed, he really did, but even he could hear the fondness in his voice.

Aziraphale didn’t catch it.

“You would say that! I bet...I bet you already have all kinds of temptation planned for them!” Aziraphale huffed, very nearly pouted.

Oh. Now Crowley was annoyed. “Tempting teenagers isn’t exactly my thing now, is it.” He suppressed a hiss. Honestly. All this time on their own side and Aziraphale could still say things like that! The nerve!

The angel did catch on this time. “Oh...oh. I didn’t mean-. I’m sorry. I know that you-...oh dear me.”

Crowley regarded him a moment, thankful for his glasses. It’s been seven years since they averted the apocalypse. They ate together nearly every day. Drank. Danced when the mood took them. A few times a year they pack up and head off to some far corner of the world to see the sights. They even had a cottage for the summers.

They were best friends and Aziraphale still slipped back into the ‘holier than thou’ routine when agitation got the better of him. He didn’t mean it. Most likely it was hard coded into his divine DNA and beyond even his best control.

It still hurt though.
Crowley looked towards the grandfather clock that was nearly hidden between the romance and philosophy sections. “I have to go pick them up at the bus stop. I promise I won’t tempt children while you finish up.”

He delayed long enough to watch Aziraphale wince at his tone. Good. Let him feel the impact of his words.

Strangely, it did nothing to make Crowley feel better. Being spiteful towards the angel never really did.

“Are you sure you don’t want me to come?” Aziraphale called after, voice strangely high.

“Yep.” The demon huffed, mood soured. He all but flung the door open. “I don’t need a chaperone either.”

It swung closed behind him with a bang.

The Bentley started before he even slid into his seat. It could sense his foul mood.

He revved the engine and peeled away with particularly squeal of rubber on asphalt. Aziraphale hated it when he did that.

This did nothing for his mood either.

After the apocalypse Crowley had thought the time of moving too fast was over. That they were on the same page. It seemed so, after all. They were free to do as the pleased and what pleased them most was being together. Crowley hadn’t expected anything grand or romantic but...the small part of him that still was able hoped that the gentle smiles and the way their hands would brush meant something.

They were on the same page. They were in the same paragraph, even.

Then Aziraphale seemed to stop bloody reading.

Seven years of hot and cold, never bridging the gap. Always being almost there. Crowley didn’t care if they had sex. Or kissed. Or even fucking cuddled.

He just wanted to know for sure that...that….

He growled. Slammed an open palm to his steering wheel. If he was still an angel he’d know for sure. He’d be able to feel it instead of having to do the infernal thing and guess.

The bus stop was fast approaching. He needed to get a grip. Forgiving Aziraphale was easy as breathing. He’d be ‘over it’ by the time he got back to the shop. The status quo restored.
Adam Young had long arms, perfect for taking selfies with friends. This was what he was currently doing as they waited for their ride to pick them up from the bus stop. “Wensley, you need to scooch in front of Pepper. She’s taller.”

“Actually, I believe she’s wearing heels,” Wensleydale saw fit to inform them. Pepper *was* wearing heels but-

“It hardly matters, does it? I’m not taking them off just so you can be taller than me in a photo.” Pepper voiced Adams own thoughts perfectly. He rarely had to stand up for her. She did just fine on her own.

“How about we do the totem pole thing?” Brian pitched in, peering into the screen of the phone as they all jostled to position themselves. “Tallest to shortest. Soooo...me, Adam, Pepper, Wens.”

Wensleydale opened his mouth to vehemently disagree with this. Adam just wanted a nice picture. “Perfect. Brian, put your chin on my head. Alright, Pepper just...slot in here and Wensley-”

Oh. This was a hard pose to get a picture of, even with long arms.

Help came at that moment.

“You know,” a familiar voice crooned, “I invented selfies.” The phone was deftly plucked from Adams hands.

“That sounds like a lie,” Pepper scoffed but she was smiling at the bespectacled redhead that was backing up, getting a good angle on them.

“Could be. My influence is vast and felt the world over,” Crowley coolly informed them. “Say ‘cheese’ or whatever.”

The Them were on the same wavelength. “Cheese or whatever!”

It was easy to tell that the demon was trying not to grin. Adam had figured out long ago that they amused Crowley and they played up to this fact whenever possible. Such as when they wanted to take a life changing trip, sans parents, to London and needed a place to crash. It had taken very little hinting for Crowley to volunteer his own flat.

Adam hadn’t even had to use his powers, which was always a plus. *The less over use the better*, Mister Fell had once said.
Granted, he said this while dropping off dusty, leather bound books of spellcraft and magic that Adam had hinted he would like to read. He had held the box so tightly to himself that Adam got the impression he wanted to bolt back up the path with them. It seemed like mixed messages, really.

Adam and Them quite liked Mister Fell and Mister Crowley. They were odd sorts, which was nice because they were odd sorts. Weirdo’s had to stick together, after all, regardless of vast gaps in experience. Or...species? Were humans a different species than demons and angels?

This needed investigation.

“Mister Crowley,” Adam hummed as he took his phone back, checking the picture. The angle was perfect. He had expected nothing else. The demon seemed to have an eye for detail. “Are humans a different sort of animal than demons? Or angels?”

Crowley waved for them to follow, seemingly nonplussed by the sudden question lieu of a ‘hello’ or ‘thank you’. “Humans are humans. Angels are angels. Most demons were angels. So, I believe, you all are animals while we are mysterious occult beings made of energy stuffed into sacks of flesh.”

“Actually, I think Mister Fell referred to you as ethereal,” Wensley piped up, struggling to keep his wheelie suitcase from flipping on the bumpy sidewalk. Adam gave it a little occult nudge of his own, just to make it easier.

“Mister Fell referred to himself as ethereal.” There was a growl in the demon’s voice. They all noticed. Uh oh.

Looks like Brian was losing the bet. They still weren’t together. For Pete’s sake. Adam was this close to over extending himself and locking the two of them in a room together like they were a couple of Sims. It was getting ridiculous. How could two ancient adults not get their shite together and have a proper conversation about expectations and devotion?

It should be simple.

At least Adam assumed so. He hadn’t really devoted himself to that kind of thing. It just wasn’t very interesting. He did get the basics, however. He’d read romance novels.

Mister Crowley somehow managed to fit all their luggage in his Bentley’s boot with no issue. It seemed like it should have been but, when Wensleydale called him on it, the demon had given him a rather perplexed look and said “I’ve moved statues in this before.”

Things seemed to just happen for Mister Crowley in the same way things just happened to Adam. He could respect that. The man simply believed things should be one way and they were.

That was probably why they all fit in the Bentley with inches between them. Mister Crowley believed he would have the space so he did.

“It’s like a TARDIS, innit?” Brian commented from the back seat, caught between admiring the pristine vintage interior and the blur of passing buildings.
“A bit more aerodynamic,” Mister Crowley murmured in a tone that suggested an eye roll. “More flash as well.”

It certainly was.

*Adam loved it.*

Aziraphale was no longer cleaning or organizing. All thoughts of entertaining had gone out the door with Crowley.

He’d upset him. He hadn’t meant to but he did it anyways.

It was hard to undo untold of millenia of suspicion and guarded behavior. Seven years seemed barely enough time to fully comprehend how deep such biases permeated his being let alone address them all. It was a frustratingly slow process but he was doing his best.

Crowley was his dearest friend in all reality. Perhaps his only. He deserved to be treated with the same respect that Crowley had always treated him.

Aziraphale could never hope of...of there being *more* until he had that part of him beaten down to the dirt where it belongs!

He’d apologize when Crowley returned. Offer to take him to dinner, buy some fine wine, then suggest they go to the cottage after the children left. They always felt more at ease after going to the cottage. It was a place they built together, after all, meaning they were both on equal footing.

Perhaps this time- *this time!* -Aziraphale would tell him just how much he...he....

There was a sharp knock at the door. Not Crowley or his temporary charges. The demon would have just waltzed on in as the door had long ago learned it couldn’t keep him out even if it tried. No. This was someone not reading the bloody ‘Closed’ sign.

Honestly. This was a book shop! One would think that those trying to visit would know how to read the signage!

“We’re closed!” Aziraphale called, eager to return to his fantasy where he was confident, perfect, and able to woo a man made of temptation with a few well planned words.

The knock came again. More insistent. It rattled the shade that was pulled over the glass.

“Lord give me strength,” Aziraphale murmured skyward and unlocked the door.
No one was there. A look up and down the sidewalk revealed no one running away, playing at pranking the strange bookshop owner. In fact, the street seemed strangely vacant for the time of day. It was unsettling but he couldn’t feel anything amiss. No celestial or infernal forces laying in the shadows.

He closed the door, not locking it, his hand lingering on the knob.

A full minute passed without any knocking.

Hm. Perhaps he simply hadn’t been quick enough?

It was around then that the shop shook, rattling the windows, knocking books from their shelves and a full day of tidying down the drain. “Oh really now?!” He shouted out to the empty shop as he stumbled to clutch at the counter and steady himself.

Light poured through the blinds, a kaleidoscope of colours that boggled even the eyes of an angel.

He felt like he was floating.

He was.

“Oh,” he frowned into the light, mind flashing back to when a witchfinder backed him into a sacred circle. “This is frighteningly familiar.”

Everything went black.

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“So, those angels are doing it, right?” Brian whispered to the group as they regarded the statue in front of them.

“Actually, they may be an angel and a demon?” Wensleydale supplied, nose wrinkled as he tilted his head to get a better angle. “...I think the demon is on top.”

Pepper snorted. She also didn’t let them in on what she found funny.

Adam decided this was one conversation he wasn’t going to weigh in on. He only saw wrestling at a
first look and now he wasn’t sure *what* he was seeing. Instead he occupied himself with wandering the flat.

Or penthouse, as Wensley pointed out. It seemed to take up the whole top floor.

Adam had expected any place that Mister Crowley lived to be flashy. At a glance, this was a subversion of expectations. Gray granite and concrete, spartan decorating, furniture that favored form over function. He never fancied a man that sauntered around like the love child of Jack Sparrow and Mick Jagger to be a minimalist.

The deeper he looked, however, the more was revealed. Mister Crowley had things. He just didn’t have *tat*. Adam hadn’t realized until that moment that tat made up a *surprising* amount of home decor.

Every item in Mister Crowley’s flat had a meaning. Adam may not have known what their meanings were yet but he was determined to find out. Why the plants? What was with the throne? Was that a sketch of Mona Lisa?

*Why the hell did he have a sculpture of an angel and a demon ‘tumbling’ together?*

He was sorting through these questions, trying to figure out which one the demon was likely to answer first, when Mister Crowley passed on the way from... *wherever* he had taken their bags.

“Car,” he demanded, mobile phone pressed to his ear. Adam could faintly hear the automated operator informing him the number was not in service. The demon hung up.

Tried again. The same message.

Oh. *They really should get in the car.* He turned to tell his friends only to find them already heading to the door. He expected nothing less. They were a good sort, after all, and of course they’d notice Mister Crowley’s growing distress.

And he was distressed. He was looking downright pale and every time he redialed his hand seemed to shake a little more.

Then he hissed, long and low, something that sounded kind of like “h’Azzzzz”. Like he’d lost the ability for the moment to form actual human words.

He redialed again.

Adam wasted little time in getting out of the flat.

Chapter End Notes
A double update because who give a fuck about prologues, honestly?
A conscious effort was being made to ease off the accelerator. “Anything?” Crowley asked the boy in the passenger seat. Adam punched in Aziraphale’s number and waited, glancing between demon and mobile device anxiously. The operator picked up again.

The accelerator touched the floor despite himself. A seething, twisting, lashing piece of himself was threatening to burst from his veins and coil around the entirety of London. It screamed ‘Fassssssssster’ within the confines of his mind and he obeyed.

Around 1602 some anonymous poet wrote a line something like ‘Absence makes the heart grow fonder.’ Crowley always thought it was a stupidly romantic lie. Propaganda to make people feel better when they couldn’t be where they needed or wanted to be. Presence makes the heart grow fonder while absence makes one heart sick, participate in copious amount of day drinking, and take extremely ill advised naps.

In the years that Crowley was apart from Aziraphale he’d find himself restless. The only thing that could settle him was the knowledge that the angel was out there somewhere doing what he did best. Luckily for Crowley, Aziraphale had quite the large presence and that allowed him to confirm he was still alive and kicking whenever he pleased. In the past seven years the two of them had spent so much time together that Crowley was sure that he could be in the Arctic while Aziraphale was in the Antarctic and still have a solid grip on how the angel was fairing.

Less than fifteen minutes ago something in him started to feel off.

He’d been putting the kids bags away in some miracled up guest rooms when he felt it. A kind of beacon flashing on and off somewhere in the back of his mind before suddenly going dark. It took him a moment to digest the strange absence, to realize what he was suddenly missing.

Aziraphale.

The Bentley cleared the distance between Mayfair and Soho in no time at all. At one point it may have gone up on two wheels, wedging itself between two lorries. The demon hadn’t even noticed until Adam socked him in the arm and reminded him, rather loudly, they were human. There were no second chances at life if they bit the dust.
He didn’t slow down.

The street A.Z. Fell and Co. resided on was strangely vacant. A rarity. Actually, nigh impossible. This was a busy street at almost all times. The Bentley screeched to a halt at the curb, putting itself in park while its owner vaulted from the driver's seat.

*There was no book shop.*

In the space where the business had been there was an empty lot full of lush, exotic greenery that certainly had no business being in England. Actually, Crowley was very certain some of the flowers he was seeing hadn’t existed in thousands of years.

At the center of it all was a single sapling.

Crowley approached on shaking legs, stepping into the lot. It wasn’t an illusion. There was a garden where his angels sanctuary had been.

A garden with an exceedingly familiar energy.

The Them joined him, Adam at the forefront. “...Mister Crowley?”

Adam. Yes. Adam Young. Reality would bend to him. Not as well as it used to but...but…! “Bring him back,” his voice was strangely hoarse.

The brilliant young man didn’t question him. He merely took a step back and breathed. Crowley could feel the rippled of infernal energy, forcing reality to bend to the boy’s will. Reality was trying. He could feel it trembling, trying to please its former master. Yet nothing seemed to change.

“I...I don’t think I—”

“*Don’t think jussst do it!*” Crowley hissed, rounding on the young man. He circled him. “*You can do this. You are HIS son, manipulation of personal history or no. You can do this. I believe you can do thisss so DO IT!*”

He believed. He truly believed this boy could make Aziraphale appear in front of them. He could
probably make the whole shop appear! He just needed a push. To hear it. He **COULD** do this.

...he couldn’t.

The boy fell to his knees with a small groan. “I’m sorry, Mister Crowley. There’s...there’s nothing to pull back. *There’s nothing there.*”

The world seemed to fall out beneath him. He couldn’t breathe. He didn’t need to but...but he just couldn’t.

“What-? What do you-?” His voice was strange in his own ears, barely like his own. At least when there was a fire he had some idea of what had happened. A logical conclusion could be gained.

He didn’t know what to do with a garden in a vacant lot.

He hadn’t realized he was sinking to his knees until he was flanked by the clever girl and the brash one. They supported him. Kept him on his feet as he over extended himself and searched the world over. Then the solar system. Then the whole galaxy.

No Aziraphale.

Distantly, he was aware the kids were talking in urgent, hushed tones. Using words like ‘plan’ and ‘possibilities’ and ‘give him a second’. He couldn’t put the words in context. He could barely think.

The last thing he did was fight with the angel.

*Again.*

They let him kneel as they began to comb the garden for any clues. He was having a moment of personal crisis and that was being respected. He appreciated that.

They really were alright kids.
His eyes focused on the single sapling. It was young. Slender. The branches few and dainty. He knew the species by the leaves alone. He had planted several around their cottage because he thought it was funny.

It was an apple tree.

Gabriel was telling himself he felt fine.

This was objectively true. Physically he was as flawless as ever, from the roots of his hair to the tips of his toes nails. His clothes were perfect, wrinkle free and without any sign of lint. His office space was meticulously clean as it always was as well. There was nothing to cause him any kind of discomfort.

Yet he was uncomfortable. There was an itchiness the seemed to spread out in his mind that he couldn’t find the source of. This wasn’t an uncommon occurrence for him. Every decade or so he’d get this kind of persistent niggling like he was forgetting something only to have it go away after a few days.

It had been weeks now and the feeling only seemed to be getting worst. It was driving him to distraction.

A large part of him wanted to slam his head into the wall but he was fairly certain that wouldn’t solve anything. So he did what he always did when something was a bit beyond him.

He asked Michael.

“Have you been praying?” She asked smoothly, not glancing up from her heavenly tablet. Gabriel almost felt insulted.

“What kind of question is that? Of course I have!” Really. He was the Archangel Gabriel! Was he praying...as if that wasn’t a thrice daily thing.
“No need to be upset. We start with the simple questions and work up, right?” Michael hummed, tapping away at icons on her screen. “Perhaps you are just feeling cooped up. You’re one of the few that was built for travel, after all.”

That was true. It might be good to stretch his wings and take a quick trip to the Outer Edge. Except...he didn’t feel an itch in his feathers. It was more in the center of his being. He was sure if he let out his true form he’d see it...but there were rules against true forms in Heaven. It got far too crowded and spooked the human souls. Also, none of the Thrones could fit through doors.

Space had recently become a ‘thing’ as well. Humans and their skyward facing telescopic lenses or fancy satellites made it risky. There was only so many times they could convince people they had seen flying saucers and not celestial entities.

Though...if he went out under the pretense of stretching his wings maybe he could find a quiet spot in the shade of some unmonitored planet and ‘decompress’ without fear of being discovered. Surely it couldn’t hurt to bend the rules a little bit...?

“Are you listening?” Michael was snapping at him, looking at him in that cool way she did when she was irritated.

“No. I wasn’t.” He answered honestly. It was best not to try to fool Michael. Gabriel wasn’t a keen liar anyways. He was actually quite bad at it. It was probably a hold over from when he had to deliver messages orally, to ensure he never said anything untrue.

His fellow archangel huffed. “I said that it seems we have need of someone to go to Earth. Aziraphale seems to be MIA. I just got the notification. I’d like to know if he and his pet demon have left the planet.”

Earth. Earth wasn’t bad. Oh! He could shop! Shopping always helped with an irritating brain itch!

Wait.

“Aziraphale isn’t there?” Gabriel tilted his head slightly, as if a new angle would help him make sense of that. Aziraphale wasn’t a friend. He had thought that, maybe, they had a companionable working relationship but then the apocalypse didn’t happen and it became clear that Aziraphale was barely an angel, let alone a friend. Not worth his time any longer.
...though the fact that he went rogue was probably his fault. Maybe his management skills hadn’t been up to snuff? An unhappy employee was a sign of poor oversight, after all.

He was getting off track. The point he was making to himself was that in all his contact with Aziraphale he got the feeling that earth was going to be where he stayed until the very end of time. That the principality would just fly the coop seemed unlikely.

That itchy, uncomfortable feeling got worse.

“He isn’t. Or he’s finally found a way to keep eyes off him.” Michael frowned at her tablets screen, as if she realized she said too much. “Not that we’ve been keeping a very close eye.”

Gabriel frowned as well. “He’s on extended leave. At least until the Almighty gives us word on what to do with him. You’re not supposed to be monitoring him at all. Metatrons orders.”

Michael smiled sweetly, finally meeting his eyes. That smile always did something strange to him. Made him feel childish or small. He disliked it. “Gabriel, sweetie, I’m just doing my job. An angel immune to hell fire and a demon immune to holy water? It’s in our best interest to keep our intel up to date.”

Gabriel stood a bit straighter, lifted his chin importantly. “The Metatron said-”

“-to not interfere. Watching isn’t interfering, sweet heart. It’s simply...watching. The Lord watches and doesn’t interfere, after all!”

It was a good point. It didn’t do much to assuage him, though. They had orders. Orders were important! If everyone disobeyed orders there would chaos!

Though he had just been considering sneaking off to unfold into his true form. That would have been disobedient.

Plus this was Michael! Michael was in charge of keeping them well informed and safe. She knew best. It was her job!

“Well,” he said at last, “I suppose a little visit to see how Aziraphale is doing wouldn’t be so bad. Especially if we’re concerned.”

Michael nodded at him like he was a human child. “We are very concerned.”

Yes. Concerned. He could frame it in concern and if the Metatron asked he’d have an entirely truthful excuse to fall back on.
“Alright then.” He offered a sunny smile to his fellow angel. “I'll report back!”

He never saw how Michael rolled her eyes as his lightning carried him away.

*************************************************************************************************

“Mister Crowley, you need to get up.” Adam was speaking soothingly, airily, using everything he learned from his Psych Weekly subscriptions to console an ancient demon. “It’s shocking, I know, but we need you. Mister Fell needs you.”

Said demon was still on his knees, staring fixedly at the tree before him as if it held an answer. Adam wasn’t even sure if he was being heard. Perhaps if he removed his sunglasses he’d get a better read on him?

He moved to do just that only to have Pepper grab his wrist. “No. That’s his shield. Messing with that in a moment of vulnerability is a sure way of reintroducing trauma.”

“Or it may jolt him. Make him angry. Get a response,” Adam countered, looking up at her from his crouched position. Still, he made no further move to grab the sunglasses.

“Is hurting a friend worth that?” Pepper asked, releasing him in favor of crossing her arms over her chest.

Adam mulled this over a moment. “If Mister Fell is in danger it may be. Any hurt I do will be undone once we find him.”

“Oooor we aren’t able to find him and then we just have a jumpy, grieving demon whose bubble we’ve broken.”

The former anti-christ clicked his tongue against his front teeth, regarding Pepper evenly and giving serious consideration to her thoughts. A good leader always listened, after all. They weren’t children anymore but he still wished to do right by his dearest friends.

He let his hand fall away. “Been enjoying Psych Weekly as well, yeh?”

“Only the parts I know you don’t read,” she informed him with a small, knowing smile. He laughed softly before turning back to the demon.

“We can’t stay here. Someone is going to come by eventually and wonder if we’re mugging him or
Brian turned from where he was examining the walls where the bookshop had once connected with the two businesses next to it. “I can drive stick. I call driver.”

“Oh, I don’t think I saw Mister Crowley even touch the gear,” Wensleydale informed them from his position near some of the flowering plants. He was snapping pictures of them with a steady hand and he didn’t look up from this work. “I didn’t even see him put any keys in the ignition.”

“We’ll ask the Bentley to start up, then.” Adam shrugged casually. It wasn’t hard. Obviously the car knew what it was meant to do.

“I can still sit behind the wheel, right?” Brian asked hopefully, tapping at random brick on the wall.

“Yes. You can pretend to drive a demonically possessed car,” Pepper said dryly, giving him a shake of her head. Adam could almost hear her saying ‘Men!’ in that tone she used when one of the three of them did something she deemed particularly strange or obnoxious.

Adam had something to add but his words died as he became aware of all the hair on his arms standing on end. Not goosebumps but-oh! Oh! He read about this once! An electrical field which meant-!

Lightning struck the sidewalk in an unnaturally precise way. Adam recognized the being it left in its wake. He had been there on the day the world was supposed to end, telling him how bad he was for not doing what he was meant to. As a rule, Adam didn’t trust people that dressed too nicely. It usually meant they were full of themselves or wearing a very pretty mask to distract from something else.

He didn’t know why the Archangel Gabriel wore such clean, gray suits but he knew he didn’t like him.

Adam stood, placing himself between Mister Crowley’s back and the angel. His friends wasted little time in joining him, forming a kind of wall.

Gabriel blinked at them and looked around, his brow pinching in confusion. Finally he chose to acknowledge them. “Hey huma-uhm-kids. Wasn’t there a store here?”

Oh. He didn’t recognize them. That was insulting.
“We were going to ask you the same question,” Adam responded, watching the angel carefully.

Gabriel glanced between them and the garden lot. “You were?” He murmured faintly, struggling to put something together. “So...this is the right place? Of course it is. I mean, my addresses are never wrong but...where’s the shop?”

“Gone?” Wensleydale supplied timidly.

“That much is obvious. Gone where, though?” The angel tapped his shiny loafers on the ground in annoyance. He finally seemed to give them some serious consideration. “...do I know you?”

“We’ve met. Seven years ago.” Adam stood a bit taller. Sometimes having a good posture helps one feel a bit more confident...or seem more confident. He couldn’t recall which.

Gabriel stepped closer, studying him with eyes that spun and shone like miniature galaxies. Recognition washed over him. “Ooooh. You’re the Anti-Christ!” He had the nerve to smile at him like he was greeting an old friend.

“Former Anti-Christ.” Adam bit out. He really hated saying that outloud.

“Whatever. Good to see you. No hard feelings about the end of the world stuff, alright?” Gabriel smiled even brighter. Adam was surprised to see the gesture carried to his eyes. He was genuinely pleased to see a familiar face. “I’m not here to see you, though. I’m here to check on Aziraphale.”

“He’s gone.” The Them stiffened, turning back towards the kneeling demon they were blocking. Crowley continued with a tone of voice that sound strange coming from him. “He’s gone. Dunno where. Just gone. Poof.”

Either the information presented or the Crowley himself set Gabriel off because he was soon striding towards them, eyes glinting dangerously. Adam stepped up, keeping himself tall and his gaze unyielding, ready for a fight even if he had only ever thrown one punch in his life.

Gabriel stopped with a gasp and a hand over his chest the minute he crossed into the patch of garden. “What--?” His violet eyes darted around the space, as if he was looking at it from an entirely new angle. “This...this...this is-!”

Crowley slowly, achingly, got to his feet. “Yup.”

Gabriel looked ashen. “How?!?”

“I dunno. Why don’t you tell me?” Never in all the time Adam had known him had Mister Crowley sounded so distant and cold. It was like a whole other person had stepped up to the plate and was speaking with the demons mouth.
Gabriel gaped at him, struggling for words. “I don’t know! This-! I mean...I shouldn’t say anything but...well...this isn’t possibly because-ugh! I don’t need to tell a demon anything! This shouldn’t BE HERE though.”

“What, exactly, shouldn’t be here?” Pepper cut in, determined to get a clear answer and to stop all the needless, time wasting stammering.

Gabriel’s lips pinched together in stubborn silence, apparently unwilling or unable to divulge anything helpful. Yet his eyes kept darting around in confusion and awe.

Mister Crowley stepped to the sapling, touching one of its frail leaves carefully. How strange. It had looked much healthier moments ago. In fact, the whole bit of garden seemed to be wilting at a steady pace. “Eden,” the demon murmured lowly, his voice hollow.

He turned to them, face dreadfully empty of expression. “A piece of Eden in Soho.”

Chapter End Notes

Here we begin some redemption for Gabriel. It's going to be a rough ride for him.
Consciousness was slow to come to Aziraphale. He found himself guided into it by distantly familiar voices.

“-promoted! How wonderful! A Principality!” A cheerful feminine voice was saying. “Goodness knows the other two could use such guidance.”

“Look closer. Look beyond flesh. He hath been contained. To keep peace in his station, of this I’ve little doubt.” This voice was deeper, sorrowful and beautiful. It stirred something in Aziraphale, inspiring him to claw harder towards complete awareness.

“He’s dapper, though, isn’t he? He wears a blue bow at his neck! How perfectly lovely!” The first voice chattered sweetly. “He hasn’t changed much, though. I think his hair is the same.”

“Tis it?”

“It is!” There was a giggle.

“He stirs. Come now, Aziraphale, Guardian of th Eastern Gate, Heavenly Principality. You are yet nearing. Hath you heard us?”

Aziraphale couldn’t find it in him to open his eyes. He felt refreshed and rejuvenated yet there was an oppression. As if a great weight was being pressed on him from above. “I...do believe I have.” At least he could speak.

“Good angel. Good child. Good man. ‘Tis hard, I know. You are imprisoned.”

“Goodness me! Must you spring that on him right away? Give him time to pull himself together!”

“‘Tis the truth. Best face it now.”

He knew these voices. He was sure of it. If only he could force his eyes to open! “I seem to be having some issues functioning. My apologies.”

“Don’t you worry your curly little head, Aziraphale! We’re very patient! Forcing it will only frustrate you!”

He was, indeed, a tad frustrated. “What happened? Where am I?”

“Oh! Oh! Uhm-well. You see. Huh. Thats hard to answer! You are...Nowhere?”
“Nowhere?” He questioned faintly, his eyelashes fluttering slightly. There. He caught a glimpse of light.

“Well, it’s the best way to describe it. However, this Nowhere is attached to Eden.”

His eyes flew open. All was blurry, dizzying him. “Eden?!”

“Oh my. That was a bad move, love, opening your eyes so fully. Deep breaths, now!”

“Eden is... Eden is elsewhere. She has it.” Aziraphale was struggling to make sense of it. Why was he here? He hadn’t been in Eden since he was told to go out and follow the sons and daughters of Adam and Eve around. As far as he was aware, God had taken Eden from earth and hidden it away! Was he recalled to his Gate? Demoted? Oh! It probably would take seven years for the paperwork to process! Did that mean SHE was nearby?!

“Ah. A mystery explained,” the second voice hummed. “I hath long wondered how they would handle such an insult to Her.”

Aziraphale couldn’t make sense of that. He squinted towards the voice, trying to bring his world into focus. A blurry shape moved in front of him, kneeling and helping him sit with gentle hands.

“Hush now. We’re confusing him!” His hair was petted and he pulled away as best he could. He didn’t really go in for strangers touching him...but this figure seemed to have no such barriers as they kept on doing it. “Let’s do reintroductions first! That’s a better place to start! I fear we’ve been dreadfully impolite. You’ll have to forgive us, Aziraphale. We often only have each other for company and know each other as well as the moon knows the tides! We haven’t entertained in a long time!”

This one was chatty. It sparked a memory in him. This voice, these mannerisms…. “I know you, don’t I?”

“You do! See! I knew you’d be quick!” Dainty, soft hands cupped his face with far more familiarity than he’d typically allow. A blurry face was close to his own, giving him a spot to focus on. They were quickly becoming clearer to him. Dark skin, dark hair, eyes of blue lined with gold about the lash line. “I’m Sabriel! Remember?”

He did. Oh Lord, he did! “Guardian of the Northern Gate!” He gasped, pulling back slightly to get a better look at her.
She was exactly as he remembered. Smiley, jovial, and more reminding of a human depiction of a fairy than an angel. A skinny thing that looked like a good breeze could knock her off her feet. The only thing changed about her was the strange harness about her chest and her hair, which was tied tightly upwards in a vain attempt at controlling tightly wound, ebony curls.

She smiled impishly, eyes sparkling. “It’s so nice to be remembered!”

He hadn’t seen his fellow Guardians since he left the Garden. In fact, and he was ashamed to admit it, he never really thought about them. They were different than himself, tightly knit and cliquish. A part of him had felt actively excluded so he entertained himself in those days. He always assumed they were recalled when She took the Garden back and were puttering about Heaven doing who knows what.

All evidence was starting to suggest he was very wrong in his assumptions.

Before he could question her on this his attention was drawn to the figure lounging on a luxurious, red velvet fainting couch behind her. They were flipping cards in their hands, shuffling and reshuffling, bending and flicking them so deftly it was distracting. Yet Aziraphale knew this angel.

His heart briefly froze in his chest before swelling.

“Oh! Oh you’re-! Y-you’re-” He stammered, hardly able to believe his eyes. He knew they weren’t typically around but he had always assumed that meant he was at Her side like the Metatron!

The archangel smiled, pleased at the effect he was having. “Come now. Thou eye does not deceive. I am as I appear.”

Aziraphale could barely bring himself to say it.

He did.

“Raphael!”
Gabriel frowned down at the steaming cup that had been placed before him. “I don’t drink.”

“Then don’t,” the demon waved a hand dismissively. “Wouldn’t want you to dirty up your temple or whatever.”

Gabriel frowned and fought the urge to consume the beverage out of spite. “My heavenly temple is immaculate unlike some.”

“This temple is anything but heavenly so don’t start a lecture,” the demon sighed, no bite in his voice. No anything in his voice.

*It was infuriating.*

The former anti-christ waved a hand between them. “Focus, focus! No blood feuds during tea! Now, Mister Gabriel, what can you tell us about Eden?”

*Not a lot,* he thought sullenly. God had recalled it. Or something. He wasn’t quite sure how a whole Garden got recalled but, he supposed, all things were possible in God.

Yet...there were somethings about that explanation that never sat well with him. For example, he didn’t even have a way of getting there. That should have been impossible. He could even her to HER if the need was dire. To not be able to find a whole Holy Garden was...strange.

It wasn’t his place to question it, though. He never wanted to go back to Eden. Even stepping into the dying lot where the bookshop was had morphed the itch in his brain to an all out ache.

Even thinking about the garden made him strangely sick.

He didn’t like it.

He was *THE* Archangel Gabriel, though! He couldn’t let mere humans and a particularly insufferable demon think he was clueless!

“I can’t talk about it.” It wasn’t a lie. He had nothing to add, therefore, couldn’t talk about it.
“Do you know anything about Eden?” The demon was looking at him pointedly behind those dark glasses. He knew he couldn’t lie well. He had to. Had Aziraphale told him? Did he simply remember?

Gabriel took a moment to compose himself, smiling cheerfully. “It’s where you introduced sin to humanity.”

The demon didn’t even frown. Worse yet, he didn’t rise to the bait Gabriel had laid out. “Yes. And? Anything else?”

Gabriel felt his smile falter. “It’s...very pretty.”

The girl in the infernal entourage caught on. “Why would a piece of Eden be in Soho?” She asked pointedly, not even having the courtesy to smile.

Gabriel fought the urge to squirm. This wasn’t good. “I...don’t...know.” He bit out each word as if they were poison.

“Did-uhm-heaven take Mister Fell?” The bespectacled boy jumped in.

“Ah. Eh.” Curse his stupid impulses! “No.”

It was becoming a free for all. He could run but, boy, the Archangel Gabriel running away with his tail between his legs would be a really bad look.

“So, like, why did you show up minutes after he vanished?” The dark haired boy that was eating up biscuits spoke with his mouth full, spraying crumbs over the cafe table.

“Michael needed someone to check it out. She was monitoring him even though she wasn’t supposed to and I wasn’t supposed to know but I needed to get out and now I’m here.” He wanted to scream. Stupid mouth. Stupid tongue!

The demon sat up straighter. “Back up. Why did you need to ‘get out’, Gabriel?”
The archangel physically bit his tongue, shifted in his seat. *No no no.* He wasn’t going to give a demon, especially not THIS demon, any insight into his own vulnerabilities!

The serpent leaned forward, pulling his dark glasses over the bridge of his nose. Those yellow eyes were taking him apart. “Why did you come? What was the *real* reason you came when Michael asked? Why not some lower tier?”

Gabriel was shaking, clutching the table cloth. “I. Wanted. To.” *Oh Lord, please still his tongue.* “Stop. The. Itch.” *He was in agony.* “In. My. Being.”

The young humans looked rightfully confused. Why should those words matter to them? An itch was nothing to a mortal form.

The demon got it, though. The demon gave voice to his own suspicion, the one that he dared not consider. Perhaps he wasn’t even able to consider it without the help of another.

...he had always hoped it would be Michael that would finally say it and allow him to consider….

“You drank from the Lethe.”

“I don’t recall.”

A dark laugh. *“You wouldn’t.”*

Gabriel stood. This was a bad idea. Why had he agreed to this? Sitting with a demon! Scandalous! And now it had gone and did what demons were good at and fed on his deepest doubts and fears! “I must go. Thank you for the hot leaf juice.”

The demon surged to his feet as well. “Are you aching now? You look *pale*, Gabriel! You know *something* and you don’t even know you know it!”

“That doesn’t make sense!” Humans were staring at him. He was seriously considering summoning lightning bolt down through the roof to carry him away. *What right did this stupid fucking beast have to be so perceptive?!*

“Going to run?! We both know there are no coincidences! Michael sent you but you came because that itch told you too!” The demon sagged back to his chair so suddenly it took the archangel off guard. “... *sit down*, Gabriel.”

Then a pause.

*“Pleassse.”*
Gabriel looked to the ceiling. It would just take a snap of his fingers. He could report back to Michael and she’d handle all this.

...the ache was there, though. Would it hurt worse if he went back?

And the demon...the demon...he remembered this one from before the Rebellion. He knew who his superior was. The Creator. The Healer. No doubt he still had some knowledge that could be helpful. Right?

Gabriel sat down rigidly. “...can you make the ache stop?” He hated having to ask. It made him sick.

The demon Crowley smiled faintly, a tad nastily. “Nope. You can though. Let’s go over it, shall we?”

Gabriel had the distinct feeling he should have bolted when he had the chance.

Chapter End Notes

Playing fast and loose with angelic canon here, folks.
The first thing he could remember about Eden was watching Adam faff about naming flora and fauna while angels rejoiced or scowled at his choices. He could recall one Creator loudly rallying against the name ‘platypus’.

The next was when the binary came to be. She was pretty, Eve was. He had sung her songs to make her smile until Michael pulled him away by the ear. He was told he was being inappropriate.

He had been a bit put out, honestly. He wasn’t trying to love her. She just seemed like she might like a song and all the other angels were tired of his songs! She was a fresh audience!

(“Was that the last time you were there?”)

Yes. It was. He sent one of his new subordinates to deliver messages after that. It had been embarrassing for him, after all. He didn’t want the others to get the wrong idea.

(“Think. Are you sure? You never had to speak to any of the Guardians?”)

No...no. He didn’t.

Except...wait.

There had been a message for the one in the West. He could remember seeing it in their cubby in the mailroom. It was the seventh day when most rested but... but there was a message. It needed to be delivered. He was the only one that could do it.

(“Did you deliver it, sir?”)
No? He...he couldn’t recall.

(“Actually you just said it needed to be delivered! So you must have, right?”)

It needed to be delivered. He was compelled to deliver it but...but….

(“Easy, Mister Gabriel. Easy. What did you do after you saw the message?”)

He....

He went to the Western Gate.

There was no Guardian.

There was...was....

(“What was there?”)

A symbol. An arrow. Pointing west.

He followed.

The message needed to be delivered.

(“What did you find to the west, sir?”)

Desert.
(“And?”)

Oasis.

A village.

Many humans.

And...and the Western Guardian.

He was laughing. He as wearing their clothing. Drinking their mead. Eating their food. A human woman snuggled close to his shoulder.

And...and….

(“Gabriel...Gabriel what else did you sssee?”)

Three. Children. Gold freckles. His hair. The human woman’s skin tone. All three brimming with his power.

HER power.

**West saw me.**

(“Nephilim! Holy shit! Oh fuck! They’re real?!”)

Gabriel tried to flee. He needed to get back! He need to tell an archangel! Michael! Michael always knew what to do!

The Lightning was blocked. His escape was blocked.
West’s had thrown his lance. Diverted the arc of electricity. Glassed the sand.

(“Mister Crowley—?” “Shh!”)

Then there were the others. No. Only two. East wasn’t...wasn’t there. East had been allowed to leave.

North and South. He could see them coming. North was swollen at the middle, struggling with her bow. South was wild eyed and desperate, no weapon.

West was closest. West was on him. West was pinning him and striking at the shield he had summoned.

West was trying to KILL ME.

West skewered his shoulder...and Gabriel unravelled. His whole corporation broke apart to reveal his true form. Many mouths screaming her message, the one that was burning in his pouch.

(“We need to do something! Oh God! He’s going to tear this whole place down!”)

There was screaming. Gold ichor spilling from West’s eyes and ears and-

(“Gabriel! You need to come back! Lisssten to me! GabriELARGH!” “MISTER CROWLEY!”)

The humans that were close we’re turning to salt. Oh! He couldn’t stop! He was Out and he didn’t know how to put it back in! He didn’t know how to put himself back together!
He was going to-!

(“You need to sleep now, Mister Gabriel.”)

You need to sleep.

**SLEEP.**

********************************************************************************************************

Aziraphale was reeling.

“Nephilim are real?” He murmured, not able to look the archangel or Northern Guardian in the face. Nephilim. The product of the union between an angel and human. A half breed. Except that wasn’t possible! The work of human fiction! “Angels can’t breed, Sabriel!”

“Perhaps not now but, well, we could. I think She must have changed it after...after everything.” The Northern Guardian was kneeling before him, her head bowed. “I’m not a liar, Aziraphale. I’ve...well...I’ve had children of my own. They are still out there. In Eden. I wonder daily if they think of me. Oh Lord, I hope they do!”

Aziraphale wanted to move. He had energy to dispel but he still felt so heavy. Whatever thing imprisoned him and the other two was still weighing him down, making his corporations muscles feel like lead. He could only squirm in his cross legged position and listen.

He dared look to Raphael. “Did you...?”

“Copulate? Nay.” Raphael flipped up a Queen of Hearts, flipped it down his sleeve, then int his left hand as a King of Spades. “A Holy Mission was bequeathed upon me. I was to bring peace and order. Pity stilled me and I was set upon from three quarters. I awoke here.”

Sabriel kept her head bowed, her slender frame was trembling.

Aziraphale took a deep, cleansing breath. “You stole the Garden.”

Sabriel nodded the tiniest of nods. “Yes. We pooled our resources and siphoned energy from Raphael to make up for your part. Took our lovers. Took our children. Took their extended families...and we fled lest we Fall or have what we created smited from existence. We...we didn’t
believe Raphael. We rejected his olive branch.”

Raphael hummed softly and reached from his seatee to tuck a dark, errant curl back behind the Northern Guardians ear. “Tis forgiven. Water off a duck’s back. All things in the name of love can be forgiven.”

“You only say that because you still want to heal all of us, Raphael,” Sabriel murmured softly.

The archangel didn’t disagree.

There was a tense silence as Aziraphale tried to put his thoughts in order. It was too much for him to deal with all at once. He had too many questions and no idea where he would start. He distracted himself by studying their prison once again, in an increasingly vain hope in finding escape.

There were no doors and no windows. The room was vast and strangely luxurious with furniture from all eras piled around but the most used seemed to be Raphael’s fine fainting couch, a small meditation bench, and a card table with two well used chairs. There was not much else in terms of entertainment. No books, no gramophones, not even paper to write upon.

For all its pretty decoration it was obviously a prison cell.

Sabriel lifted her head a little, glancing at him with her startling blue eyes. “...aren’t you going to ask why I'm here, Aziraphale?” She waved a hand, indicating their fancy prison.

“You rebelled, obviously. Saw that this had gone to far and tried to leave.” He hummed, still scanning the walls. He was finding it very hard to meet her eyes now that he knew some of the truth. She made something in him squirm.

Disgust. He was disgusted.

He hated that he felt that way. It wasn’t how he wanted to feel! She had done much the same as he had, after all! Gone out into the world and became charmed by humanity! Heavens, he was certainly worse than her! He thwarted the Great Plan and consorted with the Serpent of Eden!

Yet some righteous, holy judgment in him was screaming that it was wrong.

His holy essence was a hypocrite and he despised it!
“I didn’t.”

Oh.

With great effort he forced himself to look at her...but she was not meeting his eyes now focused on her knees and clenching hands. Those archers hands were gripping the cloth there to hard her robes threatened to tear.

“Why...why are you here, then?” He asked more out of pity than anything.

Sabriel struggled, her mouth working but no words coming out.

“The Morningstar sent the Fallens ill begotten progeny here,” Raphael informed smoothly, softly. “We are of the same stock. The Fallen deal well in Lust. There were many for a time...then none. Perhaps rules or changes were made to prevent such things. Morningstar, as I once knew him, would probably have wished to have such talents for him and him alone.”

Raphael waved a slender hand to the Northern Guardian. “Sabriel prevented their destruction. Reasoned them to be innocents, despite parentage. Her protection saved them. Prevented a massacre in Eden. Thus she was imprisoned.”

Sabriel didn’t move. Didn’t speak.

Aziraphale laughed softly, a strange kind of relief flooding him. “Jolly good then. I thought it would be something awful!”

His fellow angels head snapped up so fast he feared she might have hurt herself. “You jest! You mock!”

Aziraphale smiled kindly. “I most certainly do not! You did what was right and sacrificed for it!”

Sabriel blustered, taken off guard. “B-but...but I consorted? With demons?”

Aziraphale laughed again and leaned in, his voice dropped to a stage whisper. “It quite alright, dear.”

He finally met her eyes. “So have I.”

Chapter End Notes

We keep oooon rolling.
Also, I broke my fucking toe today so OUCH
“You shouldn’t have touched him.” Pepper reprimanded firmly but gently. Thank goodness she did that first aid course with the Red Cross. Adam had done it with her but, well, he just never got the feel for it the same way she did. She knew how to dress all kind of wounds now but was insistent that no one teased her or called her a nurse.

She was going to be a doctor.

Adam let his eyes drift from Peppers sure hands as she dressed the burn on Mister Crowley’s right hand to the face of the injured demon. His sunglasses were off, a rarity in their presence. His unsettling yellow eyes were staring forward, watching as burns were tended, flinching occasionally.

“Have you ever seen someone turn into a pillar of salt?” He murmured, tapping the fingers of his left hand on his thigh with barely contained agitation. “I was trying to stop that. You all would have been killed.”

Adam wouldn’t have allowed that.

He appreciated the attempt at protecting them, though.

The demon shook his head, a sigh whispering past his dry lips. “Stupid of me. Idiot. We should have come back here first but I wasn’t sure I’d get him to follow. Bringing out repressed memories in the middle of a crowded cafe is just about the most awful idea I’ve ever had.”

Mister Crowley laughed without humor. “I’ll probably get a commendation or something. ‘Traumatized an Archangel’.”

Adam frowned but said nothing because, really? It was stupid. There was no foresight at all. He kind of understood such rash actions, however. Mister Crowley was acting out of love and panic, two powerful emotions that often seemed to trump common sense.

It was still bloody stupid.

The Archangel Gabriel was sleeping away on Mister Crowley’s concrete slab of a sofa. He looked decidedly more rumpled than he had been and his woolen, slate gray coat had burned away to ashes.
during his cafe meltdown. His clothing was burned out in spots and his hair a wild, matted mess from where they were forced to stick him in the trunk of the Bentley.

It was kind of nice seeing such a put together, all powerful asshole so disheveled. He looked decidedly less intimidating.

Brian was standing guard, a fire poker gripped in his two hands, ready to strike if Mister Gabriel showed any signs of losing it again. “I think he’s dreaming. Sh-should we do something about that?”

“Depends on if it’s a nightmare,” Mister Crowley called over his shoulder. “We might get a repeat performance if it is.”

Adam got the distinct impression Mister Crowley may have been speaking from personal experience. The former Anti-Christ stood, crossing to the slumbering archangel, to watch his eyes dance and glow behind his closed lids.

“I’ll handle it.” Adam brooked no debate or discussion. He simply reached out and place a finger at the angels forehead. Yeh. This was a nightmare. He could see little flashes of...of a war? Feathers falling from the sky. Pleas for rationality and mercy. Golden blood and fire. A deep, dark hole in the ground that smelled of something unpleasant.

No. That wouldn’t do at all.

“Dream, Mister Gabriel. Dream of something you like best. Dream of something you love.”

His fingers lingered to be sure his command was heard. He may have just been lucky when he commanded the angel to sleep and was obeyed. Maybe Mister Gabriel was so desperate for orders and direction that any one with a commanding aura could have manipulated him. He could have simply been susceptible to suggestion.

Adam was still met with no resistance. The line in angels brow softened and the eerie, purple glow behind his eyelids faded. The scene playing Mister Gabriels mind seemed to morph, gentle, until Adam could see paper and music notes. A voice was teasing him.

“You’re not supposed to create, Gabby. Is that a hymn?”

A flush of embarrassment. “N-no! It’s...it’s just...oh buzz off will you? I only have a moment before
“my next delivery! Let me have it!”

“Can I have it instead?” A whisper, a sly giggle. “I made something that buzzes. Six legs. Black as soot! Very cute! Will you look? Will keep a secret?”

“...I suppose...IF you play the lyre for me when my piece is done!”

“Anything, Gabby, anyth-”

Adam yanked his hand away. He had stayed too long. It felt invasive. Yet...he was sure he knew that second voice. He couldn't recall from where.

“See anything good?” Mister Crowley drawled, looking over his shoulder at him with an indecipherable expression.

Adam must have hesitated a moment too long because the demon seemed to let it go and pulled his hand away from Pepper, flexing his bandaged fingers.

“Not bad. It’d going to take months to heal right but this will help.” He nodded at Pepper approvingly. “You’re going to do well with Doctor bit. If you move to America you’ll be a millionaire.”

Pepper sat taller, lifting her chin proudly. “If I stay here I’ll do more good.”

“Good people in America too. Good people with riches and status who are valuable to have in your debt.” Mister Crowley smirked at her demonically...yet Adam got the feeling that it was a show. That he was more impressed and approving her choices than he let on.

Mister Crowley was the definition ‘Listen to what I say but for the love of whoever DON’T DO IT.’

Could one hero worship a demon?

Adam may be hero worshipping a demon.

Mister Crowley stood and stalked over to the sleeping angel, stepping over where Wensleydale was snoozing on the floor. For a moment it seemed he was going to kick the celestial or maybe slap him into wakefulness. His muscles certainly coiled in a way that suggested he was considering it.
In the end, however, the demon sighed. “...we need more information. I’ve literally no idea how to go about getting it. I just know that I don’t want Gabriel to blow up my fucking flat.”

Adam could read between the lines on that one. ‘I don’t want Gabriel to blow up my flat because it’s the top floor and it will kill everyone underneath.’ It had nothing to do with personal possessions or the demons own life.

It left them in a rather precarious situation.

“..Mister Fell mentioned a cottage…?” He finally hazarded.

Mister Crowley looked up at him so venomously that the human part of Adam recoiled...but the son of Satan did not. It only met yellow eyes evenly. “Absolutely not. That’s OUR place. No one but Aziraphale and I are allowed there.”

Adam kept standing his ground. “It’s far from people then, right? A good place for if we need to do something that might attract attention. I still have those spell books that Mister Fell gave me. Perhaps...perhaps with Mister Gabriels assistance we can figure out a way to summon Mr. Fell back or summon us to him or...or even find a door! There’s always a door! The more of Mr. Fells aura lingers around the better!”

The demon stared at him, gears ticking behind serpentine eyes. Black clad shoulders sagged. “You have to be so bloody brilliant, yeh? It...it would be the only place besides the bookshop that has any of...of him.”

Pepper gave a thumbs up out of the demons sight and mouthed something clearly to Adam. He nodded.

“Mister Crowley...could you dig up the apple tree in the lot? I know you have some talent in that. I think it may help.”

“That’s a big delay. We should move Gabriel while he’s still unconscious.” Crowley hummed, stroking his chin in thought. “I can’t miracle ALL of you up there-”

“I’ll drive!” Brian piped up so loudly that Wensleydale sat straight up from his napping spot. “There won’t be a dent on her, sir! I’ll get us all to yer cottage in one piece!”

Mister Crowley grimaced. “...it’s a very old car....”
Adam thought about disagreeing with that. He had been the one that put it back in order when it exploded, after all. It was basically new.

Mister Crowley’s desperation to get his angel back won out. “Not one scratch.” Keys were tossed in Brian’s direction and promptly fumbled. “I will curse you if there is anything wrong with my car the next time I see it.”

Adam doubted that.

Brian apparently did as well because he was beaming from ear to ear. “You can count on me, sir!”

Adam thought he could hear Mister Crowley faintly murmur as he turned away “Satan give me strength.”

Chapter End Notes

It's a short chapter because I've fallen behind. Toe breaking and drugs do that, apparently. :P
Beelzebub looked at the reports laid out before her with unconcealed confusion and scorn. “I barely know where to start with thiszzz,” she admitted, idly reaching out to pet the giant fly that was sat in a mildewy cat bed on her desk. It buzzed contentedly, leaning into her hand.

Dagon was sat across from her, their knees pressed tightly together, posture perfect. “I do. We start with the A.Z. Fells surveillance.”

“By the looks of it there’s nothing to surveil,” the Lord of the Flies hummed, flipping at the report. “Vanished. A garden in itsz place.”

“I sent Hastur to have a look. It’s not just a garden. It’s THE garden,” Dagon leaned across the desk, poking aggressively at their report. “It’s dead now. Apparently London isn’t a good spot for a holy garden. The only living thing left is a tree.”

“Is Hasszzstur still lurking about?”

“No. I recalled him. The less Crowley sees of us the better.”

Beelzebub nodded in agreeance even if this fact annoyed her to no end. Their inability to effectively dispose of or rein in the Serpent was an unending source of aggravation for her. It made her particularly impotent.

“And Crowley. How is he faring with his lover gone?”

Dagon snorted. “What do you mean ‘lover’? I’ve been monitoring this wretched courtship for seven terrible years. I’m surprised a pine forest didn’t pop up where that blessed shop is. It would have been very fucking apt!”

“Fine. How is he dealing with his wank material being gone?” Beelzebub allowed a small wicked smile to tease at her lips.

Dagon snickered. “Hard to say. Hastur didn’t see him. I think he has a hand in my next report, though.”

Beelzebub huffed, giving a faint glare to the Lord of the Files, before picking up the next clipboard. There was a silence as she read over the report.
Then she read it again.

“...are you zzzzzsuggesting-” her tone was baffled, tight- “that Crowley haszzzzz kidnapped an Archangel?”

“Not just him. Our Dark Majesty’s estranged child, as well.”

Beelzebub read the paper again. “...which one. Which angel. Michael?”

“Ah. Well. It’s hardly important,” Dagon hummed, attempting to evade the question. In doing this they inadvertently answered. “If you look at the next-”

“It was Gabriel, wazzzzsn’t it?” Beelzebub sneered at the report as if it personally offended her.

“Nearly toppled a cafe. Large spike of Holy Power. Sound of Celestial Harmony.’ That’s Gabriel havin’ a fit.”

Dagon sighed. “My Lord-”

“Where did they take him after?”

“I know not. Security cameras suggest that he was unconscious and they shoved him in the boot of Crowley’s automobile.”

Beelzebub let out a terrible bark of laughter. “Serveszz him right. Still, I’d like to know what they do with him. I want this information before the day iszz out.”

Dagon nodded, hastily writing something on their clipboard. “Check my next report.”

Beelzebub did, reading quietly once again as Dagon scratched and scribbled their notes, making a record to send off to His Majesty. “…hm. You’ll have to explain this one, I’m afraid. I don’t see how it’s related.”

“Well, Ligurs files indicated Eden wasn’t in the possession of heaven but, rather, Lost. A second rebellion took it away.”

Beelzebub looked to their fellow Lord incredulously. “A second rebellion? When?”
“Five thousands years ago was Ligurs best guess. Give or take a few centuries,” Dagon informed primly.

“Nonsense. If there was a second rebellion we’d have far more in our number than we currently have.” Beelzebub snarled more at the offending piece of paper she was holding than Dagon.

“Ligur theorized that there are no more Fallen. That, perhaps, She would rather see offenders destroyed than join our ranks.” Dagon nodded approvingly. “It makes sense.”

“I know it’s been a while but...that doesn’t sound quite right, does it?” Beelzebub once again reached to scratch at her flies hair head, taking comfort in its buzzing. “She is hardly the type to order executions.”

“They attempted to execute the Principality. Failed as we did with Crowley but...they did it without even a trial.” Dagon’s lip curled, truly sickened by the notion of punishment without even a statement of sins and wrong doing.

“Uppity Archangels with fat heads tried to execute one of their own. Ones that think they knew justice because they believe themzszelves morally zzssuperior. I doubt that order came from Her.” Beelzebub picked up a pen, making her own notes on the report. “Say this second group of rebels stole and entire fucking garden, for what reason? Why have they stayed hidden for so long and why return now? Why take a bookshop?”

“I’m afraid I don’t have that information.” Then, at Beelzebub withering glare, Dagon hastily added. “YET.”

Beelzebub nodded sharply. “Yet. I want all you can find. I want to know if this is a threat or an advantage. I also want Hastur topside again and trailing Gabriel. I must know what Crowley is doing with him.”

Dagon made more hasty notes. “Shall we offer assistance? Our Majesty’s son is involved, after all.”

“Not yet. Let us see where the traitor goes with all this. If he’s being soft let him suffer. If he’s giving Gabriel a hard time, well, perhaps we can help him make it harder.” She grinned. “I’ll do it perszzzonally.”

Dagon laughed and stood. “You have some aggression to get out, Lord?”

Beelzebub picked up her fly, cuddling it close to her chest. “Oh my dear Dagon. You’ve no idea.”
shhh, actual plot progression coming soon. :P
Aziraphale waited. His words seemed to echo in their well decorated prison allowing the other two angels plenty of time to mull the tale he had weaved them over. He kept himself relatively poised, ready to spring to his if needed. He wasn’t worried about Sabriel but….

Well.

The second archangel ever created could be something to warrant concern.

“A demon and an angel helped to thwart the Great Plan,” Sabriel finally broke the silence, as if she needed to hear her own voice. “I guess it must have been different than the ineffable one for you to survive!”

Aziraphale modded stiffly, being sure to keep Raphael in his line of sight. The ancient angel had moved but he wasn’t flipping cards anymore either. He wasn’t sure if this was cause for alarm or not.

“Croooooowley.” Sabriel rolled the name about on her tongue in a way that made Aziraphale flinch. It was as if she was savouring it, tasting it.

He didn’t like it.

“You paint quite the picture,” she continued, not noticing his discomfort. “A noble demon willing to walk through flame and holy water. A trickster with a heart of gold. What does he look like? Handsome? Pretty?”

Aziraphale squirmed but could find no reason to deny her an answer. “Ah. W-well. Um. He has this nice mop of red hair that curls rather fetchingly when it’s long but he’s been wearing it short lately.”
“A ginger! How perfectly lovely!” Sabriel giggled happily. “I always did fancy gingers. Raphael claims HE inspired the Lord to create the first ginger angel!”

Raphael said nothing. His eyes were closed, posture laid back. He may have been asleep.

Aziraphale doubted it.

“Tell us more! Red hair isn’t enough to form a good mental picture.”

The principality was beginning to feel strangely possessive of his dear friend. Yet he continued. “He’s tall and slender. Wherever he goes humans look him over and I have my work cut out for me inspiring if not chastity then basic decency.”

Sabriel grinned salaciously. “Sex on legs.”

That was it. He simply couldn't any longer. “Really! Must you? He’s brilliant and kind and selfless yet you only want to know how his arse looks in tight pants!”

“I hadn’t asked that. Does his arse look good in tight pants?”

*Phenomenal*, he thought despite himself. He kept this information to himself in favour of pouting like a child who was asked to share.

He fully realized he was being ridiculous.

He didn’t mind.

Truthfully Crowley made him feel a bit ridiculous at all times.

“Pray tell, Principality,” Raphael spoke suddenly, gravely, “did once this ‘Crowley’ go by a different name?”
“Oh! You mean before the Fall?” Aziraphale began to prattle nervously. “Well, I don’t rightly know! All those names are lost, after all, and even he wouldn’t be able to tell me-”

“Thou is knowing that is not what I meant.” The archangel’s eyes were still closed, face to the golden ceiling.

Aziraphale found himself worrying the ring on his pinky finger. “Ah...well...he...far be it for me to Dead Name someone!”

“Dead name?” He heard Sabriel question faintly but she was overpowered by the force of Raphael.

“I ask thee do it this once. Once and I’ll not ask again.” Raphael finally opened his onyx eyes, fixing a piercing gaze on Aziraphale. “This I promise.”

With great reluctance he let the name spill forth. “Crawley. Serpent of Eden. The Original Temptation.”

He barely heard Sabriel’s soft gasp, too focused was he on the Archangel. For a moment they regarded each other steadily, infinite black meeting endless blue.

Then Raphael smiled. “Ah. Very good then.”

Aziraphale blinked. “Is it?”

“Oh yes. The best news.” Raphael sighed happily and let his head drop back on the fainting couch. “‘Tis nice to be vindicated.”

He began to casually flip and shuffle cards once again. There was a distinct feeling of dismissal.

It left Aziraphale bristling.

Pieces began to fall into place. Crowley had said once he hung stars in the sky, swirled nebulas at the tips of his fingers, tasted the very essence of earth own sun. It had only been mentioned once but Aziraphale clung to the small bit of information, the only real tidbit Crowley had provided. The angel had never questioned it, never asked for more. He cherished the image of Crowley standing in a void, brow pinched in that way it did when he was thinking things through, and dropping something unseen into the universe.

Sabriel had just said Raphael suggested the first ginger angel.
Raphael took students, managed those he felt were creative.

Raphael managed Creators.

Aziraphale also knew for one to be vindicated they needed to have some suspicion clear. What choice had plagued Raphael so long that he felt vindicated hearing of Crowley’s great deeds?

He could only think of one.

A righteousness born of injustice was building in his chest. He found in him, finally, the strength to stand. If Crowley could ask questions to God then Aziraphale could manage one to an archangel!

He never got a chance.

It was at that time a door appeared where there had been none and a distantly familiar angel stepped in. Aziraphale made the shotgun choice to refocus his building indignation on this new face.

“Ah! Aziraphale! Eastern Guardian! Principality!” The voice was smooth as silk and cool as arctic water. The owner was of a wide hipped, wide shouldered build that spoke of one that had seen the front line of battle. Their face and deep green eyes were as shrewd as they had ever been.

“Kushiel,” he bowed his head politely. “I would say it’s nice to see you but circumstances make that hard.”

The battle hardened angel frowned. “Now, I greeted you by your full title, Aziraphale. Will you not do me the same?”

“I’ll not until I know your worthy of it,” he replied, surprising himself with his own boldness. Oh dear, perhaps he should soften himself?

“Ah. So this little demon lover has been telling you all kinds of ugliness.” Kushiel gestured to Sabriel as if she were an ant to be stepped on. Sabriel kept her head bowed passively.

Aziraphale made the unilateral decision that he would not soften himself in the face of such rudeness!
“She has actually been very charitable in her descriptions,” he informed the Guardian of the Southern Gate smoothly. “She’s displayed amazing grace.”

Sabriel made a small noise, like a whine, in the back of her throat. He didn’t take his eyes from his captor, dared not let them see weakness.

Kushiel smiled tightly. “Well. That isn’t why I’m here. West and I wish to have words with you, Aziraphale. We need to know where you stand in the world to come.”

That didn’t sound good.

Kushiel bowed ever so slightly, gesturing to the mahogany door. “This way please.”

Aziraphale wanted to refuse. Let him be a prisoner. He’d rather that then the pawn in some half cocked game-

Go. Agree to nothing. Just go and see.

It was Raphael’s voice echoing inside his own head.

He swallowed his indignation, his questions, his stubborn retorts.

“Lead the way, then.”

The garden that occupied where A.Z. Fell and Co.’s spot had died, leaving only a trembling sapling. As Crowley stepped into the lot the last of the dried grass crumbled beneath his foot only to be carried away on the evening breeze. He watched them go, wishing he was going with them.

It would be better than the ache he found himself saddled with.

He did a half circle about the sapling, his shovel weighing heavily where he had it heft over his shoulder. The roots weren’t that deep. No doubt they’d find little purchase in the foundations of SoHo. It wouldn’t thrive here.
It probably wouldn’t thrive in his orchard either but...well. He’d cross that bridge when it came time.

That seemed to be the philosophy he’d have to live by for the foreseeable future.

Crowley set to work, ignoring the ache in his burned hand as his shovel broke ground and the threat of actual physical labour set in. This burn was nothing. This labour was nothing. The ache was soul deep and overpowering.

Aziraphale was beyond where he could feel for the first time in centuries and it was like some part of him was missing. He hated it. He hated it with a passion, even. When had he put so much of himself in a fussy angel that it felt like his lung and heart were pulled out the moment he was gone?

He knew the answer.

He didn’t regret the answer either.

Just kinda hated it.

“When I get you back—” he spoke between laborious, having not heard his voice enough in the past hour—“I’ll take you to the Ritz. I’ll take you on a picnic. I’ll take you the bloody moon. When I get you back I’ll force you to look at me and lay it all out for you. I’ll shed my skins like a fucking Lyndwyrm until I’m raw and blood and your for the taking.”

He levered the shovel under the thin roots, freeing the sapling from SoHo’s brittle soil. “When I get you back I’ll crucify myself. I’ll let all the power of Heaven and Hell have a go at me so you can see just how serious I am. Then I’ll get that bottle of scotch I’ve been hoarding for the past three hundred years, pour it into the blessed chalice that Jesus Christ himself took his final sips from and offer it all to you. I’ll take no drink for myself. It’ll all be for you.”

A sack was needed. He didn’t bring one. He threw down the shovel and divested himself of his jacket and laid it flat.

On this he laid the tree. On this he tied the roots and dirt.

He was able to get another coat. It wasn’t precious.

With the work done he stood back and finally looked to the sky. “Please. Is it too late? Is he gone? Is this for nothing? I need to know before I invest more. Before I drag human children and a daft
archangel through some unknowable torment.”

The sky was silent.

He expected nothing less.

He hefted the tree into his arms and found it light.

“...when you get back-” he whispered to the wilting leaves- “I’ll love you better than anyone has ever loved another.”

A step was taken. Another.

“Just...come back.”

Chapter End Notes

i’M NOT SORRY.
Eden was no longer a garden.

There were trees and shrubs still, yes, but the vast majority had been overrun by housing. Dwelling upon dwelling stacked on top of each other as if Escher had been given a chance to control both architecture and civic planning.

Aziraphale was strongly reminded of London around the time that would come to be known as the Industrial Revolution. It felt dirty and progressive, totally devoid of respect for nature and her gifts.

He supposed it made sad sense that thing had developed this way. Two people had bloomed into billions. Three rogue angels, a handful of humans, and some half breed demons had no trouble becoming a rather decent population.

Oh! And what a strange, ill looking population they were!

Aziraphale had a few different printings of Lovecraft’s Shadow Over Innsmouth at his shop. It was a clever, uneasy story about humans and occult forces coming together in ways they were never meant to.

He was reminded of that story now.

These people tread between human and ‘other’. He couldn’t call them ugly but there was an oddness in many that set of some instinctual ‘uncanny valley’ part of him. Gold mottled in sallow flesh, hair of unnatural but dull colours, wings that were just slightly off kilter or missing patches of feathers, demonic animal forms that were crooked or just off model.

The worst was the eyes.

The empty, hopeless, sad eyes.
Aziraphale considered that he was being uncharitable in his first impressions. Perhaps it was a soul deep bias rearing its ugly head once again. He could feel love amongst these people. Affection and loyalty. They weren’t dead inside.

Yet as South lead him through dirty, winding streets he also felt waves of fear, anger, and such negativity that it cut him at the knees. This was not a happy place.

It didn’t even have the sun. Above them was open with white Nothingness.

Kushiel glanced behind him, noting his disturbed expression. “Most of these ones are from the original half breed demons. They bred in again with humans and—” their lip curled in disgust—“our own flesh and blood. They aren’t worth much, these ones. Good as soldiers and doing dirty jobs but not much else.”

Aziraphale roiled under his skin. He had, unfortunately, seen enough ghettos and cramped shanty towns to recognize such talk for what it was: bigotted drivel.

The path became nicer, cleaner. More plants and well maintained trees. The homes, while still compact to make the best use of the limited space, were nicer and more meticulous. The people on this side of the garden were prettier as well. More angelic. If it weren’t for the distinct lack of Her Grace he wouldn’t have been surprised if these were angels sprung from Her hand.

He was reminded of Heaven in just how sterile and cool this section felt. Even the plants seemed to lack innovation or desire for more.

It was here that he was taken to a rather large home. Far too large for the limited space. It was decadent, pretty and well maintained by servants that looked to be from the first part he had been led through. He was reminded of a Plantation Home he visited once when he and Crowley had taken a holiday to Jamaica. They had done the tour.

He had offered a sad, impotent prayer for deeds long done afterwards.

Aziraphale had already decided that whatever offer South and West had for him would be rejected without waffling or politeness. He’d rather be in a cell for all eternity than participate in such an obvious show of oppression and classism! Yet...Raphael had asked him to listen and it made sense. They needed information and he was the one in the best position to get it.
He was a secret agent!

The moment he had the thought he wished he hadn’t. He found himself quite jittery all of a sudden and a memory of a night in nineteen-forty one wormed its way to the forefront of his brain….

Within the home there was an elegant dining room with a long, sleek table made of white marble. Kushiel pulled out one of the white velvet chairs and gestured, forcefully, for Aziraphale to sit. “West will be with us shortly. He was never quite able to heal himself after the Incident.”

Aziraphale sat, back ramrod straight. “Incident?” He questioned, sensing an opening to learn more.

Kushiel gave him a strange look. “You don’t know?”

Ah. Raphael had mentioned in passing wondering how they explained the missing garden away. “I didn’t even know you had taken Eden until I woke up in that cell,” Aziraphale informed him primly. Oh! “Speaking of, where is my shop? In tact? The books at least!”

“We left it in the Lower Quarter. It would have been an eyesore up here and, really, human books? What use do we have for that?” Kushiel said haughtily. “I’d expected those miscreants have tore it apart by now.”

Aziraphale’s heart sank. “Oh.”

Kushiel wrinkled their nose. “Wait, that was really your place? We thought you just happened to be inside. Why would you collect such…dusty things?”

“I like them. Why else?” He tilted his head slightly, daring the other Guardian to insult his hobby further. “Why would you do all of this?”

Kushiel smiled sharply. “For love, of course.”

Aziraphale was an expert in sensing love. He had yet to feel any since he came into this half of the garden.

“For Glory! To have what we made!” A booming, pleasant voice rattled the walls and caused Aziraphale to jump in his seat. He turned, trying to lay eyes on the owner.

Jophiel had changed the most. He was still broad shouldered and thin waisted, his white hair and fluffy beard as pleasing as ever. A fine specimen of stereotypical human manliness that could give Gabriel a few lessons in physical appeal.
He wore a blindfold, which was new. His ears were also carefully bandaged over. Belatedly, Aziraphale realized that West was not only blind but partially deaf. That no doubt explained how loud he was when he spoke.

Blindness didn’t hinder the angels movements. He breezed through as if he could see it all with perfect clarity and took a seat directly across from Aziraphale while Kushiel stayed standing at his left, looming over him. “It’s good to meet you again, Zira. I can tell you’ve been given a new rank. How good for you! How is it, being a principality?”

Aziraphale squirmed. “It’s...rewarding work though I’m more of a free agent these days.”

“So I’ve been told! Threw the Great Plan right back Her face! Never thought you’d have the bollocks on ya t’doo that, gotta say.”

Aziraphale winced. Really, he was quite loud. His ears were ringing. “I didn’t throw anything in her face! I merely saw...saw a convenient loophole! If anything I was throwing the Great Plan in Gabriels face.”

Jophiels smile took a darker edge. “All the better,” he murmured, voice dripping with malice. Then he was back to being pleasant. “Dreadfully sorry for the abduction, mate, but these things are often hard to do gracefully! We have important things to discuss with you so...if you’ll give me the floor for a bit?”

It seemed he already had the floor but Aziraphale nodded courteously anyways. He was here for information and a good monologue was an effective way to get it. “Do go on.”

“I’ll make it brief, no worries. Not big on drawing things out and wheedling. If a man knows his mind he’ll be able to make a decision quickly!” Jophiel laughed boisterously. “It’s simply this, old friend: Eden and its people are dying. It’s over crowded. It’s dirty. It doesn’t get much sun and Kushiel and I are having trouble keeping it all going with miracles alone! So we want to relocate.”

Aziraphale blinked. “You...want to come back to earth?”

“Exactly! My progeny deserve a better shot at life! We all do!”

Despite himself Aziraphale found himself relaxing, smiling. “Oh dear. That shouldn’t be a problem. I’m sure if we spoke with Michael-”

“No,” Jophiel shook his head, chuckling in a grandfatherly way. “There will be no negotiations. When this first started Gabriel, a mere choir boy, very nearly killed me. Then Raphael came and spoke of repairing my own flesh and blood! I won’t have MY people destroyed or altered...so the only alternative is stamp out all that would.”

He tensed again. “You mean-”
“War! War, East! It’s what we’re good at! I remember you and that flamin’ sword! Ribbon dancers would bleed for such grace! Between the three of us and all my children we can stomp out heaven and hell alike! Give them conflict they’ve always craved and humble them!” He was beaming. “We’d show mercy to those that were wise but the others? Let them rest with Her!”

Aziraphale gaped, eyes wide. He looked to Kushiel at his side and found the other angel smiling in a sharp toothed way that made the ichor in his veins run icy. “J-Jophile that’s—that’s--!”

“Don’t worry about the humans. Our agents say you’re fond of ’em. Their just pawns like the rest of us. I’ll take good care of them once all other powers are properly dealt with!” Jophiel stood, grin wider than ever. “So how about it, Aziraphale? Come! Help us bring a new order to things!”

A hand was extended to him.

He stared at in horror.

“Not for all the kingdoms in the world!”

His own words echoed in the vast chamber. Jophiel had heard him. He wanted him to hear him.

The hand was dropped but another, Kushiel’s, was pressed to his shoulder. Jophiel’s smile melted to nothing.

“Then I’m afraid we have a problem, Aziraphale.”

“I’ve never been in a car before,” Gabriel slurred, voice thick with the first sleep he’d ever had. “Is nice. Fast. Can it go faster?”

Brian yelped as the engine revved itself and clutched the wheel tighter. “Don’t ask to do that! It has a bloody mind of its own!”

Adam sat to Gabriels right in the back seat. He briefly considered trying to ease the angel back into sleep but it seemed that he was too dazed and confused to cause any real trouble. He let it be for the moment. It was late in the night and he felt like they were nearing their destination. The Bentley knew the way well.

Pepper leaned forward from her spot to Gabriel’s left and looked up at his face. “How are you feeling, Mister Gabriel?”
Gabriel blinked at her slowly, processing the question. “...fuzzy.”

“Fuzzy?”

The archangel nodded. “Is this what it’s like all the time after sleeping?”

“Actually!” Wensleydale turned in the front passenger seat, adjusting his glasses as he went. “You’ve probably over slept! Over sleeping can make everything seem strange! Especially if you were having dreams.”

“Angels don’t dream,” Gabriel yawned into his bound hands. “They don’t sleep either.”

“You were dreaming, though,” Adam informed him with a tilt of his head and curious look. “I apologize for the invasion but I saw it. I guess it was more of a memory, though. It seemed like one.”

Gabriel was quiet a moment, violet gaze fixed blankly on the speedometer. Adam strongly suspected the self important angel wasn’t even going to acknowledge his observation.

He was surprised when he did.

“I had a friend. A good friend. My only friend.” Gabriel murmured distantly, eyes unblinking. “I pushed her into the Pit because I was told to. I forgot I did that ...”

Adam frowned. “How do you forget betraying a friend?”

“You have a break down and drink from the Lethe,” Gabriel informed, letting his head fall back to the headrest. “You erase them from your mind. Pretend you did nothing wrong. I didn’t. I was told to.”

“Just following orders, huh?” Pepper sniffed indignantly.

“Yes...yes I suppose so.” Gabriel hummed and closed his eyes again, making no attempt at escape. Perhaps he simply hadn’t thought to yet.

Adam let it be. “I think we’re close,” he told Brian and, as if wishing to prove how right he was, the Bentley wrenched its wheel in Brian’s hands and turned up a long, hidden driveway. Brian scowled.

“I wanted to drive it...and it hasn’t even let me put the foot on the brake or switch gears,” he pouted at the wheel crossly. Adam laughed.
His phone buzzed in his pocket and he took a glance at it.

*Got the tree.*

*Hoofing to a pay phone.*

*Text when you’re at the cottage.*

*Station someone next to the landline.*

“Mister Crowley got what the tree!” He informed the car occupants with a smile. “He says someone should set up shop next to the landline once we get to the cottage.”

“How is him calling on the land line going to help us get it up here?” Wensleydale asked, twisting in his seat again.

“Dunno, honestly. Mister Crowley is being very insistent about it, though.” Adam shrugged a little. “Must be something demony?”

“Demonic,” corrected Gabriel, sounding a bit more like himself. “He’s going to travel on the land lines. Stupid, really. If the connection drops he’ll come out *anywhere.*”

Adam frowned up at the angel. “Mister Crowley isn’t stupid. He’s worried.”

“Same difference.” Gabriel said dismissively. “Worry makes fools of people. You’re too young to know that.”

Adam rolled his eyes and looked out at the dark night passing by.

He hoped he’d *never* be old enough to be so cold.

Chapter End Notes

If you aren't picturing West to have the same build as Gaston mixed with Santa I have done my job poorly.
A few snippets to tie things together.

Before it All

“Come. Play cards with me.”

“Willst thou teach me the rules?”

“No. Watch, though. Perhaps you’ll glean them.”

“I am not playing with thou then, am I?”

“Ha. I suppose not. Still. Sit with me.”

“Thou only needs to ask.”

There was silence as cards were shuffled in practiced, unknowable hands.

“Are you upset with me?”

“Nay. Never. Thou’s reasons are not mine to understand.”

Four cards were laid out, face down.

“You may ask a question, if you like.”

“Hm. Perhaps I shall. Give me a moment to decide which one.”

“Take as long as you need.”

Four more cards, placed below the first.

“I won’t apologize. I cannot. I can only feel regretful that things happened as they did. I fear I
asked too much of you. Michael had many more than you, she could have spared some. You gave up your favorite.”

A card laid face up. A Joker. To the bottom of all the others.

“I had no favorites. They were all dear.”

“Do not lie.”

“...he was quite talented. His wit and worth made me proud.”

“Then why choose him?”

“Because he made me proud. Dare I send the weakest flame and let it be extinguished? Or do I send the brightest and hope they have it in their soul to rise up again? Nay. I chose the best in hopes that they’d ignite again. I pray he forgives me.”

“He will not.”

“I know. I still pray.”

The first four cards were flipped. King of Diamonds, King of Spades, Queen of Clubs, King of Hearts.

“Did you know a snake was the one that tempted my dear Eve?”

“A snake?”

“A part time one, yes. One with a silver tongue.”

“...I’m sorry.”

“Don’t be. It led to an... interesting happening.”

The King of Hearts was slid across the table, next to the Joker.

“Oh?”

“Mhm. I do believe my Eastern Guardian has given fire to Adam. His sword is gone.”
“Ha! Really? I spent a long time on that sword!”

“Really. I may need to give him a new mission. He’ll certainly be ineffective without a weapon...but...but I saw something fascinating. I didn’t expect it.”

“What was it?”

“Is that your question?”

“Perhaps.”

“The snake and he spoke.”

“Argued?”


“...huh.”

“Yes. So interesting. I wish to leave it be. You know how I like things that surprise me.”

“Thou truly didst not know it would happen this way…?”

The face down cards were flipped upwards. Blanks. Four of them. Impossible.

Another card, laid beneath the Joker and the King of Hearts. Ace of Spades.

The dealer frowned. Gathered them all into a deck and passed it to their second son. A gift.

“I truly did not. Isn’t it wonderful?”

“It’s frightening. You not knowing.”
“Frightening, yes...but a good sign.”

“Tis it? Truly?”

“It is, Raphael, it is.”

Present Day

They rose from the ground in a bubbling of brimstone and melting asphalt.

Beelzebub smoothed the lines of their wrinkled suit, walking off a short distance to admire themselves in the window of a closed shop. “Idiots trying to put me in a skirt. Remind me to boil that one’s head when get back.”

Dagon joined her at her side. “They were only trying to out fit you to pass, my Lord.” No scales lined their face. Their knee length skirt and fitted blazer were of a particularly grotesque, brown houndstooth. “I like skirts.”

“Good for you. I don’t.” Beelzebub looked up and down the moonlit street. Not a soul was in sight. This was the kind of small town where everyone went to bed at a reasonable time and woke up bright and early. Boring. “How far off from the archangels last position are we?”

“About an hour. We should arrive shortly after they do.” Dagon looked just as unimpressed as she did. “His Majesty could have let us open a gate a bit closer.”

“He could have. He didn’t. He wants us to fail.” Beelzebub began to saunter down the sidewalk, eyeing the quiet, unoccupied automobiles as they went. “If we succeed he’ll have to figure out how to best use a captured angel...if we fail he’ll get to punish us. I’m sure his ill begotten son and Crowley being involved has increased his hesitancy.”

“Our Master has been gun shy lately.”

“Yeh. He haszzzz.” The Lord of Hell crossed the street without looking both ways like a true rebel.
“This isn’t about him, though.”

“I know that,” Dagon chuckled, running her tongue obsessively over her new, human teeth, admiring the novelty of it. “What will you do once you see him? Kill him? Torture him?”

“I’ll see what mood strikeszzz me.” Beelzebub grinned back over her shoulder. “I’d settle for punching him in the nose, if it comes down to it.”

There it was. The perfect automobile, parked outside of an inn. It had no top, allowing open air to pass over it passengers. It body was black as the night itself, shining in the moonlight. Beelzebub buzzed happily, rubbing her hands together.

“Oh. I’ve always wanted to do this!”

“...we could just fly, you know. Lots of room here for wings.” Dagon circled the machine doubtfully.

“They’re driving, yeszzz? I wish to as well. I haven’t tried before.” She hopped over the side, behind the wheel, and flexed her hands around it. “We get out so rarely. Let’szzz enjoy it.”

Dagon wrung their hands. “Ah. Uhm. You need a license for this.”

“Joy riding?”

“Driving.”

Beelzebub nose wrinkled. A wave of her hand and the car roared to life and the passenger door swung open. “Humanszzz do it all the time. It can’t be hard.”

“Humans invented it because they don’t have wings.” There was a note of desperation in the Lord of the Files voice. They made no move to get in.

“If they suddenly got wings they’d still drive for fun. I have a chance and I wish to drive.” Beelzebub glared at their companion. “Get in or I’ll back over you when I take off.”
Dagon sighed and slipped into the seat, pulling the safety belt snug around their self. “Take it slow at first. The less attention we draw the better.”

“Right. Slow.” She shifted to reverse, cut the wheel, and hit the gas. They backed into a light pole to fast and hard the thing teetered and fell with a crash. Beelzebub grinned, waved the damage from the back bumper away.

Dagon clutched the dashboard. “Beelzebub!”

“Lighten up. This will be a good experience!” The car was put in drive.

A squealing of tires and, perhaps, a demons shriek heralded the departure of two Lords of Hell.

Crowley was hissing with barely contained annoyance induced rage by the time he found a working telephone box. The advent of mobile phone meant that municipalities took very little care of phone boxes anymore, leaving them standing around as useless monoliths for people to take a drunken piss in, shag against, or shoot up within while being not at all functional or convenient.

He had made the suggestion they cut costs by putting off repairs.

Karma was a bitch and it LOVED Crowley.

This one had seen better days but when he lifted the receiver he at least got a dial tono and a computerized voice demanding coin from him. That was a plus. A wave of his hand later and all Anti-semetic graffiti, rude messages, and suspicious fluids were wiped away. Much better.

He sent off another brief message to the kids, informing them he was ready and waiting to call. The tree was hugged tighter to him.

It was risky, going this way, but also the fastest way to get from Point A to Point B without having to wait on each other.
He sat on the curb, gently placing the sapling next to him, and looked at the moon high above.

Patience was hard...but he had six thousand years of practice.

Gabriel’s office was empty. Michael frowned at the space as if it were personally offending to her. He should have been back by now. Even a suit fitting didn’t take this long. Granted, she wasn’t quite sure how much time had actually passed but she felt sure it was late at night on earth.

He hadn’t even reported his findings. Very unprofessional.

When Gabriel wasn’t in his office he was often in the mail room. Some habits were hard to break, after all, and that was built into his nature. He would hide away here, sometimes, when stressed or recentering himself.

He wasn’t in the mail room. Michaels frown deepened.

This...was worrisome.

Where was Gabriel?

“Oh, this is... nice. ” Gabriel looked around the foyer of the cottage with genuine appreciation. This place generated love in much the same way as the sun generated heat. It was everywhere, all around. It had started at the garden gate and had only intensified with every step he took.

Love, love, love, love.

It was overwhelming.
It was wonderful.

It was terrifying. This is what Aziraphale and the demon had built together? How...how did such a thing even happen?

It left him feeling odd. Longing for something that wasn’t his.

Or maybe this longing wasn’t his own. For all the love in this place there was quite a bit of pining and fear. They didn’t know they loved each other. They only knew their own feelings.

Idiots.

The cottage was charming, though. Filled with overflowing bookshelves, neatly organized records, overstuffed furniture, a mantle crowded with picture frames and knick-knacks, and many well tended potted plants.

He had never understood the difference between a shelter and a home before. He had always thought they were just different names for the same thing. He got it, now. THIS was a home.

It was lovely.

The human girl led him to one of those decadent looking couches and instructed him to sit down while the other three began puttering about with a purpose. He supposed he could leave but...well...he looked a mess and felt awful. He’d never live it down if he went back and was forced to admit he had been kidnapped by a demon and some humans.

Best to wait for a chance to make himself look good. Find an advantage that he could report back with and pretend like he was playing a long con.

Not that angel could con!

...right?

“Fantastic!” The Anti-Christ sighed in relief and began plucking ancient, leather bound texts from the
shelves. “Not all of the old spell books are here but there’s a few! The runes and summoning circles one is all we need, I hope.”

The girl left the angel, investigating the books. “Can we pull it off?” She asked, taking one from him and flipping through the pages.

“Hopefully.”

Gabriel rolled his eyes. Humans working the forces of nature. How cocky!

“The phone is hooked up! Text Mister Crowley!” The bespectacled boy called from a back room. The anti-christ pulled out his phone and began typing. The driver boy stood at the door, tire iron in hand, guarded and ready for a threat that didn’t exist yet.

The archangel had to admit, this was a tightly knit unit. He had some subordinates that could learn a thing or two from how effectively these four communicated.

For the first time in many years Gabriel felt fond.

“Oh God above! What did you do to him!” Sabriel’s voice, he realized. He must have passed out at some point. He didn’t remember being dragged back to his prison but his knees told a tale of rough treatment. They were scraped badly, his trousers torn.

Damn. They didn’t make trousers like this anymore.

“We did nothing. He did this to himself! He refused to see reason.” He was dropped like a sack of potatoes to the floor. Ah...it was cool under his damp cheek.

“Did you drown him?!” Sabriel was close to him, her voice shrill.

“Among other things. He’s far more stubborn than we thought he’d be! Don’t fuss. He’ll heal up.”

“Yes, he will.” Raphael’s voice was tight. Anxious.
“In any case, he doesn’t have his sword. West is VERY displeased. He’ll probably visit personally come tomorrow. We NEEDED that sword!”

A gentle hand was stroking his curls. Comforting him. It worked but they weren't the slender hands he craved.

“We can’t bring everyone back over without it. There's too many. Raphael won’t work again.”

“Good. Perhaps we should all die. We’ve been awful! This is a sign that it's time to stop.”

“This is a sign of nothing. SHE has no power here. No. We have a back up plan.”

“You do?”

“We do. An archangel alone cannot give us what we need...but perhaps a principality, archangel, and guardian can force the lock.”

The hand in his hair still, trembling. It was getting hard to concentrate. Their voices sounded far off.

“Wait you don’t—you can’t!”

“We can….”

 Darkness crept up on him.

“And we will.”
Interlude: Before the Fall

Chapter Notes

You've all been so kind. Have this bonus, yeh?

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Before the Fall

“‘Tis beautiful, child.” Raphael tilted his head, as if he could take in all angles of the creation with such a simple motion.

“Is it? It’s much the same as all the others.” Eyes of molten gold narrowed at the outstanding thing. Typical for this one.

“‘Tis not. Other’s did not make it. Thou did.” Raphael smiled as brightly as the star they were appreciating.

His pupil was not convinced. “I can make it better. Brighter.”

“Now, now. More light, more energy. More radiation, yes? Too much and no life will see this place, too little and the same. Find a balance, child.”

“This one isn’t meant for life, then. It’s meant to be harsh. To drive all away and be appreciated from a great distance. Only the ones it wants near can come close.”

“Hm. How lonely.”

“It’s safe.”

“It’s a star, child. What could hurt it?”

“It could hurt others. Not give the light needed when it’s needed. Not provide in the way its meant to.”

“Then temper it.”

“That’s not its nature! It’s meant to be just as it is! Why does it need to change? Perhaps the universe
should change for it instead!"

"...Dear child, what is this about?"

His star maker fretted the edge of his robes...then curled one of his ringlets about his pretty fingers.
"...I went to that meeting against your wishes."

"I had a feeling thou would." Raphael sighed heavily. "Well?"

"It was...meh."

He laughed in that way this one was only able to pry from him. "Meh?" He repeated. Really. This one was so strange and lovely.

"Yeh. A lot of talk. Some good points. Boring, really."

"I have many words for Morningstar but ‘boring’ is not amongst them."

A grin was flashed his way. "Care to share?"

"Nay. He is still a brother."

"Ugh. Fine. Keep your rude words to yourself."

They were silent a moment, watching flares jump from the surface of the star and lash at the sackcloth sky like writhing serpents. The redhead spread his wings, flying in a direction that could be construed as up.

Raphael followed. "Morningstar said something that has placed a shard in thou."

"Ngk." He winced dramatically before stilling himself. "It’s nothing."

"Tis not. You can’t stay still. You are anxious. Is it a doubt? A fear?"

"Please. Don’t make me repeat it. It’ll be in your mind as well. I just...it’s my burden, alright? I thought too hard and now I must take whatever comes."
“Child….” He was touched. Such concern. Such affection. “I wish to help.”

“…you cannot. I’m cursed with this darkness in my chest. I’ve done something very stupid and I expect it will catch up to me soon.”

“What did thou do? I’ll forgive you any thing if only you ask.”

“Will She?” He spat his offer back in his face, seeing it for what it was. A loving gesture that lacked power.

The archangel found suddenly he could meet his eyes. He couldn’t lie.

“Nghhh. I thought so.” He turned his face from him, voice breaking tellingly. “I’m rightly fucked!”

The word echoed in the blackness, fading to another silence. His favorite reached out, caressed one of those twisting flaming tendrils as if it were a living creature. The tremble in his graceful hands did not go unnoticed.

Raphael’s heart broke to watch it. He had a guess as to what had happened. He’d run the Morningstar through if given the chance.

Finally, his student looked up, tears in golden eyes. Fear and despair. Heartbreak.

“She’ll love them more than us, won’t She? All we’ve done and we weren’t good enough. I don’t understand it. Did we do something wrong? Are we unlovable? Is it not for us?...am I?”

“Oh child...oh child.”

I love you dearly. I love you all. She cannot love you all and that is Her pain. There’s too much of Herself in us. It hard to love your reflection. You can only watch it, never touch it.

He didn’t dare say so out loud. It was not his place. He favored an embrace instead, carding fingers through long red hair. “Shh...shh.”

Oh child. Oh child.

Forgive what I must do.

Chapter End Notes
I'll be hiding in my bunker.

Edit: 420 hits. Blaze it.
Warmth was being suffused through his entire being causing him to feel light and airy. The tell tale signs of divine healing. What discomfort and pain that had plagued him before the blackness of unconsciousness took him were far from his body and soul, leaving him feeling soothed. He hummed contentedly, very close to a mellow type of ecstasy.

“There we go, Aziraphale.” Raphael’s fruity tones echoed in his ears, benevolently guiding him towards complete awareness. “Tis mostly thou. I only lead. Thou hast the strength to heal thyself.”

Aziraphale wasn’t sure that was true. If he had strength he most likely would not have found himself in such a dismal situation.

“Tch. Now. Such thoughts only hinder. Think of what thou love’s best instead.”

The thoughts bubbled to the forefront of his mind like champagne. His shop after closing for the day, when the sun set pours through the dusty windows and casts everything in a tangerine light. The crunch of gravel under his shoes as his treads the garden path. Black scales glinting in high light of noon. His favorite chair pulled close to the warm hearth. Yellow eyes catching the fire light. A heavy book in his hands. An unguarded, beautifully fanged smile. Aged red wine with hints of clove. Red hair he itched to touch. Creme brulee. Long legs dangling over the arm of their sofa-

A chuckle purred through his veins. “Ah, me. Ah, my! How dost thou walk about with such love in thine chest? Does it ache?”

Aziraphale sighed, fully aware he was smiling blissfully. “Only when he’s not there.”

“AWWW!”

Sabriel’s voice snapped him to full awareness. He found himself blinking rapidly up at Raphael’s amused face. “Oh dear.”

Raphael laughed and pulled him up until he was sitting. He realized that he had been given a place of honor on Raphael’s fainting couch, the archangel kneeling on the floor at his side.

Sabriel was beaming at him. “You’re so in love! Ohhhh! Do you think he’s coming for you? Will there be a heroic rescue?! How romantic!”
Aziraphale couldn’t help rubbing his face, if only to hide his blush. Really, now, it wasn’t at all like that but he had a feeling that telling Sabriel so would be a waste of good breath. “Perhaps. Yes. I’m sure by now he’s figured out I’ve gone missing. Yet...I wish he wouldn’t.” His teeth worried his lip briefly before he glanced between the two other angels. “Kushiel and Jophiel are...are quite mad, aren’t they?”

Sabriel’s smile snuffed like a lit match meeting a vengeful breeze. Raphael bowed his head regretfully.

“...what will they do to me?” He asked quietly.

“Us.” Raphael murmured. “What will they do to us. No doubt I will be used to make up for thou’s lack of sword.”

A guilty pang clutched in his chest. “Then... what will they do to us?”

Sabriel closed her eyes, unable to bear the fear her words would bring him. “Execution. It’s not needed at all but...but it will be very effective. All that grace poured out at once…”

Ah. He guessed that might be it. “God isn’t in this space, is she? What...what happens to those who die?”

He was met with a deafening silence.

Dread finally found it purchase.

Nonexistence. No soul, no body, no Great Ever After. Just...nothingness.

His breath caught in his chest and he bent over, placing his face between his knees as he forced himself to breathe through the wave of panic. “Oh my. I...hm. I think I preferred the beating. At least I would feel that.”

His situation crashed down on him. A never ending wave of anxiety and finality. Hopelessness. He’d never felt hopeless before. Not even when Satan had risen from the ground and fixed him in his fiery glare. He had a remarkably capable boy at his side then.
Crowley had been there.

Aziraphale’s descent into panic and despair was cut short when Sabriel gasped and let out a strangled cry. He forced himself to look up and added his own little noise or surprise.

Raphael was standing for the first time since he arrived (Hours? Days? He didn’t know.) More than that, his impassive expression had morphed into one of pure concentration, the harness he wore across his chest and back glowing and searing.

His wings fought to uncase themselves, straining valiantly against their binding. He was trying to ‘let go’, attempting to reveal his true form or pull a great amount of power from it.

“Stop it! You’ll hurt yourself!” Sabriel was pleading, looking nervously in the direction where the door seemed to appear. “Or you’ll discorporate us all!”

“Come dawn we may all be much worse than discorporated.” Raphael hissed through clenched teeth. “I don’t need much of mineself. Just a little more. More than healing. More of ME.”

There were blazing yellow suns in the pits of his black eyes and he nearly buckled a moment as the harness seemed to tighten around his chest...only to draw up again, extending a hand to the wall. “I am Archangel Raphael. Second creation of the Almighty. I held reality in my hands. I protect the weak...and have sacrificed greatly, awaiting some great sign that will never find me. In truth, guilt has kept me stagnant. I did something terrible in hopes of good returns and have doubted myself since that moment.”

He flared, wings extending only to be pinched and crushed to his body with an audible snap of bone. “I will not let harm come to pass on innocents. I CANNOT. I will not wallow in self pity any longer.”

The archangel pointed accusingly at the wall. “NOW LISTEN! Thou WILL open to me!” He was nearly screaming, forcing Aziraphale and Sabriel to jump back. “Reveal yourself!”

The wall remained resolutely unchanged.

“Nay! The time for reason had long passed!Now you meet coercion and threat! OPEN. SHOW THYSELF! I have made plenty like thou and will unmake thou as I please! Tarry not if thou values a continued existence!”

Still, nothing. Aziraphale’s heart sank.

Raphael’s teeth clenched. “A battle of wills, then? An unstoppable force to unmovable object? It is a battle thou willst lose.”

Nothing.

Raphael snarled. Stamped his foot.
“YOU STUPID FUCKING THING. YOU DISAPPOINTMENT. YOU COWARDLY ENTRANCE! OPEN LEST I RUST YOUR HINGES!”

Noth- wait. Aziraphale could just see it. A rectangular outline. Faint, but present.

Raphael grinned back at them in a way that Aziraphale found frightfully familiar. Comfort washed through him.

“Tis a start.”

Chapter End Notes

A short one before a long one. :P
When the phone rang Wensleydale answered it with the kind of gravity that suggested he had waited his entire life for this one moment. He had been thinking about something cool to say, something witty and memorable, like ‘Your ride has arrived, sir.’ or ‘Operator. How may I direct your call?’

He only disappointed himself when he picked up and stammered “Uhm! Hullo!”

“Hi. Put the phone on the desk,” Mister Crowley muttered back, oblivious to the perfect moment that Wensleydale’s performance anxiety had let pass by. As it were, he simply sighed and placed the phone down as he was told just as a dial up noise began to emanate from the receiver.

This grating noise was quickly overcome by the screech of tires and crash of metal on metal outside the cottage.

Adam was on his feet in an instant. “What on earth-?” He exclaimed as he hopped over the coffee table, scattering a few spell books as he went. He was just a few steps from the front door when it was kicked open dramatically.

There, back lit by car headlights and silhouetted, were two figures that emanated malicious intent. The shorter of the two stepped forward. “Archangel Gabriel! You are to come with us or meet your doom!”

She was petite, this newcomer. She could perhaps even be considered dapper if her black on black suit wasn’t so wrinkled and her dark hair not so wind tangled. She somehow managed to look a tad slovenly and commanding at the same time. Perhaps it was her glare, blue as the center of a butane flame, that held such power.

From the couch an archangel sighed. “Beelzebub. This...this isn’t a good time. Could we, perhaps, reschedule?”
This stoked the demons ire, sending her lurching into the living room. “You can’t reschedule infernal planning!”

“I know, I know. Just...I’m having a rough day, you know?” Gabriel regarded her with out an ounce of fear. “Got some repressed memories back, was kidnapped by kids, nearly killed a bunch of humans, found out that Eden is in possession of a mysterious force that we know nothing about the intent of. Just...A DAY.”

Adam took a spot between the two celestial figures. His comrades followed suit. If this bothered the Lord of the Flies she gave no indication, instead she looked over the archangel with a critical eye. “...you look like shite.”

Gabriel smiled wanly. “You look pretty as ever. I like the suit.”

The compliment sent the demon bristling. “What are you playing at?”

“Beelzebub. I remember what...what I did. To you.” The words were forced from the archangel's mouth as if it took a great amount of will to wrench them out. They clacked together painfully, as if there was no catharsis to be found. “[...I’m sorry. I betrayed your trust and you Fell for it.”

Beelzebub blinked slowly, the severe expression on her features morphing into something more conflicted. She, not so subtly, looked over her shoulder at Dagon for moral support or guidance only to find her fellow Lord had plucked one of the spell books from its spot and was reading through with a knit brow. She was on her own.

“...fuck you. Sorry doesn’t fix it, now, does it?” She crossed her arms over her chest proudly. “Besides, I’m a Lord! I command armies! Can’t get much better than that! I should THANK YOU.”

“Laying it on thick there, Lord Beelzebub.” Crowley exited the office, tree held awkwardly in his arms, looking frazzled as one would after travelling a long way via telephone line. “To what do I owe the pleasure?”

She sneered, buzzing. “I came for the angel you captured. Our Majeszzzty has an interest in him.”

“You know very well he doesn’t.” Crowley plopped the tree down on the rug, scattering dirt across it. “He just wants to see if you’ll get your arse handed to you. If he takes an angel it’ll be war and he’s not ready for that, seeing as his Ace is decidedly neutral.”

Crowley gave a passive wave towards the ace in question. Adam bowed with a bit of a flourish.
To her credit Beelzebub didn’t pout. “Fine. I shall fight him then.”

“I’d prefer not to.” Gabriel admitted. “Like, I just wanna see how this all shakes out. Not really up to fighting unless I need to.”

Beelzebub huffed and puffed, increasingly at a loss. Something needed to come out of all this! “What are you waiting to see ‘shake out’ exactly?” She asked, trying not to sound helpless.

“They’re summoning a gateway,” murmured Dagon, flipping a page in the book they had their nose in. “This has to do with the fact that your pet angel has gone missing?”

Crowley nodded mutely, posture stiff as he looked at all the faces that were crowded into his home. They never had guests in the cottage. It was their spot. Now it felt like he had been invaded. He felt like hissing at all of them.

Adam stepped up to the plate. “How about we all just relax for a moment and we’ll have a...a circle talk! We can all share the events of the day and figure out how to best proceed!”

He looked about the room expectantly, as if daring anyone to disagree with such a reasonable request.

No one did.

Crowley suspected the Adam was influencing. He had no proof of it, of course, but the fact that all eight were able to share information so freely with minimal sniping was a testament of something being off. He only suspected Adam was at the center of this parlay because the former anti-christ was unusually quiet during the round table sharing of facts and, when they were all caught up, he clapped his hands clearing a kind of fog from them all.

“Alright then,” Adam smiled cheerfully and looked to the two Lord of Hell. “We could really use your help. I’m sure going back with a report of something is better than going back with a report of nothing and no angel.”

Beelzebubs lip curled in distaste. “Work with an angel and a...a whatever he is?” A hand was waved in Crowley’s direction.
He hissed softly. “Ssstill a demon.”

“Don’t know many demonszzz that can sit in holy water,” Beelzebub countered stuffily.

The serpent shrugged. Well, she had him there, even if her facts were wrong.

Dagon had three books laid before them and had produced a pencil at some point in the discussion. She scratched notes in the margins, underlined and circled symbols as Pepper watched curiously. “If I may, Lord Beelzebub?” They murmured, not looking up from their work.

“You’re just about the only person in present company I can tolerate, Dagon,” Beelzebub informed the room and her fellow Lord with a casual wave in their direction. Gabriel gave a rather affronted noise that made Crowley smirk. “Proceed.”

“I believe that all information gathered paints a picture of an imminent threat,” began Dagon, still looking up. “I also believe that, by capturing the Principality Aziraphale, former Guardian of the Eastern Gate of Eden that whatever threat is coming this way is fast approaching. They left an integral piece until all other aspects were fixed.”

“Got all their ducks in a row,” hummed Crowley, thoughtfully. “They didn’t want to show their hand too soon.”

Dagon nodded stiffly. “I would typically say that the goal is to bring Eden back from its hiding place...but the piece of garden left in London died within hours. That would suggest Earth can no longer support the divine nature of Eden. No doubt this unknown enemy is aware of this as well.”

The Lord of the Files waved their free hand and produced a large, blank piece of paper and began drawing a perfect circle. “Based on this I believe we are facing either the introductions of a powerful being into our reality or an invasion force.”

Gabriel leaned in, watching as Dagon continued to sketch. “The Guardian of the Western Gate was a war hero. He commanded some of Michael’s best Soldiers during the rebellion. He...he was also the one-uhm-breeding with humans...or the one I saw. The Northern one appeared pregnant but...but I didn’t get a good look.”

Beelzebub buzzed and squirmed, slouching further in her seat. “Humans were able to produce billions from just two. Who knows how many three horny angels and a crowd of willing humans can produce. Then, when we add the demonic half breeds His Majesty banished...bless it all. I thought he had them killed. Not sent off to-to-to boarding school!”

“Lucifer is still an angel,” Crowley looked to the Lord. “A wicked one. A self important one. One of enormous power...but an angel. We all have parts of our original nature that come in direct conflict with the infernal part.”
The other two demons said nothing in the face of observation. They knew he was right.

Dagon continued after a moment, drawing a rough depiction of a tree in the center of the circle. “I would advise that we open the gate first and ascertain the nature of this threat, take steps to sabotage or end it before it starts, and report our findings back to head offices on both sides. The easiest way to sabotage would probably be regaining the Principality. He’s obviously needed. They’ll be stuck without him.”

Adam stood, looking down at the paper from above. “Can we open a gate? I initially thought we’d just try to pull him back? Lot’s of his energy is here-”

“We won’t know the nature of the threat without a visual confirmation. If Lord Beelzebub and I reported back with the angels first hand account it will be dismissed,” Dagon informed coolly.

Gabriel groaned, massaging his temples. “I hate to say it but I need to see as well. Michael will never let me live it down if I don’t perform my own check.”

“Alright then,” Beelzebub sat forward as well, though not eagerly. “What have you got, Dagon?”

Dagon finally looked up. “These humans are surprisingly talented.” They waved their hand at the four. “They did good research in a short period of time. They also thought of getting a living part of Eden. We will use that as a conduit, build a large summoning circle with it as the focal point, and combine our forces to open a gateway.”

They began making marks about the circle. “I will take South. Lord Beelzebub would probably be best in the West. Crowley? You are best suited at the East given your connections. Gabriel will be North.”

“I can’t participate in a summoning,” the archangel stood suddenly. “It’s witchcraft! It’s...ugh...I’d have to mingle MY divine energy with...with yours.”

Crowley hissed in displeasure, standing as well. “What if this is a threat to Heaven? Are you just going to leave on of your angels-”

“Aziraphale is a traitor and aberration. He’s not one of ours. He’s...nothing. Not something I’d go to bat over, for sure.” Gabriel informed him, eyes glowing dangerously. “The fact that I’ve remained here this long is, actually, baffling to me. I’ll stay to see where this goes but I will NOT help.”

“Spoke like a true angel,” Beelzebub growled without looking said angels way.

“Spoken like a bloody wanker!” Crowley snarled and lunged...only for Adam and Brian to close
around him, pulling him back. “You coward! There’s only a single good one out of the lot you and he’s-!”

“Mister Crowley,” Adam spoke with that commanding tone, fixing the demon with an even look. “I’ll take the North.”

Whatever anger Crowley felt faded to nothing in an instant. “You will not. You’re more human than demon. This isn’t some love spell! This is summoning a Gate!”

Adam smiled calmly. “If I don’t we can’t get Mister Aziraphale back.”

Oh, something conflicted and ugly turned in the serpents chest. “...Aziraphale...he...well, he wouldn’t want you to hurt on his behalf. I’m-” he hissed through his teeth- “obliged to sssay no.”

“I’m not a minor anymore, Mister Crowley. Sooo...I think I’ll do it anyways.” The boy beamed at him soothingly. “There’s not a lot you can do to convince me not to, let’s be honest.”

A strangled noise caught in Crowley’s throat and he wheeled away, throwing his hands in the air. “Anti-Christ! Fuck! Shit! FINE.”

“Great!” Adam clapped his hands again, looking about the room, ignoring the troubled glances his friends were exchanging. “Shall we get to work, then?”

Chapter End Notes

I apologize for how shit this one is. Well, the first half. The second ain’t bad. Getting eight people together is HAAAAARD.

Just ask any D&D group.
Interlude: Guardians

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

The highest point in Eden was something the residents called The WatchTower.

It was attached directly to the Great Ancestors luxurious residence and could been seen from any point in the overcrowded garden, but the ones that had the best view were those who lived in Upper Corridor. From here one could clearly see the four balconies that graced the four sides of the tower and, as such, see Father Jophiel or Ancestor Kushiel as they looked out at the Walls.

Once there had been three. Mother Sabriel was said to be a beautiful sight when she looked out from the balconies, her dark skin easily spotted against the ivory white of The WatchTower. She’s sing, at times, and all who saw her felt happier for it.

At least, that was the rumour.

That had been before the Civil War. Before she stood at the side of undesirables and expended most of her divine grace in ensuring that no infernal would die by blessing or holy water. A genocide prevented. She was now spoken of in whispers among those of infernal bloodline. A great hero whose descendents dared not say her name in public for fear of swift retribution.

Rumour had it that she had a living daughter still. One that had more grace and thus the immortality of her mother. It was just a rumour, however.

It had been three hundred years since the War. Many things were seen as rumour. So many weren’t blessed with immortality. So many relied on word of mouth from older ones.

Other things were legend. It was said there was another angel hidden away. That this angel came to destroy them though another version said they came with open arms. This legend said that Father Jophiel himself struck this powerful angel down in a heated battle...or he struck while their back was turned.

...another legend said there were once Four Guardians...but this legend was older than their Home. Older than their memory of a place with a sun and moon and winds....
The Residents of Eden were prisoners, really. Eternally children in the eyes of they Great Ancestors and not allowed to grow in any way that threatened.

Until Ancestor Kushiel started training them for war.

In this they found a purpose.

In this they found hope.

Kushiel sharpened their axe against a whetstone of ground diamond with oil made from the finest olives. They knelt as if in prayer while they did this dedicated work, whispering Enochian beneath their breath to enhance their weapons power and remind it of its purpose. It gleamed in the white light of the outsides Nothingness, it’s silver blade glinted dangerously.

From the corner of their eye they watched as Jophiel ambled slowly from balcony to balcony. He was on his tenth lap.

“You know,” Kushiel said at length as they held their axe up, examining the blade with a critical eye, “if you’re bothered we need not do anything. We can cull the current population, keep only the faithful and loyal, then start over.”

Jophiel paused in his wanderings. “Thanks to Sister Sabriel we would create an unbalance. Too many infernal blooded. Too many blasted bastard demons. No...we’ve trained them all now. It’ll only be a matter of time before they turn such power on us. Better we give them a target that is not us.”

The Western Guardian continued his path, gracing the west balcony.

Kushiel hummed, nodding slowly, before taking a white, silken rag to their blade. The excess oil was buffed in to the metal. “We can’t take back what we’re about to do, Jo. Raphael is a top dog. The only way we’d be more deserving of Divine Wrath is if we killed Michael or Metatron.”

“I know this. That’s why we must win.” Jophiel’s voice boomed in the narrow space of the WatchTower. Kushiel accepted it, as Jophiel could no longer hear their own voice very well, but the racket still drew flinches from the Southern Guardian. “...are you having doubts?”

Kushiel snorted. “No. We’ll either win or lose. I’m so bored that either outcome would please me. It’s better than existing between black and grey.”
Jophiel crossed to the Northern balcony. “...I do not wish to lose you in all this, dearest Kushiel. You’ve been my one constant. When mortal wives and husbands and children have passed you were always there. The first at my side in all conflict. The god parent of all my children.”

Kushiel let their polished axe slip back into the ether with a wave of their hand and rose to their feet. For a moment they merely watched as Jophiel left the Northern balcony and took to the Eastern. It was there that they joined him, wrapping their arms about their fellows Guardians hips and bringing them flush, front to back, their chin on the top of his head. “Your the godfather to mine as well, remember. Yet I’d gladly slaughter them all if it means your happiness.”

“Don’t say such things.”

“It’s true. I’d tear this whole Garden apart then you and I could live on our own until the end of time,” Kushiel sighed into his hair, nuzzling. “This was a fun experiment. Interesting. We aren’t human though and my own children confuse and disgust me. If it weren’t for your love of them I’d have released them all long ago.”

A hand, worm and calloused, was placed on a thin, strong arm. “Dearest Kushiel...you are blood thirsty.”

“Aye.”

“I do love you so.”

“Aye.”

“Until the very end.”

“I know this.”

“The end may be tomorrow.”

“Aye. Exciting, is it not? We get to take off Raphael’s head! A shame about Aziraphale but he has the scent of demons on him. It’ll be no big loss.”

“No pity for Sabriel, eh?” Jophiel chuckled darkly.

“FUCK Sabriel. Little demon fucker.”

The angels laughed, as if they said something uproariously funny, and drew closer together until they shared one breath.
“Tomorrow” Jophiel breathed against viciously grinning lips.

“It’s a date.”

It was then that the barewall that held a small pocket dimension began to tear, golden light splitting the air. Both angels turned to look at it, annoyed and surprised.

“Hm. Raphael must not like what’s to come,” Kushiel noted with palpable disdain.

Jophiel bristled and snarled, looking at the widening escape attempt with contempt.

“Let’s move our date to the present, shall we?”

Kushiel grinned. “We shall.”

Chapter End Notes

Oh shiiiiit
It was hard to get a clear video when ones hands were trembling so Brian had opted to hand his phone off to one of his steadier friends. His first choice had been Adam but his supernatural bestie was occupied in assisting the pissy fly demon in meticulously drawing intricate symbols on some paving stones they’d pried from the path. Pepper was the best back up he could ask for.

“So, a lot had happened in the past-what?-day?” He said conversationally, even though his voice trembled.

“Mhm,” Pepper nodded, recording steadily. “Demons flats, kidnapped angels, weird mysteries...and now there’s a...a...”

“Eel on crocodile legs,” Brian supplied, almost afraid to say it. “A giant eel on crocodile legs.”

That was the best description for this creature the librarian looking demon had transformed into. A moray eel with abnormally sharp teeth in its massive jaws and reptile legs. Its pale, pupilless eyes stared on unblinkingly and it moved at a plodding pace, its range of motion guided by a length of rope tied to the sapling. A focal point for the circle it was making in the ground using the razor sharp flat of its tale.

“Have you ever read Dagon ?” Pepper asked suddenly, adjusting the shot so she could get a better look at the scales that were glittering in the pre-dawn light.

“Can’t say I have. Is a novel or...?” Brian fidgeted, wishing he could be more useful in this. Even Wensleydale was being helpful, following a compass to place candles exactly where they needed to be.

“Short story. It’s good. I’ll send to you it later.” Pepper offered him a faint smile. She was feeling the same as him: useless. “Dagon in that is a sea god. A horror. I always pictured something gross but...Lord Dagon is actually quite graceful.”

Brian huffed a laugh. “Graceful? Really?” That wasn’t the word he’d have picked. Not by a long shot.

“Look at the curve they cut! It’s amazing! Geometrically perfect!”
Brian shook his head and resisted the urge to pat her on the head, lest it be taken less as affection and more as being patronizing. Best leave that one be.

Instead he looked back over his shoulder at the cottage. The warm light in the window help the silhouette of Mister Crowley. He was gesticulating wildly, tearing into the archangel that was lounging in his sitting room. Every now and then, when the activity outside lulled to a moment of silence, they could hear him yelling some kind of obscenity at the angel. Attempting to shame him into action.

Adam taking a spot in the circle was eating him up more than anyone could have expected. A demon shaming an angel...imagine that.

Pepper handed his phone back just as he noticed that Dagon had transformed back into a human form. He quickly tucked the phone in his pocket as things began to move. Adam and the fly lady were taking the rune stones they had created to their spots, exactly where Wens laid the candles.

It was go time.

“Making reality do what thou want requires a sense of command. It’s a miracle on a grander scale, really. When thou performs a miracle, there’s something thou wants or needs to accomplish and it happens, yes? Well, when one is warping reality and changing the nature of objects thou must convince it that IT wants this as well.”

Aziraphale nodded hurriedly, his breath coming in strained gasps as his wings pushed again the force binding them. “It’s a temptation,” he forced the words through his pain clenched teeth.

“Nay.” Raphaels graceful hands pressed at the point between his shoulder blades, easing the discomfort. “When a demon tempts they are pulling at something that already exists in a soul. We are not speaking of mortal souls. We are speaking of objects that have no choice and capacity to think. Thou’s job is to convince reality to bend, give matter a chance to choose for itself...and choose what thou desires.”

“Choice. Yes. Make it choose.” He didn’t understand it at all. Blast! He was made for the front lines! He had chosen to be anything but a soldier! He had not chosen to learn to create and manipulate! The words made sense but he hadn’t the foggiest idea how to apply what he was being told. Miracles
were easy as breathing. He could accidentally produce a miracle if overcome enough!

Crowley had always made it look so effortless….

No. He couldn’t think of him. Not right now. Raphael had exhausted himself in a final flare of power and a breaking of his voice. Sabriel was certain she’d never be able to manage the feat and was now sitting close to the wall, listening.

It was on him to convince this wall to yield a door.

At least Raphael had managed to draw a few door like components out. A crown moulding, a nice golden door knob, the general shape...but no seams and no actual door. It was a good start but...but that final flare of power had no doubt attracted attention. The archangel seemed to think it would take little effort to make it at last give.

“Thou does not need to yell,” Raphael was informing him in his broken, gentle tones. “Thou does not seem the sort that commands in such ways. Thou needn’t even curse or be foul of tongue. Do the first thing thou feels correct in doing.”

The archangel was being so patient and soothing, even given their time limit. A teacher to the last. Aziraphale got the feeling he missed being able to bestow his wisdom on others, that tutoring was a passion for him.

Far be it for him to disappoint.

He cleared his throat and drew his posture up straight as he could manage through the pain of fighting his restraints. “Now, look what you’ve done! You’ve gone a broken a perfectly good archangels voice by being uncooperative! How shameful! He’s putting so much time and effort in instructing you on how to be better and you’ve barely managed a door knob!”

It felt silly, talking to a wall.

He pushed the feeling away.

“Now I’m forced to pick up the slack! Do you think I wish to be doing this? Taking my time to discipline a naughty wall? Hm? Do you? I do not! I have more pressing things to think about! I may
be dead in a few hours and that is something that is far more deserving of my attention!”

Raphael laughed softly, if not bitterly. Sabriel made a noise as if she had been wounded. He dared not break his focus to confirm what expressions accompanied these noises.

“I had a week planned! An itinerary meticulously prepared! I was going to show a love group of young adults all about London! No gallery or museum was to be left unexplored! I had reservations for some of the finest dining spots in the city! At night Crowley was going to take all to club spots and I haven’t been to a club in ages! I was FULLY prepared to be annoyed and bemused!”

The wall stared back at him, impassionate. Raphael’s hand at his shoulders urged him.

“And...and...and before I was abducted and placed here I was having A Moment! We had fought, you know, Crowley and I! What’s worse is that it was my fault for being hateful! I discredited him as a man and only saw him as...as...well. It matters not! It was shameful behavior on my part and I haven’t had the chance to apologize! I must get out of here if only to do that!” His voice broke painfully. “I know how he is. He’ll twist it around to be his fault when, truly, it’s not. If I don’t return in good time he’ll think I went away being angry with him or, even more terrible, he’ll think I MEANT it! His last thoughts of me will be of an ill tempered, hateful creature! I simply... I SIMPLY CANNOT ALLOW IT.”

He felt it. A Pull. The strange feeling of something bending or twisting in a way it wasn’t meant to.

Raphael gave a soft cry of ‘Yes!’ behind him and patted his back so hard his wings gave out, allowing the binding to tighten and imprison him again.

Sabriel threw her arms around his neck, yelling something joyful and astonished.

Aziraphale could only stare at the wall in surprise.

It was not level, the angles having gone janky at some point, and it seemed to look like it wanted to be the well worn door of a shop more than that of a prison. It even had a sign, written in cursive, that declared itself ‘Open’ with the business hours all listed as “∞”.

Sabriel let go of him, moving towards it. A moment later she turned the knob….
When she pushed it open a crack a pleasant bell rang...and she peeped through.

“It’s a bookshop!” Then, more baffled. You...you made a door to a bookshop?” Aziraphale couldn’t hold it in any longer.

He laughed in pure relief.

Kushiel paused midstep, midword, mid thought. Their troops dared not move lest he start on strategies again and they weren’t paying attention. They all kept their guard up, facing the wall that held the sole prisoners of Eden. The silence lingered, the Guardian looking about suspiciously.

“Something...has changed,” they finally murmured. Then straightened in alarm. “Get to the Eastern Quarter! They didn’t create a door here! They made it elsewhere!”

The words didn’t make sense. Made it elsewhere…?

Kushiel snarled at them all, brandishing their flaming axe. “MOVE. EASTERN QUARTER. NOW.”

They moved in a hurry, frightened into urgency.

No one could fight back against Kushiel, after all.

Adam stepped up to the stone he had painted and looked directly out to the middle of the circle. The pathetic looking sapling stood sadly in the middle of the wide circle. He was nervous but ready.
It was time to put his power to good use.

Dagon took the reins, speaking softly into the air in a language that made his brain burn and sinuses itch. He always pictured spells to be yelled out into the night, not whispered calmly into the predawn air. He supposed it wasn’t the tone that mattered but the words...yet he felt it would have been more appealing if it was just a bit more dramatic.

He concentrated on the tree. That was the focal point.

So focused was he that it took him a moment to notice when a large hand landed on his shoulder and firmly guided him from his position. He blinked dumbly, looking up.

Gabriel, wings so white the produced their own light, stepped into his spot and made a motion for him to join his friends. The expression he wore was so serious, flushed, and determined he couldn’t find it in him to argue.

The human part of him felt immense relief.

If the other three minded this change they said nothing...or they just didn’t want to interrupt what Dagon had started.

Something had started. The breeze was suddenly gone and there were no cries of morning birds. It was as if the world itself was holding its breath in terrible anticipation. The sun crept above the horizon, bathing Mister Crowley’s back in golden light...and Adam could have sworn the demon stood straighter under its gentling glare.

The symbols lit up, one by one, North to East to South to West. Then there was a rush, a hurricane wind that swept around the gardens of the cottage taking with it all the life of the trees in the orchard or the flowers in their beds and leaving them withered, before focusing on the sapling.

Roots exploded from the ground as the sapling shot up into a verdant tree, laden with the reddest apples ever known to man.

Then...there was gate. A parting in the air to another place. A city? It looked to be a city.
Adam stepped forward in amazement at the same time Lord Beelzebub yelled out.

“CROWLEY! STAND DOWN!”

It was too late.

Mister Crowley sprinted and vanished through the portal without even a word.

Jophiel could see many things from the WatchTower. To the East he could see his fellow guardians and the archangel fleeing from the bookshop they had taken, heading his way. To the South Kushiel appeared to be redirecting their forces to the East.

He laughed. Kush was going to be so sore when they found out Jophiel had handled the tree of them on his own while they were still mucking about with marching orders!

He summoned his lance in preparation for their arrival. It wasn’t going to be a grand sacrifice…but it would still work. He had hoped to put on a production for the populace, to stir the morale with a grand sacrifice but perhaps this was a more dignified end for his fellow guardians.

A portal opened in the courtyard before his home, his Watch Tower. It stretched high into the sky, a strip of orange light and green torn into the still air of Nothingness. It boggled his eyes, left him stunned.

The orange light was DAWN.

The green was trees.

A fresh, living air flooded into the Garden for the first time in Millenia, stirring it to life. Vines broke through marble floor, clawing towards the portal, clawing towards Earth.

EARTH!
He was looking at Earth!

His children, in their battle regalia, all backed away in fear and wonder. They hadn’t seen such a sight in all their lives. White and Nothing was all they knew. This...this was overwhelming.

Then there was a ripple.

A man stepped through, breathless as if he had ran. Red hair, dressed in black, thin as sticks.

The infernal nature of this new being hit him like a punch in the chest.

A Fallen. A TRUE FALLEN. PURE DEMON.

IN HIS GARDEN.

The rage that took him was all encompassing. His lance burst into flames in his hand, wings spreading of their own accord as he stepped to the very edge of the balcony.

DEMON. IN. HIS. GARDEN.

No. No. He knew this energy. Felt it when the first humans took the Apple….

SERPENT.

HOW DARE HE RETURN.

Jophiel dropped from the balcony with no more rational thoughts except KILL KILL KILLKILLKILLSMITEKILL!!!
HERE WE GO
Chapter Notes

THERE'S CHARACTER DEATH HERE. ITS TEMPORARY BUT IT EXISTS! THIS IS YOUR WARNING.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

The minute the gate opened Crowley could feel the gnawing gap in his chest fill. Aziraphale. Aziraphale was close by. All he needed to do was leap without looking.

Luckily, he was very good at that.

Unluckily, the experience of passing from one dimension to another was always a rather disorienting one. He stumbled as his feet hit solid ground and the power of Eden wrapped around him like a familiar blanket. A surprisingly dirty feeling blanket but a familiar one, nonetheless. At least the bright light that flashed before his eyes was mitigated by his glasses. Being dizzy and blind would have put him at even more of a disadvantage.

The air here tasted foul on his forked tongue. It was stale and full of such misery that Hell could have taken lessons from it. Eden was no longer a happy place. It felt violated.

He could also taste rage. A kind of wrath he had never felt before. It was close. In fact it--OH SHIT!

Crowley barely managed to dance out of the way as a flaming lance shattered the marble ground where he had been standing, the heat burning at his clothing and giving him the fright of his life. Barely ten seconds in a new dimension and he was already drawing ire. That was a record for him. He’d have felt pretty smug about it if the owner of the lance wasn’t pulling a superhero landing and putting on a full, winged threat display.

Oh, that was some old school angelic battle posturing.

Crowley held up his hands, palms out. “Woah, woah, woah! Not here to fight! I’m just here for an angel! White hair? Blue eyes? Bow tie?”
The angel before him wrenched his lance free from the ground and pointed at him with it. “Aziraphale is not yours to take, Demon. He is mine to kill!”

Kill?

*Kill Aziraphale?*

There were fangs in his mouth. “Oh...oh. That was the wrong thing to sssay,” he couldn’t control the way his voice seethed. “Did you hurt him?”

The angel didn’t dignify him with a response, favoring lunging at him with a deft jab of his lance. Crowley once again danced out of the way, keeping out of reach. “That’sss not very nice. I wasn’t a sssoldier even before I Fell. I haven’t picked up an actual weapon in nearly a ssscentury now!”

The vicious angel twirled and swiped, bringing the lance down on his shoulder. A flash of pain tore through him before he pulled back out of reach again, openly hissing, exposing fangs to him.

This was bad. This angel couldn’t be distracted with words. He wanted a fight and Crowley was woefully underprepared for a physical confrontation. It was something he’d never been made for. A bar brawl every now and then was fine but actually fighting one of God’s own?

Well, if Armageddon had actually gone down he was fairly certain he’d have been the first one in a shallow grave for all the combat skill he had.

That didn’t mean he was without defenses. If this arsehole was going to go all out against him he’d return the favor in spades.

Narrowing his eyes he forced up a cocky grin.

He snapped his fingers.
Crowley.

Crowley was here!

Aziraphale nearly tripped over his own feet as the familiar demonic presence reached out to him, beckoning him like a moth to the flame. Raphael collided with his back as his pace slowed.

“Aziraphale! We must keep moving!” Sabriel was saying in hurried, hushed tones. “We need to find my daughter or one of my other descendents. They will have my bow and arrows and then I shall be able to remove our bindings!”

Aziraphale felt pulled Westward. He could see dawn through a strip the broke the air. A gate.

Then there was a fire in the sky. Hell fire.

Raphael gasped. “I think thou’s demon hast arrived.”

“He has.” Aziraphale began to jog in that direction. “Forgive me but...but! Please! Get what you need then follow!”

Golden light shot upwards. Jophiels lance being thrown high.

Sabriel let out a strangled cry at the sight. Or maybe his running is what tore the noise from her. “Wait! You don’t even have a weapon! Aziraphale!”

He chose not to hear her. He didn’t have time for doubts. Crowley was nearby and possibly fighting one of the most battle tested Guardians. Crowley who he couldn’t remember fighting anything in his entire life-

Wait. There was that time in Ireland with Saint Patrick but that had been less a fight and more a battle of taunts that Crowley lost so badly he wouldn’t even go back.

Oh! Then that time at the pub when that man had that server pinned to a wall! He had slammed a chair into him!

Beyond that, however, Aziraphale couldn’t recall a time when he thought of Crowley as someone
that was 'battle ready.'

No. He needed to get to him and get to him soon.

************************************************************************************************************

A pit in the ground here. A missed stair there. A dazzling light too close to the angels face.

Fighting using subterfuge and annoyances was tiring. If he had a bloody moment to think he’d be able to pull something brilliant off but-

Another jab. A swipe. Wings flaring and attempting to knock him down.

This angel was giving him no time to think.

He needed to get rid of that lance. At least for a minute. Then he’d be able to think it through or escape. If he went full serpent mode he could slip away...but it would also leave the gate wide open-

Another jab, this time finding purchase and slicing through his outer thigh. Crowley yelped and stumbled.

*Fuck fuck fuck-*!

************************************************************************************************************

Crowley’s cry of shock and pain is what led Aziraphale around the final corner to the courtyard. A small crowd of frightened denizens had gathered, standing as far to the edges as they could, but they parted like the Red Sea about him, allowing him easy access.

Crowley was dancing and twirling around, trying to slow down Jophiel with deft infernal miracles but succeeding only in aggravating the angel. There was a fury present in the Guardians stocky body, evidenced by the puff of his wings. His holy weapon was flaming so fiercely the lance could barely be seen with in it.
He was bleeding, smoke curling from the wound.

Weapon. Aziraphale needed a weapon. Preferably something he could swing very hard and very fast. He looked around desperately, eye alighting on a battle ready half demon whose jaw was dropped in amazement as they watched the battle.

They had a sword. A dingy, poorly cared for weapon but it had a hilt and blade.

Aziraphale dashed for it.

He never saw the shadow barreling down on him from above.

Crowley did.

It was a movement just out of the corner of his eye. Another angel flying high above, this one lanky and wielding an axe. They were dive bombing but the trajectory seemed off. It wasn’t aiming for him.

White hair. Blue eyes. Bow tie. Aziraphale was there. Trying to wrest a sword from an unwilling looker.

The demon leaped forward, words already spilling from him. “Aziraphale! Above you!”

This proved to be enough warning, thank Someone. The Principality wrenched the sword from its owners hands, swung around in practiced movement, and countered the oncoming swing before the other angel could readjust. More than that, Aziraphale followed up with a counter swing that sent the angel colliding with the ground.

Their eyes met, yellow to blue. Relief flooded Crowley as his angel smiled at him.
Then there was pain. He couldn’t breathe.

He could taste blood and fire. A searing, soul shattering feeling that went beyond his physical corporation and struck at the core of his existence.

Aziraphale was screaming his name.

Crowley had just been smiling at him. Everything was going to be okay. They were going to go home and everything was going to be solved.

Then Crowley wasn’t smiling.

Aziraphale screamed but he wasn’t sure what exactly. It wasn’t a noise he usually produced but horror did funny things to even the most well put together of souls.

Jophiels lance was sticking out from his beautiful demons chest proudly, flaming bright as the sun as it achieved it divine purpose. God had given them weapons for a reason, after all. To use against Fallen.

The lance was pulled free with a victorious flare and Crowley...Crowley...Crowley was falling.

_Crowley was falling._

Distantly, he registered the clatter of metal as he dropped the sword he had fought for. He needed his hands free.

He barely caught the demon, holding him tight against him as he trembled and spasmed in his arms. Yellow eyes were wide, looking up at him in frightened desperation. Something hot and wet was soaking through his suit.

His wings fought against their bindings, trying to get free. _Just let me perform this one miracle._
Jophiel was there, wings spread impressively. He was saying words but Aziraphale was couldn’t understand them. *Please God let me heal him! Please Mother! Please! Anything!* 

Danger was approaching and Aziraphale couldn’t be bothered. He needed to heal Crowley. His demon was dying and he couldn’t do anything. A lance was bearing down on him and he couldn’t do anything. An axe from the other side.

He...he didn’t want to do anything....

*Oh Crowley....*

A zipping noise and a thunk, Kushiel was sent stumbling once again. An arrow had found its purchase in his elbow and he was screaming, taking off towards the sky, bellowing Sabriels name.

The lance clashed and clattered against something above his head. A shield.

He knew that shield.

“*YOU!*” It was Jophiels turn to roar in rage.

Gabriel smiled pleasantly, eyes glowing a dangerous shade of purple. “Jophiel, right? How good it is to see you again.”

The archangel got a snarl in return and another clash against his shield.

Aziraphale was barely aware of it. Crowley wasn’t shivering anymore. The hand clenched about his bicep was loosening as he sank to his knees as if in supplication, holding the demon close. “Crowley, Crowley ...you can’t...please?”

Crowley looked up at him unblinkingly, lips moving but no sound coming out. So he spoke for him. “I’m sorry, you know! I was sorry the minute you left! I’ve been sorry ever since! You’re-you’re the best man, best demon, best angel to have ever existed and you’re not going to...to...to go anywhere right now because I love you , yes? That’s what you want to hear! That’s what I really want to say! So you can’t ...”
The hand was slipping away from his arm. Those yellow eyes unfocusing.

“Crowley! You can’t just run away after I say something like that!”

Pale lips were no longer moving.

Aziraphale felt something in him starting to crack wide open. To burst at the seams of his corporation, exposing this world and the next to Him as He was created. He’d salt the earth, burn the skies!

A hand was on his shoulder. Comforting him. Grounding him. A voice spoke more inside his head than anything.

Aziraphale. Aziraphale. Thou must let go now.

“I can’t.”

Thou can. Let not the sun go down on thou here.

“Doesn’t matter.”

Thou dost not believe that. Not truly.

Crowley was being taken from him by careful, gentle arms.

I will release thous bindings now. Stand at Sabriel and Gabriels arm. Protect the gate from invasion. Thou must do this.

“I must? I...I don’t have a sword. I dropped it.” He felt numb. Shock, he supposed. How else could he feel so empty and calm when he looked down and saw blood staining the white of his clothing?

Raphael, still holding Crowley, spread a set of his wings and yanked a long, slender feather out by the quill. A moment later and the feather was a glorious scimitar, a beautiful thing of silver and gold.
It was light in Aziraphale’s trembling hand. It hummed and soothed. His bindings snapped away and his wings unfurled only to tuck in close to him once again. No battle stances here. No showiness.

He found his feet...but his eyes couldn’t be drawn from his dear, sweet-

**Aziraphale. Use despair as a weapon...but do not fall to it. Let us see what can be done, yes? Now, fight.**

One last look. Red hair, a sharp jawline. His eyes were still open. Oh! He should close them!

**AZIRAPHALE.**

He took to the air, following the sound of battle more than the sight of it.

The sword hummed and sang in his hand.

******************************************************************************

Raphael sighed, cradling a corpse.

“Ah, me.” He carded red hair gently. “Oh child. What hast thou done this time?”

No answer was forthcoming.

“Tis not how I wished to see thou again.” He picked him up, taking him from the site of battle. There was too much negativity here. Too much grief.

It made it hard to concentrate on ReMaking.

If there was anything to ReMake.
“Oh Child, sweet child,” Raphael sang and sighed sorrowfully. “I hope thou is still a willful creature. That will make what comes next much easier. I have never done this with a Fallen.”

There was a first time for everything.
A Star

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Before It All

Raphael couldn’t remember the circumstances of his own creation the same way Michael could. It had apparently been a traumatic thing for her so, afterwards, the Almighty had made it so one would forget those first few hours of existence. Much later he’d figure this was why humans wouldn’t remember their own births: the shock of going from non-existence to existence was far too much to deal with.

No, Raphael couldn’t recall his own creation...but he remembered being present for other angels first breaths. He, Michael, Uriel and Morningstar would sit in Her grand hall, watching and claiming subordinates or students or warriors. It had been an exciting time, watching so much new life fold into existence and quickly find their personalities. Fledgling angels were such funny things!

He had liked red. Red existed in the freckles that dusted Michael’s cute nose. Red was in the ink Uriel used to write The Word. Red was in the pretty swell of Morningstar’s lips. Red existed at the edge of the few stars he had molded. It was a warm colour. The colour of love, at least in his mind.

So when She laughingly asked for any requests he said ‘Why not red hair?’ before anyone else could get a word in.

A moment later they were there. They didn’t start with hair, of course! The True Form was made first. There was red in the aura and at the inside of their wheels, the rest was gold, silver, and a hint of gray at the tips of the fingers on those many hands. The Form gradually diminished to be something closer to Her own shape.

Then they were there, blinking into consciousness. Red hair fell in waves well past their shoulder blade in loose ringlets. The gold that adorned them streaked their cheeks like tears. Their narrow, graceful wings trembled slightly as they first looked down at their hands, flexing their fingers for the very first time, examining their shiny, silver fingernails. They looked up at where She sat with questioning, vaguely concerned, molten gold eyes.

She spoke. Naming him.
(Raphael could no longer recall the name. It had been lost.)

Then She spoke again. **You are an angel.**

“Eh?” The newest one had replied ineloquently, red eyebrows drawing together.

She laughed, soft and loud at the same time. The noise echoed around them. **You are here to create or guide or wait.**

“Ah.” They intoned fretfully, looking at their hands again. Then back up, brow knit even tighter together. “Erm…?”

She was amused. The others were amused. Raphael had been amused.

Fledglings were just so amusing! They all took these first moment of existence differently. Some babbled on joyfully, others only smiled beatifically, some broke into sobbing laughter, some flew right into Her arms. There were even a few that tried to fight Her only to be gently coaxed down.

Something in the new one seemed to waiver and they sank to their knees, cocooning themselves in their own wings. This hadn’t been done before. Not in their presence, anyways.

The Almighty seemed to gasp softly, a small, worried noise, a sound that made Raphael ache. Michael picked up on it too and took offense on behalf of their creator. “Stop that! Get up this instant!” She barked, her military commander voice on full display. She marched up to the new one. “You’re embarrassing yourself!”

This seemed to only make the new angel curl in tighter on themself. There was a muffled whimper, barely heard from behind the curtain of feathers.

Michael sneered and turned away. “I won’t be taking this one. This isn’t a good soldier.”

Uriel looked down from their perch on the poor creature dispassionately. “They are not very articulate. They stammer, hem and haw. They have yet to say a full word. They’d make a poor scribe. No. I have many apprentices already. I shall not take this one under wing either.”

Morningstar tilted his head, looking at the trembling mass of feathers. For once he wasn’t smiling. “That hardly seems fair. Give the poor creature some time to get their feathers straight!”

“If they had a thought worth sharing they’d have done it by now,” Uriel informed him curtly.
The Almighty seemed to sigh. If the others noticed they didn’t say anything.

“Well,” Morningstar took a step closer, kneeling in front of the new one, “can you speak?”

There was a moment of silence then a weak, trembling voice responded. “Yes. If...if this is speaking?”

Morningstar smiled faintly. “It is. It is. How can we help you?”

“mmn...ngk...uh...I...dunno? Go away? Maybe?”

She laughed softly, kindly. Morningstar looked at them queerly, bemused and curious. “All of us?”

“Um...uh....”

Ah. Raphael understood. This chamber was loud. It echoed with everything they said and other angelic voices carried through the air. It was bright in its newness, an unyielding glare that was generated from Her divinity.

He gestured Morningstar away, taking his spot. “Child,” he crooned softly, melodically. “Wouldst thou come with me? I know of somewhere dark and quiet, far from here. We can sit until thou finds their bearings. ‘Tis all a bit much, is it not? To be asked to exist where once thou was nothing.”

The wings parted, just a little, exposing a wide, honeyed eye set in narrow, overwhelmed face. Their fingers were moving, clenching and unclenching, wringing each other.

Raphael smiled gently and held out his hand. “Come.”

Those fidgeting hands stilled. “Uhm...uh...n-name?”

“Raphael,” he answered softly, still smiling, still waiting.

“Raphael,” they repeated faintly. A long moment passed...then slender fingers found his palm, tentatively taking his hand. “Hullo. Hi.”

Raphael chuckled, completely enamoured. “Hello, sweet child.”
“Mister Crowley!” It was a chorus the moment he passed through the gate, stepping into fresh air for the first time in over five thousand years. He felt no joy. His arms were too heavily laden for joy.

Instead he sought the source. Young humans. Not quite children but not quite fully grown. He smiled at them wanly as they approached.

Oh, how he wished he could enjoy this moment!

A tall boy with features he found frightfully familiar approached, eyes wide. “Is...is he-?!”

He felt it flare. The power of the first Fallen. Ah. No wonder his features were so jarring. He was HIS child. THE child.

He seemed much sweeter than his father had grown to be. He had to have been for the world to still be standing.

“He’s dead but, perhaps, not yet gone. These things are often not as they seem,” Raphael informed the young humans. “Give me some time. I will see what can be done.”

There were others. Two demons that he recognized from long, long ago. He smiled their way, sending the sharp toothed one nearly reeling. “There will be an invading force, shortly. I pray thee not be too rough. They only do what they think is right...but do not let them hurt Her creation. Do not let them hurt HIS machinations, yes?”

The petite one looked weak in the knees. “You’re Raphael!”

“Aye.”

“What...I...” She stopped herself. Then straightened her posture. “I am Lord Beelzebub. I can hold this position but...if it’s angels....”

“Do not fret. I suspect we will gain allies very soon. Michael will come. Thou’s Master will come.” He smiled and winked at the demon. “They will come to see me, no doubt.”

Before the demon lord could responded he began to stride away. “I must deal with this before it gets
Words were shouted at his back. Questions.

He chose not to hear. There was a home nearby. Well loved and warm. It had a feeling of safety that even the best fortresses couldn’t match. Ah! The perfect place!

The door swung shut behind him, muffling the sounds of shouting and smothering some of the overwhelming energy of the outside. Now it would just be him and the fallen demon.

Him and his best student.

Raphael took care in laying the demon out, closing their eyes with a gentle hand, folding their hands over their heart. They physical wound no longer oozed, the holy fire having cauterized it. It would need to be healed...but for that to take place there needed to be a soul to heal.

The archangel kneeled and placed their head in his lap, delicately resting his fingers at their temples. “Now, sweet child. Let us see how far you have wandered….”

There was a star.

Blue as glacial ice at its corona, white at its center. It wasn’t an especially large star but it freely gave its warmth to the spatial void that surrounded it, brightening the darkness and making it not only tolerable but enjoyable. It smelled of champagne, chocolates, and pleasant mustiness.

There were no other stars quite like it.

Crowley couldn’t get close. In fact, the more he reached for it the further he seemed to be. He fancied there was a black hole hidden somewhere in the void, pulling him deeper. Strength was leaving him. He wanted to close his eyes, rest them for a moment, but the light of that star...the fading light...so far....

“‘Tis beautiful, child.” The voice was shockingly familiar, causing something in him to lurch away
from that invisible, pulling force.

“I didn’t make this one,” he explained to the darkness. “I can’t anymore. It’s not mine.”

“Is it not? It seems to be shining for you.”

It was, wasn’t it? It was beckoning to him, even over this great distance. It was sad. It was furious.

It was glorious and the glory was for him.

He didn’t deserve it.

“Ah? Dost thou not like it? Would thou like it brighter? Better?”

“What? No...it’s perfect as is. Doesn’t need anything else.” Crowley forced himself to turn in the grip of the immense force that was pulling at him. A professional eye was cast over the distant star. Actually, it did seem lonely. Such a pretty star deserved...something.

“‘Tis meant to give no life? To be isolated and admired from afar?”

Oh no. He didn’t like that at all. It was such a pretty star that to not see it was a shame but to not feel it? That was criminal. It was such a welcoming thing. Drawing in even the most undeserving.

“‘Tis safe on its own?”

It seemed to be. It wasn’t a big star but it felt strong and potent. Whoever created it had poured a little extra grace and love into it. Maybe it grown that way on its own, collecting energy and matter from some unseen place?

...but was it safe? He couldn’t tell from this distance. The uncertainty left him feeling restless.

He spread his wings and beat against the black hole.

“It could hurt others. Dost thou see?”

He could! It flared viciously, an eruption of wrathful white from the very center that shattered the
blue. Oh! Unstable! It seemed like it might supernova? How awful! “Hold on. I got this. I can temper it,” he called frantically into the void. Beat his wings harder. “That’s all it needs! A bit of grounding!”

“This is its nature.’’

“Bugger that!” He was speaking through his teeth, straining against the pull. “Where’s the rebellion in following nature, yeh? Where’s the fun of choosing for yourself? Bugger nature. Bugger nurture. If that star wants to hum happily away let it!”

“Ah, me. Thou cannot-”

“Shut the fuck, Raph!” Crowley snarled as he launched forward, feeling something snap and release him. “Let the universe change for it for once!”

He bolted through the void, a bat out of hell shooting towards the one bright spot in a world comprised of darkness.

There was a gentle laughter in his ears.

He continued on out of sheer fucking spite.

Chapter End Notes

Hm. Might need two chapters today, don't you think?
Jophiel was beginning to think that he may have made a mistake. It was a hard thing for an entity that had held power for over five thousand years to admit to fault but Jophiel thought himself humble enough to admit when a plan had gone awry. When the civil war in Eden had happened he was able to admit that aiming to cull all the infernal breeds was a mistake.

He should have done it slowly. A group here or there, secreted away to never be heard from again. Sabriel wouldn’t have reacted so violently then because it would have already been done by the time she realized anything was amiss!

This time it was his divine nature that got the better of him. He had acted too hastily in terminating the invading demon. He didn’t have all the facts and ignored the signs that this demon was of little threat. It obviously wasn’t a creature made for combat. He should have questioned why a creature with so little defense would throw themselves so willingly into the unknown.

Love. It made fools of all. Demons included. He knew this already, if the rate that those half blooded demons found mates with the weaker of HIS beautiful descendants was anything to go by.

Jophiel was also learning a whole new lesson. One that was confusing and alarming.

Love lost was apparently a good way to really, really, really inspire divine wrath.

Aziraphale meant to kill him, he was sure of it. He gave no quarter or distance, keeping himself close and not allowing Jophiel the full range of his lance. The Eastern Guardian met every attempt at defensive move with a parry and jab that would rend flesh or sever feathers.

If ever Jophiel managed to push back or gain distance it was a short won victory because Aziraphale would simply be there again, slashing with an intent only seen when one meant to smite another from existence.

What was worse was that he had back up. Gabriel. How did a choral - damnable courier!- become an archangel? Heaven must have been desperate after they captured Raphael to allow such a lowly angel to take a position so mighty!
...but he was effective. Everytime he thought he finally had his fellow Guardian on the ropes there would be a sonic boom and that shield would collide with him from some angle, deflecting a blow or knocking them apart.

He wouldn’t even pause to banter! Gabriel would just fly on by on massive wings, turn mid air, and gather speed as he plummeted to the ground and broke up the ranks waiting to invade to the other side. All this time spent fantasizing about the day he’d get to show that uppity Choral what for and he was acting like he didn’t have time for him!

The gall! The absolute nerve-!

Aziraphale was on him again, intimately close this time, speaking loud enough he could hear him even above the din of battle. “I have had a revelation, Jophiel. It’s a rather frightening one but I feel you deserve to know what you have inspired in me.”

“Do enlighten me, dear Aziraphale.” Talking was good. Talking was an advantage. A foe was distracted if they were talking.

“It is simply this: I hate you.” The confession was so blunt it took Jophiel off guard, allowing Aziraphale to cut him deeply at the ribs. “It’s quite a feat, actually! I’ve never hated anything! I can’t say I like the feeling very much but it certainly is a driving force at the moment.”

Jophiel snarled in anger and pain, jabbing forward, catching the angel in the thigh. “Glad to have put some fire in your belly.”

Aziraphale didn’t whimper. He seemed to not even notice his injury he was so fixated on his task. He’d been like this while they beat and tortured him as well. Unwilling to bend. It had been admirable then, now it was a rather frightful thing. “I’m not done. I hate you so much that if the word was written on every atom of my being, both corporeal and non, it would still not be enough to describe the loathing I hold for you. I hate you to the point that I wonder if I might Fall the minute I leave this place.”

An arm was waved with intentional gravitas towards the open gate...and that was all the opening Jophiel needed. He lunged, lance clenched tightly in both his hands, and skewered the stuffy bastard through the sternum. Then, to drive the point home, he beat his wings and sent them both rocketing into the ground.

He laughed, victorious. A good battle but far too close for comfort. A bit of a waste of a good soldier, though. Such a shame. If he had seen reason it he’d have been a valuable ally in the world to come.
Ah! Now to see to Gabriel! He wrenched his lance free-

It did not come free.

A hand was closed around the holy weapon, holding tightly, not allowing it to be released. *Aziraphale was holding onto his weapon while it was still impaled in his chest.*

Jophiel pulled again and succeeded only in dragging the Principality back to his feet. Again he pulled and Aziraphale yanked as he was recovering, pulling him closer in turn. Impaling himself further.

“Not very sporting. I wasn’t done yet. I had quite the siloquay forming.” He was still talking. How?! “I’ll finish though, seeing as you are so impatient.”

He pulled closer and Jophiel felt fixed in that wrathful gaze. “*I hate you almost as much as I love what you took away.*”

Aziraphale paused, grief morphing his features, his voice breaking. “That’s an incalculable amount.”

Transfixed as he was by that steely glare he too late noticed that Aziraphale had never dropped his sword until it was already finding purchase in his guts, twisted, and withdrawn in an efficient motion.

Jophiel gagged, stunned. “Y-you-!”

Whatever Aziraphale was the world never found out as the Principality raised his sword and brought it down on his head.

Hilt first.

Knocking Jophiel out cold.

As Johpiel sagged to the ground Aziraphale finally allowed himself to release the lance and pull it free from his body. He sank after the Western Guardian, unable to stand on his own. He was cracking, he could feel it. His corporation was going to give up the ghost, quite literally. He wasn’t sure what would happen then. With that gate open would he just revert to his True Form? Or if he passed here would he just...be gone?
...well. He still knew himself. His values. He wasn’t going to toss out six thousand years of relative pacifism and an eternity of forgiveness for a brief moment of grief fueled revenge.

A miracle was expended and Jophiel was healed. Just enough so he wouldn’t bleed out. It had been a good hit to the head, if Aziraphale was honest, so he should remain unconscious for quite some time.

It did leave him with little for himself. Just enough to ease the pain he was suddenly very aware was tearing through his body.

Crowley would no doubt call him a fool...but in that fond tone he used when he was greatly impressed.

It was dizzying, keeping his eyes open. He should flag down Gabriel or Sabriel. Have them heal him.

...he should...should…

Take a rest.

Yes.

A rest.

Crowley would approve, no doubt.

Chapter End Notes

Was it all you ever wanted?

See ya tomorrow!
“Your student is a menace, Raphael.” Michael had him held by the robe and pinned to the wall, a rather familiar position for him. Irritating Michael was a good form of entertainment. Not to mention that he found her quite pretty when she was angry.

...and a terror.

“The Almighty seemed to-“ he began but was cut off as she pushed at him. He fought back a delighted giggle. Oh! She was really mad!

“The Almighty thinks flesh eating bacteria is a fascinating thing! Of course she’d have no problem with some thing like a...a…” She faltered, unable to remember what the creation had been titled.

“Black hole?” Raphael supplied helpfully. “That’s what mine child hast called them. It’s quite a unique concept when thou-“

“They are dangerous annoyances! Our new courier was stuck in it for a week before he broke out!”

Raphael snorted despite himself. “Oh?”

“It’s not FUNNY Raphael!”

“Tis a little funny.”

Michael huffed and released him. “Put your little prodigy on the OutSkirts.”

“What? No!” Put his child out so far? His best student! Such talent would be wasted out at the edge! Not to mention he’d never get to see them because the distance was great, even for an archangel.
“It isn’t a request. It’s an order...for your own good. You’re far too attached Raphael! Favoritism is frowned upon and you most certainly favor him.”

He couldn’t deny that. His child was his pride and joy. Always so eager to serve and please but also a spiteful blighter when the desire struck him. They had once gone an entire year making nothing but impossible doorways because Raphael had too harshly critiqued a rather oblong moon they’d made. It had been an absolutely maddening time as Raphael would often open a door only to find himself looking out into the center of a star or the ceiling of Almighty’s own chambers. One notable time he’d carelessly thrown open a door only to have a flood of ocean wash him away.

His Child was surprisingly talented. He did things that even he couldn’t do. He wondered if he should be more curious about why the Almighty would create an angel with that kind of ability but….

Ah, but he loved his child so! If the Almighty thought that was how they should be then so be it! In the meantime he’d soak up the love and entertainment he offered.

To send them away though? ...well. He didn’t like that at all.

“I shall not. I will speak with them. Try to curb their desires for unconventional excitement.” Raphael stood taller, affecting an air of superiority that made other angels look at him like he held all the stars in the sky.

Such displays were wasted on Michael.

“This order is from the Almighty. It’s more a test of your loyalties than anything to do with him.”

She may as well have slipped a knife between his ribs.

His loyalty was in doubt?! Was it not possible to be loyal to Her and...and….

It wasn’t, was it? He had been created to love and serve Her. Anything else was just...just….

“...fine. If I must. I do it under great protest, however!” He was very nearly aflame with anger. He’d show them loyalty!
Michael seemed satisfied. She patted his cheek, before standing on the tips of her toes to kiss his lips chastely. “I’ll note the protest.” She smiled as she pulled away. “Did you know you are pretty when your angry?...find me later? After it’s all done?”

He did, after it was done.

He needed the comfort to ease his guilt.

The impact was terrible. Crowley couldn’t see what, exactly, had caused it but it had sent star stuff scattering outwards in a straight, golden line that set the impossibly beautiful star he was flying towards off its axis. He cried out as he saw it, a pained noise that seemed to come from the very center of his existence.

It was bleeding out into the dark, golden plasma filling the void.

Raphael gasped in horror, an echo in the blackness. “Oh! Oh I did not think-! Child, child-”

The demon barely heard him. He was fixated on the steady flow of star stuff, the dimming of light.

It was awful. He couldn’t turn his face away.

So he screwed his eyes shut instead.

The change was instantaneous. Everything was still blacker than black but instead of a star there was Aziraphale, laying spread eagle in the void, golden ichor growing in the beige of his clothing.

“Angel!” The word stuck in his throat and he was at his side in an instant, reaching for him, ignoring the strange scalding sensation that bubbled on his flesh. Raphael was saying something but it was so far away he couldn’t be arsed to hear it.

Aziraphale never opened his eyes. Instead he seemed to let out a gentle gasp, the corners of his mouth ticking upwards. “Oh...my dear. Am I to follow you?”
“What?” He choked out, not understanding. He felt like he was close to understanding something but...but it was just beyond his grasp. “I...I get the feeling that’s not a good idea.”

“I thought I’d never hear your voice again,” Aziraphale confessed softly. “Did you hear me? Did you hear what I said as I held you?”

Held him? When had-?

Oh.

OH!

He’d been stabbed! He’d been fighting, let his guard drop, and gotten run through by a holy weapon! Then Aziraphale had took him in his arms and-

“Yes!” His voice broke as the floodgates opened. He was sobbing. “I did! You stupid, clever thing! Why would you wait until I was dying to say that? I couldn’t even tell you how much I love you in return!”

Aziraphale smiled, dazed and delirious. “You just did.”

Pieces were falling into place and Crowley didn’t like the picture they were forming. “Angel, listen. Whatever has happened, I need you to hang on just a bit longer, okay? I’m coming for you.”

“Why? You’re dead, my dear. I can just follow.” Aziraphale seemed entirely too okay with that statement. It stoked a new type of fear in the demon.

“No! Don’t! I’m coming, Aziraphale! Don’t. GO.” He spoke through his teeth, made it an order. “I’ll be there soon. Just...just stay put, okay? Don’t go anywhere!”

Aziraphale seemed ready to argue the point so Crowley did the only thing he could think of to stop a stupid argument before it ever started.

He opened his eyes.
He was touching the star, the aether that made up his being was burning like gasoline. An impulse to snatch his hand away was fought off. He wouldn’t withdraw from it. It needed him.

Aziraphale needed him.

“Child, thou cannot go to him yet. I was using his essence as bait to pull thou from the wings of death but...but you are not healed yet.” Raphael’s voice was a source of hateful comfort. It used to mean everything to him, hearing that voice. Now it left him pained and short tempered...but also longing for approval.

He hated that, even after all this time, a part of him still craved that.

“Is this real? Can I affect this?” He gestured to the star frantically. “Can I manipulate it?”

There was a long silence.

“Dost thou believe they can?”

Crowley hissed. Typical. Leave him hanging instead of offering a real answer. “I believe I must but I need to know if it’ll do anything! I’m not going back if he’s not-” he swallowed thickly- “not going to be there. I’m not going to do that *Romeo and Juliet* shite!”

“Child. Do you believe this is real?”

He clenched his fist inside the dying fire of the perfect star. It hurt. It was wonderful. It felt like Aziraphale all over.

“Yesss.”

“Then do something.”

Crowley let out a growl of frustration...or perhaps desperation. Fuck it! It was real then! Aziraphale was out there somewhere dying and he was arguing with his former mentor! It was all hideously, awfully, horrifically real!
And if Raphael was telling him he could do something he must be able to.

So he took a breath, opened his wings and arms wide, and did what he had been taught to do.

He created.

He forced the plasma back into its rightful spot because, really, what business did it have being so far from its star? That’s not how stars worked! He reignited the nuclear furnace at its center. He increased the white light with in it and stabilized the flaring.

...hey. While he was at it, why not make it a bit bigger? This star was special, after all. Make it stronger. Make it brighter. Give it all the warmth and hope it would ever need.

He gave it tenderness.

He gave it love.

He gave it its own ring, made with a careful wave of his hand. Not a collection of space dust or meteors but a solid, silver thing that looked suspiciously like a snake eating its own tail so it would never be alone.

When he was done he flew back, taking in the nature of his creation.

It was unlike any other celestial body to have ever existed.

He closed his eyes and found the space behind his eyelids blessedly Aziraphale free.

“Child,” Raphael whispered from the dark, voice heavy with awe. “What did you do?”

Crowley smiled, laughing to himself a tad darkly.
“I made a new kind of Principality.”

Thank goodness he was already Fallen.

He’d certainly be in the shit for this.

Chapter End Notes

Sorry about missing yesterday. School shopping with two kids is exhausting and, honestly, I out right scrapped the chapter I had after rereading it. The tone was way off.

I hope this one sits bit better not only with me but with you all as well!
Speed was Gabriel’s forte. It was what made him so effective as a courier in the early days as God needed someone that could get between realms and spaces without hundreds of years passing. He could do Earth to Pluto in under three minutes without even trying. The ever expanding edge of the universe was a bit harder given the game of catch up he needed to play but give him a few hours and he’d be out in nothingness.

It was during the Rebellion that he discovered his speed could be used offensively. Many angels couldn’t track him with their eyes and even those that could weren’t able to withstand the blast wave he left in his wake. Coupled with a shield he made a rather devastating battering ram.

This was the tactic that he applied now. Sure, since his promotion to archangel he’d been trained in swords and spears by Michael herself but he had actual, God given talents and he was very adept in their use. Coupled with his holy shield he was tank.

The only thing that tempered him was the lack of any actual malice in the ranks he scattered and battered. There was desperation, hope, fear...but no real evil intent amongst the nephilim. It was much the same for those of demon blood, which was a bit of a shock but one he decided to roll with. He didn’t want to kill anyone that didn’t want to harm him...it didn’t seem right, abominations in the eyes of Heaven or no.

Goodness, a day on Earth and he was already compromising on long held ideas. What would happen tomorrow? Would he gamble with Beelzebub? Indulge in gross matter with Aziraphale?

...Aziraphale. He’d lost track of him. Not that he had really needed to guard over him, it seemed. The Principality was doing a fine job in living up to his first title of Guardian. Gabriel had always thought Michael was exaggerating when she warned him to not anger Aziraphale or told stories about how he was rather excellent with a blade and stronger than he appeared. The angel had been under Gabriel’s jurisdiction so long without exhibiting anything close to aggression that he had truly thought that Michael must have been thinking of someone else.

He owed Michael an apology for doubting her memory.
Aziraphale was still, technically, under his supervision. On an indefinitely long suspension of duty, sure, but still his responsibility.

Time for another pass. Hopefully he’d get a glimpse of Aziraphale and the other, bow wielding guardian the higher up he got.

He soared upwards, ascending at unheard of speeds, before turning on a dime and surveying the scene below.

The nephilim-demonic ranks were broken up. Many were in retreat. The area around the gate was relatively clear with any strangler being herded back by the other guardian with a few well placed warning shots. He probably didn’t even need to so another dive bomb.

Aziraphale was nowhere to be seen, nor was the Western Guardian that tried to kill him so long ago. This unsettled him. They had been going at it so fiercely there was no way that he wouldn’t be able to see them.

Unless the battle was done.

Alarmed by the prospect he dove down into the garden and began to navigate the narrow roads and pathways, looking for any sign of the angels. It wasn’t quiet by any measure but the lack of sword clashing against lance made him uneasy.

“Jophiel!” The name was being screamed in utter dismay and rage. Jophiel...that was the Western Guardians name, right? He followed the sobbed sound to its source.

Gabriel found the Southern Guardian holding the prone figure of the Western one and shaking them. “Wake up!” They pleaded, touching a fresh lump at their temple. “C’mon! It’s only a little bump, Jo!”

There were signs of bleeding, golden ichor staining the Western Guardians clothing, but no sign of a wound. He had been healed very shortly after his injury had been inflicted.

A sword lay on the ground.

Not far off from it was Aziraphale, arms spread wide, eyes closed. There was no movement in his body and only the slightest flickerings of power. A substantial, still pool of golden blood oozed out from under his prone figure.
Gabriel launched forward, all thoughts of past treachery, deception, and past attempted immolation forgotten in the face of loyalty. He could heal that! It was one of the skills he had honed since becoming an Archangel-

The Southern Guardian was on him in an instant, apparently not so undone by concern to turn down a cheap shot on an angel with his back turned. Luckily, Gabriel was still faster and was able to turn and block the first mighty swing of their axe. The hit was powerful, travelling down his arm and into his shoulder, a pain blossoming there.

“Damn you all! Look what you did to my darling Jophiel!” Another swing, flaming and wild. Gabriel stepped back with it, trying to soften the impact. It worked, somewhat, but he could still feel acute pain in his shoulder. A long gouge was left in the glowing, transparent material that made up his shield.

“You’ve all done something awful,” Gabriel informed the wayward angel with the voice he used when spreading a message to humankind. “Any hurt you endure is of you own making. Bow down and repent! Confess and find glory!”

“I’ll show ya fucking glory!” The axe blazed bright like a dying star and swung downwards. It was a move so well telegraphed that Gabriel had no trouble in lifting his shield high and blocking the blade from finding purchase in his skull.

It did find purchase in the gouge it had created before. Cracks spiderwebbed across the face of the shield, creeping towards the edge. Something in Gabriel screamed, the fear he felt on that day outside of Eden so long ago.

Another hit like that and he’d have no more shield. He’d only have his speed and Voice.

The Voice was a nuclear option.

He stumbled back, eyes alighting on Aziraphale’s dropped sword. It was behind the Southern Guardian. A tricky placement. He’d need to get around them to snag it but the Guardian was so intent on killing him where he stood he wasn’t confident in his ability to get there without drawing that blade to his exposed back.

“You’ll know out glory when we destroy all of Heaven and Hell!” The furious angel continued, words spilling from their mouth like bile.
Another strike and a shard was separated from the upper right hand side of his shield. He stepped back, unnecessary heart hammering fearfully in his chest. There had to be some tactic he could apply here!

Wait. There was!

A step backward. Another, Italian leather shoes scuffing the white marble.

Then he lunged forward, putting a violent burst speed behind the sudden movement, and smashed his shield square into the opposing angel. His shield shattered on impact, shard falling to the ground like sparkling comets, but it had its desired effect.

The Southern Garden was knocked back with such force that they went clear through the nearest wall, collapsing the structure on top of them.

Gabriel let out a breath, releasing tension from his body. Very good then. Nicely handled, if he did say so himself. Now, to see to Aziraphale.

Except...where was he? There was a puddle of golden ichor but no angel. Oh! Had he discorporated?! Oh Hell, Oh Damn! Would he be returned to Heaven from inside this space? He didn’t think so. This Nothingness felt devoid of Her guiding light. He’d fucked it up. He’d lost a whole Principality!

He was beginning to grapple with guilt and plan the paperwork he would need to file when the rubble of the collapsed building behind him exploded outwards. Kushiel launched, axe raised and ready, eye aflame with wrath and vengeance. Gabriel stumbled backwards, taken unaware-

Then the axe was blocked by a sword.

Aziraphale looked dazed, a tad confused. Gabriel supposed he’d probably look much the same way if he was glowing like the Principality was. A golden sheen that seemed to exude from every pore on his body. It was as if the Almighty Herself had reached out and nursed him to health, leaving a large part of Herself behind.

Gabriel could only gape as Aziraphale stepped between him and Kushiel, sword blazing in his hand.
“Kushiel. I suggest you lay down your arms lest you find yourself lying in the spot next to Jophiel. You will not die...but I will not be gentle with you, either.” It was a threat delivered in a tone that Gabriel was familiar with. Aziraphale had sounded like this when he bid them farewell before stepping into the pillar of Hellfire. A strange kind of confident detachment that was unnerving if only because it was so unlike the angel.

It was nigh demonic.

Kushiel did not seem dissuaded in the slightest, readying their axe. “Give it your best shot, you fucking pillow biting Princi-”

Aziraphale never let him finish the insult and Gabriel was glad for it. It was ugly and Gabriel detested such hateful things.

The move was swift and furious. He didn’t even use his sword. It wasn’t even a fist he raised but an open palmed slap across the face the sent the Southern Guardian colliding with ground so hard it broke on impact. Kushiel didn’t stir, only twitched as his body was knocked out cold.

Gabriel’s jaw dropped.

“Oh my!” Aziraphale gasped, looking at his own hand with shocked, yet pleased, smile. “Goodness gracious me! I seem to be quite strong! Well, I always was but...this is quite, quite strong!”

“Y-yeah?” Gabriel stammered, trying to get a grip on the situation.

Aziraphale smiled brightly in his direction, eyes bluer than a summer sky. “Gabriel, dear, I believe we need to help these poor souls. What do you think?”

Gabriel wanted to argue but...but there was such open and pure goodness flowing from the Principality that it made him reel. It stirred something in the very center of his being. Something that he had stopped paying attention to millenia ago.

_Compassion._

Gabriel straightened, dusted himself off, and nodded. “What did you have in mind?”
Aziraphale beamed like the sun.

“Let us leave the Garden.”

Chapter End Notes

END GAME! END GAME!

Raphael: Soooo...you made top energy.
Crowley: Hahaha! Yeeeeeeh.
The Rebellion

It hurt terribly. Morningstar was confused, angry, and hurting. Betrayed, he felt, by the Almighty and he wore these intense emotions like a beacon. It broadcasted directly into Raphaels mind and broke his heart into a million pieces. A sting so raw that it felt like a gaping, physical wound that was beyond his ability to heal.

*It hurt.* He sobbed his pain into the cloud cover, body shaking, his face twisted with grief. He was not able to stand under it. His arms ached to gather Morningstar in his arms and tell him it was okay. That understanding wasn’t as important as continuing to be.

It was the first war. He had often wondered why Michael built up such a force when there was no one to defend against. An army seemed superfluous. Unneeded. Yet the Almighty always let her take the strongest and best. The easily hyper fixated and single minded. The ones Michael could point at training dummy, say “Smite it!” , and have the deed done with a not only a smile but a spring in their step.

Michael had millions under her command.

So did Morningstar, despite never having taken more than a dozen subordinates. He had always preferred a small, loyal group to a faceless horde of devotees. Yet there he was with an army. His silver tongue had brought a spark of rebellion in the questioning and curious. *They weren’t soldiers.*

It was a slaughter before there was a word for it. No one died. Not really. Maimed, bled out of grace, but no death despite the Darkest Angel of them all waiting in the wings, just in case their skeletal touch was needed. Raphael could not look at Death directly. They were the antithesis of everything he represented.

A hand put his shoulder in a vice grip and he jumped, ready to expend a miracle to drop whoever would dare try to attack him while he was so vulnerable. The power died before it came to fruition as he found himself staring up at red and gold.

“Raph!” His Child was distraught, his leg was injured and feathers singed. They pulled at his arm
insistently. “C’mon. We gotta go! W-we can hide out for a bit! Until this blows over!”

A strange stillness fell over the archangel. An earlier conversation with the Almighty spring to the forefront of his mind. “There will be a purging soon. You’ll all lose some under your command. In the name of balance I ask you sacrifice those that are closest to the Edge. It must be ten million to ten million, if a division takes place.”

Raphael only had one student that attended Morningstar’s gatherings. He only had one student who was openly rebellious and spiteful, even if it was all done in good humour. He only had one student that asked uncomfortable questions.

They were standing before him, pleading with him to run away when they could have done so on their own easily. They could have been overlooked, if only they weren’t so loyal...and now Raphael found the choice he dreaded was presented on a plate of good intentions.

He’d reward loyalty with cruelty.

Raphael stood despite the weight of the universe bearing down on him.

His Child smiled nervously, perhaps sensing something was off in the way he was being regarded. “This is insane, right? I never thought it would be like this! Thank goodness I didn’t pick up a weapon!”

Morningstar was falling. Michael had succeeded with Her guiding her hand every step of the way.

His retinue was being struck down. One by one. Falling after their leader. Their false king.

His Child voice rose in pitch and terrified desperation as they screams chorused about them. “W-we gotta now! B-before-”

“Before thou is forced to follow?” Raphael murmured, unable to look at the lovely face anymore.

They clutched at his robed. “Please! Raph! Master Raphael! I’ve been good! I’ve been so good! Forgive me and...and please don’t let me go!” A frightened whimper that reminded the archangel of the moments after this poor creatures creation. “Please?”
“I do forgive you, my sweet child,” Raphael still couldn’t look. He felt he’d fall to pieces and give in if he did, then there’d be two archangels Falling to the unknown.

Michael was looking their way. He could feel her gaze, infused by the Almighty’s own sight. They were coming.

His star maker saw doom coming. “Oh Lord-!” He turned and spread his singed wings, taking to the sky…but was caught in Raphael’s grip and pulled back down with a yelp.

“You can’t be serious! This isn’t fair! I DIDN’T EVEN FIGHT!” He was struggling, beating his wings frantically, kicking and scratching. “Please! I’ll go! I’ll hide! You won’t ever hear from me again, not for all eternity!”

“Child...child,” he soothed, stroking red hair, voice thick. “I’m so sorry.”

The fight gradually fled from them and he was left with a limp, sobbing mess that only remained on their feet by virtue of Raphael holding them up. “Raphael...Raphael...please. Please. If your sorry then do something!”

He did. He tilted his child’s face up to look at them properly. “I am. Thou art the best I’ve known. The brightest star in the sky. Of all I’ve ever had the privilege to teach thou hast been my heart’s delight! Thou are going to do great things, no matter what happens next. I have faith in thou. Even the gifted must bear the weight of their choices, however. Remember that, my child. Wear it outwards. Make thou’s choices in good faith not to Her but to thyself. Can thou do that? For if thou does thou will find light where there is darkness.”

“I don’t understand!” It was sobbed in defeat. “Just say it plainly for once!”

“I know. Oh sweet child, I know!” He embraced him, holding tightly and never wanting to let go. Michael was close. He’d need to do it soon. He wouldn’t let this fall to her. His Child was his, after all. His to deal with. “Listen to me, child. Throw out my lessons. Be impulsive. Be spiteful. Be impatient. Be proud. Want and crave the world. Never settle for less than what thou deserves! ...yet…yet don’t forget. Never forget. Never forget softness. Never forget optimism. Never forget love, my dearest one.”

“R-R-Raphael I-” It was the mournful noise of someone that saw their down fall closing in and had bitterly accepted it.

Raphael let them drop, pulling the grace from them as quickly and painlessly as possible. His sweet child Fell, fading into the impenetrable darkness that had never existed before. They did so without further protest, beyond his sight, beyond everything.
Michael landed noiselessly, reached for him. “Raphael….”

There was no hesitation before he threw himself into her arms, sobbing, near screaming with the pain of it all. He slid down her body, to his knees, grasping her ankles. His forehead pressed to the cool matter of the floor.

She and she looked down at him, Her and her voice breaking. “Oh Raphael….”

“Show me a great plan,” he begged between sobs. “I won’t ask for an explanation. I have faith, still. Just…show me a great plan. Show me the Tests mean something. Make it good.”

He choked on a sob.

“Please.”

Chapter End Notes

This was to be the start of the next chapter but I felt it was too long. So here! Have an extra!

Don’t @ me about your hearts.
It wasn’t an invasion so much as a trickle of stranglers. Most were scared or just down right desperate. Some screamed when they saw the sun for the first time and grovelled in the dead grass in abject terror. Pepper and Wensleydale dealt with these poor souls with compassion and logic, offering safety away from the gate. They dragged or guided them to the living parts of the orchard, where cover still existed.

It was the ones with weapons that Adam was more conflicted over. They held the same desperation in their hearts, the same fears and hopes, yet they came through ready to spill blood. Perhaps they were only following orders but Adam had read enough history to know that was often not a good enough excuse for cruelty.

Beelzebub and Dagon had a simple philosophy for dealing with anyone with violent intent: beat them within an inch of death. A swarm of flies here, a snap of massive eel jaws there would put down the more violent offenders. Brian, always more than willing to rough house, gladly followed their lead and swung a fence post about like he was attempting to batter down wasp nests. Every now and then Beelzebub would look over at him and bark “The head, human! Aim for the occipital lobe!” or “Yeszzzz the knees! Good work! Good zzzstrike now do it again!” Brian soaked up the praise and the tips with a proud grin.

That left Adam on a precipice.

The voice of his Satanic heritage was whispering in his mind. Telling him to destroy and punish. This was HIS world, HIS reality. He was its shephard, its destroyer, its guardian, its warrior! He need only focus his intent and all that came through with an intent to harm would be put down.

Yet there was another part of him telling him to show restraint and compassion. That another solution would present itself, one that would benefit all. Just because it wasn’t apparent at the moment didn’t mean it didn’t exist!

So he hung back, watching. Feeling simultaneously cowardly and justified in his inaction. Observation was the key, he reasoned. An opportunity was coming and he’d be aware enough to seize it.

...it didn’t help him feel less shitty, though.
Still, he waited with baited breath.

It was coming.

He felt it.

“Child, thou must stop resisting if I am to bring thou back from the wings of death.”

Crowley floated in the void, watching his pretty star radiate in new and interesting ways. He was probably smiling like a fool but didn’t give a damn. There was only one able to see him at the moment and Crowley was resolutely telling himself he cared not a lick for his opinion.

“Kinda hard to not resist. I’ve made a habit out of it.” He spat into the dark and let himself float upside down. “You do remember the last time I didn’t resist you I had the grace torn out of my body and was then thrown into a boiling river of sulphur, right?”

“I remember thou put up quite the fight.”

Crowley sneered nastily. “It wasn’t a fight. It was a bloody struggle to escape.”

“...thou should have never came to me.”

“Hindsight’s twenty-twenty on that one,” Crowley murmured. Fuck. What was he doing? He needed to allow Raphael in for this to work but...he could still remember. He never forgot the betrayal. The hurt.

Aziraphale was out there fighting. Adam and the others could be in danger. His whole world might be in danger.

Fuck. He needed to do this. Force himself open and let in a thrust of grace.
“Alright...alright,” he spoke quietly, more to himself than to the archangel. “Okay. I can do this. Alright.”

“Thou can. Thou is right. Thou is the brightest star-”

“Save it. Just...its been awhile. You’re going to have to talk me through it. It’s a ReMaking, right? I got bloody skewered by a holy weapon so-”

“Yes. We start simply, child. Do you remember?”

Crowley did. A deep, unneeded breath was taken in through his nose and exhaled through through his mouth. He let himself sag, forced himself to relax and become a dead weight in the darkness. “Think of what I love bessst.”

Crowley never made it a habit to openly think about what he loved. Demons weren’t meant for it and much of what he loved was denied to him. Oh, he loved and loved well...but acknowledging it, swelling on it, craving it...well, that was a good way to drive anyone mad.

He started with the obvious. The love that was strongest and confirmed requited.

Aziraphale. His angel. For a moment he could only see tears, his final moments before coming to this place flitting through his minds eye. That tearful confession-no. That’s not the angel he wanted to see. He wanted the angel whose cheeks flushed after the fourth glass of champagne, the angel that smiled bitchily when someone was insisting on buying a book and he was denying them, the angel that would hold out the last forkful of cheesecake for Crowley to sample, the angel that fussed about the cottage and chided him when he scared the ivy-

“Oh my. Two sides of the same coin!” Raphael was laughing, kind and amused, but not letting him in on the joke. He hissed half heartedly, embarrassed. Perhaps he was going a bit overboard in the Aziraphale department?

He redirected his thoughts. The Bentley. He loved that bloody car like a child. He was there, cash in hand, the day she rolled out of the factory. He had molded her with his very presence, giving her a personality all of her own.

His garden. Even the disobedient plants were a source of pride. They saw him as their master and, in return, he loved each and every leaf.
The Them. Adam and his lot. He could think that as long as they never, ever found out. He loved watching them orbit each other. The way they interacted was a reminder that humanity wasn’t rotten. That it had been worth saving and not just because he liked all the innovation. For all the weird shit humans got up to they weren’t evil. Just people being people. Kids being kids.

Warlock! His precious brat! He never got to talk to him but he kept tabs. One didn’t comfort and tutor a child for so many years without becoming attached, after all! Perhaps one day he’d reintroduce himself...most likely not. That was a love best left at a distance. He’d fucked that one up enough.

Crowley found himself faltering. It wasn’t enough. Did he love so little? Well, he was a demon. It wasn’t like he was meant for it.

“Nonsense. Thou is closer than thou believes. Does thou not feel it?”

He couldn’t. It was still dark. The star had faded away and he wasn’t sure if that was a good thing or not. He was stuck. He was dead. Dead because he he was a demon and not worth hanging on-

“Stop.” Raphael commanded. “I cast thou down knowing thou would rise again. If thou can rise above Hell, thou can rise above this. Thou is a creature fueled by belief.”

Another hiss. Stupid Raphael. Always having faith in him when he really did nothing to deserve it. Always hanging on even after letting go. He hated it.

Or he loved it.

He wasn’t sure if there was much of a difference.

Raphael really did laugh this time, full throated and affectionate...but it seemed closer. Physical. Less in his head and more in ear drums.

There was a very real, physical ache in his chest coming up on him in a rush. Real air in his lung. Real warmth on his skin.

He gasped, convulsed, nails clawing at the floor. A hand was pressing him down, laughing at the same time it was shushing him.
“There we go. That’s a good child. I did not have to do much at all. We really must work on this self loathing thing. It slows thou down! Imagine what one could accomplish if thou gave thyself the same love thou gives others!” The archangel hadn’t changed. He looked exactly as he did the last time the serpent saw him. Dark eyes, dark haired, white robed. The only difference was how proudly he smiled.

Crowley was so overwhelmed he couldn’t help himself.

He flung himself into his arms and sobbed.

Chapter End Notes

Two or three chapters left, I think. :P Time for a big baaaang.
“Remember to sign it with your sigil,” Gabriel was saying, eyes darting from window to window of the book shop. Behind him Aziraphale sat at his writing desk, quill in hand, taking his sweet time writing the message. “I won’t be able to put the force we need behind it if you don’t.”

“Oh dear. You’d think She’d let you indulge in case of emergency,” Aziraphale tutted, dipping his pen in the pale blue ink. For a moment he tapped the feather of his quill against his chin, trying to conjure the words needed. It was hard when he could hear Sabriel shouting and so many voices rising as Eden devolved into more and more chaos.

“I could sing a song. Whistle a tune. Make them all stop for a minute or two...but it wouldn’t be a command. It wouldn’t be what we need.” Gabriel’s wings fluffed defensively. “I’m not even sure if this will work. I’ve only ever done it for Her Word.”

“I appreciate the attempt.” Aziraphale signed his sigil with a practiced flourish, pouring grace and intent into the motion to make it effective. He seemed to have an over abundance of grace at the moment. He wasn’t quite sure what had happened while he was waiting for Death to take him but he couldn’t argue with the fact that something about him had changed.

He had a feeling Crowley had something to do with it.

His chest panged as the thought floated through his head. Crowley. His sweet demon. Gone. Except...it didn’t feel as devastating anymore. Perhaps revenge on Jophiel had eased him but...would that explain the optimism he felt? He didn’t think it would.

If anything he felt calm. Reassured. Determined. A drastic change from where he’d been just a short time ago as he fought Jophiel. The despair in him had dissipated like smoke from a match. Crowley might as well have not died in his arms at all but merely fallen asleep.

He ignored the tentative hope in his heart it in favor of folding the letter up and passing it over to his superior.

“There. Signed and sealed.”

Gabriel tucked it into the breast pocket of his shirt over his heart. “Last chance to not do this. Once
they’re through we’ll be stuck with them.”

“I know,” he confirmed solemnly.

“Aziraphale...these people wanted to destroy heaven and hell.”

“Jophiel and Kushiel did, Gabriel. These people are desperate and beaten. I’m fairly certain once there’s safety they’ll lay down arms.” Aziraphale had no idea why he felt this way. Perhaps it was naive of him. Perhaps they’d rescue the nephilim and the infernals only to have them start wrecking the earth as their ancestors had instructed.

Aziraphale would rather err on the side of compassion and love than be cruel out of fear and caution.

Besides, he was a Guardian of Eden. It was time to expel all that didn’t belong from inside the walls. It was his duty to see it done where the other three had not.

“Once their through Michael will know.” Gabriel fretted, looking upwards for guidance and finding none in the space of Nothing. She wasn’t here. “We could be leading them into a slaughter.”

“Aren’t you THE Gabriel?” Aziraphale reminded him firmly, standing from behind his desk. “You command Michael and the rest by Her decree.”

“Michael hates that decree.” Gabriel shifted on his feet, flexed his wings. “This could be the straw that breaks the camel’s back when it comes to the chain of command. I could be seen as being unfit for duty and Michael will overthrow me, declaring it war time. I may be seen as a traitor to heaven.”

“Oh my. How awful to be declared a traitor for doing the right thing. How absolutely dreadful.” Aziraphale couldn’t keep the dry cynicism out of his voice.

Gabriel shot him a rather dirty look. “The irony isn’t lost on me, you know.”

“I should hope not!” But he allowed himself soften. Gabriel really did look like he’d had a rough few days. Perhaps not as rough as himself but one should never compare discomforts. Gabriel wasn’t used to this level of internal conflict and disobedience. Aziraphale, at least, had a few thousand years to come to terms with bending rules. “Think of it like this: if She doesn’t wish this to happen it will not. Something will happen that throws a wrench in the works and anything we attempt will be met with failure.”

“Ineffability.” Gabriel sighed heavily.

“Ineffability.” Aziraphale repeated knowingly, nodding.
“...I tried to kill you a few years ago.”

“Yes?”

“...why are you being kind?” It was such a plaintive, confused question that Aziraphale somehow felt insulted that the archangel didn’t understand.

“Because we *should* be kind and forgiving,” he informed him haughtily. “We *should* be warm and move forward. That’s what is to be an angel.”

“What ever gave you that idea?” Gabiel laughed in disbelief and Aziraphale didn’t even have the heart to offended this time. It wasn’t how things were in Heaven, after all.

“The humans see us that way. If they are built in Her image that is must be how She has come see us, yes?” He smiled patiently, knowing it to be a difficult philosophy to comprehend. “We are meant to serve Her by protecting and guiding them. They want kindness. Hope. We should give it to them.”

The wheels were turning in Gabriels head, his eyes swirling with the purple of aether that made up his being. Finally, he smiled bemusedly. “Sounds like something She would say.”

“Oh!” Aziraphale knew he was blushing, flattered beyond belief. “Oh, thank you!”

Gabriel shrugged and began marching to the door. “It’s only the truth.”

Aziraphale reached out for him. “Wait! You can’t go out looking like you just rolled out of a particularly wild Fashion Week after party!” He knew all about that. Him and Crowley had miraculously received an invite to one such party in Milan a few years before. They’d entered looking stellar...and left dawn the next day looking like they had rolled about in a dumpster full of champagne and glitter.

It had been *very* fun.

“What?” The archangel looked down at himself, finally paying attention to how rumpled he was. “Oh. Oh! Hm. Perhaps…?”

Gabriel snapped his fingers and clothed himself in a pristine, white tunic with golden epaulettes. White dress pants with golden pin line tapered off into polished, white boots. A purple sash
decorated in all his best medals and commendations wrapped from his left shoulder and down across his right hip. He gave his wings a shake, trying in vain to straighten speed ruffled feathers.

Aziraphale applauded. “Well done.”

“Oh shut up,” Gabriel huffed, reaching to smooth his wings. “Is it too much?”

“It’s commanding,” Aziraphale observed truthfully. “It should do the trick.”

Gabriel rolled his eyes and flushed despite himself. “Ready?”

Aziraphale took a moment to clean golden ichor from his clothing with a snap and straighten himself as best he could. He’d never get this suit right again. He’d always know that he was very nearly ended in it. He’d need to get a new one was everything settled and the thought of having to change his outfit after so long was nearly enough to send him into a fit of anxiety...but he pushed the thought away in favor of focusing on the task at hand.

“Lead the way.”

It started as a tingle in the back of Adams neck that creeped up the back of his head and down his spine at the same time. It was like electricity but infinitely more comforting. Turning away from the gate he found himself looking at the cottage at the exact moment the front door was thrown open and a familiar figure sauntered out, looking significantly not as corpse like as he had.

“Mister Crowley!” He gasped and found himself running, leaping over the path gate like greyhound, skidding to a halt just in front of the demon. “You’re...I mean...I thought- I wasn’t-” He had many things he wanted to say and none of them were coming out.

He settled on the rather impulsive decision to throw his arms around the demon and hugged him tightly.

Said demons hands fluttered, hovering about him, before patting his back awkwardly. “Right. That’sss enough of that,” he murmured before extracting himself, not smiling but looking rather pleased nonetheless.

Oops. Adam had gotten carried away.
He didn’t really care.

Raphael ducked through the doorway behind Crowley, chuckling, seemingly endlessly amused. “How can thou have such low self worth when so many are heartbroken without thou?”

“Raph….” It was growled like a warning but came out sounding a little whiny and embarrassed. Adam grinned hearing it.

“Yes, yes, I know.” The archangel folded their hands neatly before them and regarded the scene. “Hm. It appears everyone has done quite well. Now a solution must be found.”

Mister Crowley gazed at the gate and its trickle of refugees. “We can close it but we need to get Aziraphale out first.”

“And Mister Gabriel,” Adam reminded.

“…sure.”

Raphael laughed again though it sounded slightly more baffled. “We will help everyone, surely.”

“Oh yeh? How do you suggest we do that?” Mister Crowley placed his hands on his hips, looking up to the angel petulantly.

The archangel looked between Adam and the demon, deep in thought, black eyes distant. “...tis strange, is it not? All three of us have experience in warping reality as we see fit. All three of us are standing here together.”

A smile crept across Adams face, his imagination beginning to run with the observation. “It is strange, Mister Raphael. It seems very fortunate.”

Mister Crowley tilted his head, eyebrows inching upwards in a dawning realization. “Even more fortunate that one’s human, one’s demonic, one’s angelic.”

The three of them regarded each other for a moment in relative silence, oblivious to the action going on around them. Finally, Adam clapped his hands.

“Right! What do we change?” He asked, finally putting the question out there. “Circle talk. Mister Raphael?”
The archangel looked skywards, searchingly, as he withdrew a deck of cards from his robes and began shuffling them. A fidgeting movement, Adam recognized, meant to focus one’s thoughts. “...we could bring down the Host. Have them take the Garden. Though, I am not confident that taking Eden is the right thing to do. It has been lost for so long. SHE may want it lost.”

“Not to mention the Host will destroy any demon they come across.” Mister Crowley ran a finger across his own neck grotesquely. “I just got better, thanks. We could erase the Garden all together. All the ill begotten spawn, the Guardians.”

“We can’t UnMake just three Guardians, child. We’ll need to do all four if we go that route.” Mister Raphael informed softly.

The demon twitched, hissing under his breath, before clearing his throat. “...no. Not that then.”

Another silence fell over them.

Then Adam gasped. “Some are half angel and some are half demon, right? That means that they are ALL at least half human or have human in their bloodline. Why not...take the demon and angel bits out?”

Mister Crowley grinned. “Remove excess grace.”

“Remove excess damnation.” Mister Raphael mused happily. “Oh! That might be viable! Just make them all human! Then-”

“-we spread them out,” Mister Crowley cut in. “Erase Eden, angel, demons from all of them. Give them the full Babel treatment, setting them up with normal lives all over the place-”

“-and then close the gate. Everyone is safe and happy!” Adam beamed at the demon and angel. “Can it be done?”

Mister Raphael nodded enthusiastically, long hair bouncing along with the motion. “For one alone? Nigh impossible. Three working the same intent should have no problem.”

“Well, there is one problem.” Mister Crowley frowned and nodded at the gate. “We can’t do it from here and doing it on the other side will probably be a shitshow. We need to get them all over HERE.”

This was indeed a problem. Adam’s head buzzed with possible solutions and ways to draw everyone else out without further fighting and potential blood shed. Perhaps a parlay? Is that something that could be done?
Fortune was on their side.

Or perhaps She was.

At that moment **Words** echoed through the gate.

Gabriel stood at the top of the WatchTower, wings spread wide. In his hand he clutched the message Aziraphale had written. The ink was still wet and it stained his fingers. He barely noticed. It was an important message, one he needed to get correct and put the right amount of Faith behind.

It wouldn’t work as well if he didn’t have Faith in it.

Below him he could see Aziraphale and the Northern Guardian working to tie up their brethren. Almost done. He had to wait until those two were truly bound and unable to move before he started. The Word would be heard by all who were close, after all. They’d wake. They’d fight.

Finally, the petite guardian gave him a thumbs up.

The Archangel Gabriel took a deep breath.

“**BE NOT AFRAID. LAY DOWN YOUR ARMS AND FIND PEACE FOR I BRING TO YOU ALL THE WORD!**”

His voice didn’t echo or boom but it was heard by all. Loud and soft, a storm and a breeze. Below him there was a clatter of weaponry hitting the ground, a thump as some dropped to their knees.

Not a bad start.

“**KNOW THIS, ALL WHO HAVE SUFFERED, THAT BEYOND THE GATE LAYS THE EARTHLY KINGDOM OF GOD. KNOW THAT THE SINS OF YOUR ANCESTORS ARE NOT YOUR OWN. GOD FORGIVES ALL. MARCH, FRIENDS. MARCH AND FIND HER FORGIVENESS. CROSS THE GATE TO SALVATION!”**
This was the most important part. This was the part he needed to have Faith in. That all these souls would be forgiven and would not be smited the minute they crossed. That this would end in salvation and not slaughter.

Aziraphale seemed confident.

Gabriel decided to lean on that.

The Faith in his Word was strong and bled out into all who heard, louder than the sudden booming protestations of Jophiel and Kushiel. The nephilim listened and, despite their nature, the infernal breed did as well.

A march began.

Beelzebub hated to admit it but hearing that voice made her knees weak in a way that had very little to do with the holiness of the Word. Gabriel was- ugh! -blessed with a voice that carried no matter what. When they sang celestial harmonies together Before he’d always overpowered her own voice. He overpowered all choral voices.

It was why she wanted to change. If she couldn’t have a spot light like he had she’d find another niche. She made the first bee. The first house fly. She did these things without permission, against permission.

She showed Morningstar because he liked such acts of rebellion. Praised them.

She showed Gabriel because she wanted his praise as well. She had trusted him.

Then he Felled her when the time came.

Beelzebub had millenia to stew in the betrayal. Millenia to envision what she would do when her and Gabriel met in a less professional setting. Slitting his throat and pulling out his vocal cords had been
at the top of a very long list of things she wished to do.

She certainly hadn’t expected to feel compelled to listen to the blasted voice! Yet as the creatures she had been fighting tooth and nail, instructing the young human to fight just as brutally, praising Dagon to destroy, walked through she found herself pulling both the boy and fellow Lord to the side.

Next time. Next time she saw Gabriel she’d beat his head in.

This time she’d listen.

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It was in moments like this that a treacherous part of Crowley believed in the ineffable plan Aziraphale had spoken of since their first meeting. Chaos like he’d been living coming together so neatly had to be the fault of divine intervention. He couldn’t fathom another explanation, as much as he wanted to.

He didn’t question it. This was what they needed. He took Adams hand in his own and gripped it hard. “If this gets to be too much pull out, alright? Raphael and I are celestial. You aren’t. Don’t pull a hero move.”

Adam smiled at him confidently, eyes sparkling in a way that reminded Crowley far too much of the boys father. “You’re one to talk, aren’t you? Just try to keep up with me.”

Cocky blighter.

Crowley grinned proudly despite himself.

His student was the brightest star, after all.

Raphael took the young man’s other hand. “I think thou mean that thy must try to keep up with me.” He smiled sweetly, as if he hadn’t just intentionally antagonized them, and winked.

Oh, it was ON.
It was surprisingly easy to get on the same wavelength. It brought to Crowley’s mind the image of vastly different rivers converging to become the sea.

At least, he was pretty sure that thought was his own. I could have been Adams. Or perhaps Raphaels. Raphael always did like the concept of an ocean.

The more they worked their intent the harder it became to think individual thoughts. It all became ‘rework, rewrite, redo’ and a litany of other, similar concepts. Each nephilim. Each infernal. Each and every one-

All sense of self was lost.

There was only RECREATE.

There was light.

And it was good.

Aziraphale wasn’t a killer. He may have been created a soldier but he made the choice to not be a killer.

He reminded himself of this choice repeatedly as Jophiel spat bile at him. “You’re dooming them! I hope you’re happy! They’ll all be killed! Heaven and hell will tear them to shreds and it will be on your useless, fop head! You betrayed heaven and hell! How can you allow them this! Hypocrite! Bastard!”

Strangely, the words all rolled off him. There was a power thrumming in him. It felt like safety. It felt like tangible reassurance. He was stronger than him not just bodily but spiritually. He was bolstered.

All would end well.

Something good was waiting for all these poor people on the other side of the gate.
Something good was waiting for Aziraphale.

...but something not so good was waiting for Jophiel and Kushiel. Death by Hell fire? Falling? Both seemed awful. Deserved, perhaps, but still awful.

That’s why he decided to make another choice.

Gabriel joined him and Sabriel with a pleased smile. “That went well! Time to move on, I think.”

“Not all of us,” Aziraphale hummed thoughtfully before waving a hand at the Southern and Western Guardians. “We’re leaving them here.”

Sabriel gasped softly. “Oh dear. Is that advisable?”

Gabriel considered them a moment. “...they wouldn’t be able to get back without Raphael or Aziraphale, right? They’d only have each other. It makes for a good prison.”

“It’s a poetic one. One we’d have the keys too.” Aziraphale dropped Jophiel the same time Sabriel dropped Kushiel.

“Wait!” The latter screamed. “You can’t mean it! By ourselves?! What will we do?!”

“I suspect you’ll get on just fine on your own. You two seem close.” Gabriel crossed his arms over his chest, puffing himself out importantly. “It’s better than what I’ll do to you if I drag you back to Heaven, I guarantee you that. At least you’ll have your lives.”

This mollified Kushiel but Jophiel still raged. “We will NEVER stop. I’ll have my children back! I’ll have everything I want! I won't live in austerity! I want the world, the kingdom!” He gnashed his teeth, madness pricking the pupils of his eyes.

“We’ll see how you feel in a few years,” Gabriel decreed coolly. “A parole hearing will be held once the paperwork is processed. Should only take about...fifteen hundred years? We have to make forms for such things first, after all.”

Aziraphale tutted softly. “That long, really?”
“Hey, we outsource the creation of new forms.” The archangel shrugged dismissively. “It’s out of my hands.”

Sabriel sighed softly. “...I will remain as well. These two need help. They will not get it in a void. I have committed a crime as well and...I don’t wish to face Her. Not yet. I can’t.”

“Now surely-” Aziraphale began to bluster, to vehemently object, but her hands framing his face stopped him before he could start. She looked up at him with beatific smile.

“Dear Aziraphale, please pass my best regards to Raphael? He was a wonderful cellmate. He never left me fall to despair. I’m certain I’ll miss him.” She paused a moment, regarding him carefully. “I wish the best for you as well, dear. We’ll see each other again soon, I’m sure.”

She laughed and pulled away, backing between the other two guardians. “I suspect in fifteen hundred years I’ll be paroled.”

Gabriel had the decency to look pained. “...yes. I expect you will be.”

Aziraphale’s throat was tight. He opened his mouth to speak but found he couldn’t for fear of bursting into tears. That simply wouldn’t do at all.

Instead he nodded then, feeling this an insufficient display of his gratitude, he bowed steeply. Gabriel did as well, a hand over his chest.

They turned to the gate.

“Ready to leave the garden, Aziraphale?” Gabriel asked, giving him a chance to...well. He wasn’t sure what he was being given the chance to do.

Aziraphale found he didn’t have to force a small smile.

“I left long ago.”
Michael was distraught. Never had she felt such a miracle. Such a massive bending of reality, time, and the forces of nature. Normally she’d consult with Gabriel and the Metatron before taking person action but the former was missing in action and the latter wasn’t answer her calls.

She plummeted to Earth like the angelic general she was created to be, ready to put all things right. Enough of these spy games! She had always dealt better in action than intelligence! It was her original purpose!

She was mildly disappointed when she found herself in front of an idyllic cottage in an orchard that was dead except for a single, flourishing apple tree. Not the battle she expected to find. Certainly nothing felt wrong.

Then she got her bearings.

The remains of a summoning circle surrounded her. Powerful magic. Certainly not enough to explain what she had felt but it was a start. Then there was the Tree at the center.

That was the Tree of Knowledge. That was something that just didn’t appear for no reason.

Beelzebub and Dagon were lounging against the garden fence, the latter jotting notes on a clipboard, and regarding her with something close to amusement. Like they knew she missed something important and they had not. She made a move towards them...only to be caught off guard when she finally noticed Gabriel sitting on the dead grass in his dress uniform, leaned up against Beelzebubs legs, much to the demon lords bemusement, and sound asleep.

What. The. Hell.

The more she looked, the more absurdity Michael was met with. The antichrist was laid out in a patch of grass with a small entourage of similarly aged humans, all of them chatting tiredly and proudly. He had a pair of expensive looking, strangely familiar sunglasses perched on his nose and was brimming with a power that told her he was still attempting to do something... and succeeding. When she focused she found that he focused somewhere in Soho, repairing or replacing something-oh. Aziraphale’s missing shop. Of course. He had pulled it from wherever it had been and was now setting it right.

Aziraphale...ah. There he was! In the garden bed with the demon Crowley-
She averted her eyes. She had seen the crater, as if Aziraphale had collided with the demon with a great amount of force and laid them both flat. She wasn’t paid enough to observe the inter-celestial make out session taking place in the begonias in the midmorning sun.

(Though the fact the Aziraphale seemed to be creating whole new flower was of note. When had he learned how to create things? How was he able to do it when he was so obviously distracted?)

Still, she’d need to interrupt them. No doubt out of all of these faces the principality would be able to provide the best explanation-

“Thou looks disturbed, Michael. I promise thee that all is well. It was not, but now it is.” Her heart froze in her chest. That voice. She hadn’t heard the voice in millenia. She fully expected never to hear it again.

Michael turned and looked up. He had always been taller than her. A joke by the Almighty, she figured. She was the oldest yet he was the taller of them. He smiled, the same infuriating smile he always wore when he wasn’t apologetic in the slightest, his black eyes twinkling like stars.

“Raphael?” She hardly believed she was saying the name.

He beamed as brightly as the sun. “Tis I! Didst thou miss me?” Then, softer than silk and warm as that same sun: “I missed thou mightily.”

Michael slapped him.

He giggled even as he rubbed his cheek.

Apparently some things never changed. He still liked to annoy her.

“Care to explain what happened here?” She asked helplessly, frustrated and confused. There were signs that there had been a battle and there may have been many, many others but there was no lingering presence.

“I shall, I shall.” He stepped closer, cupping one of her cheeks. “Just know that all is well.”

His hand was warm and comforting.
Familiar.

Michael knew that he spoke the truth, felt her guard drop.

All was well.

Chapter End Notes

Epilogue incoming! Tomorrow! TOMORROW!
Ducks were funny, Gabriel had decided, with all their floating, bread eating, and waddling about. It was a relatively simple thought but that was where he was today. If he started thinking any harder he would probably flee right back to heaven and spend the next few centuries wrapping himself in absurd amounts of busy work. So, he kept his mind on the ducks floating peacefully in the lake.

A rather wilted looking lettuce leaf was tossed over his shoulder into the water, instigating a mad dash from the water fowl. Gabriel sighed. “Really?”

“What?” Beelzebub snorted, joining him at his side. “I was juzzzst feeding them.”

“One leaf isn’t really a feeding, is it?” He glanced around. No one seemed to be watching, not that humans were particularly observant at the best of times. A wave of his hand and there was plenty of fresh, green leaves floating on the water’s surface. He smiled proudly.

Beelzebub grunted, shoving her hands into her pocket. “Should keep your guard up, you know. I still intend to throttle you.”

“Mhm.” This wasn’t the first time she made this threat. It wouldn’t be the last. Gabriel eagerly awaited the time she actually tried it. Certainly attempted murder would be less awkward than these strange meetings.

They stood side by side in silence for a while, watching the ducks make a mad dash for all the leaves they could handle. Greedy creatures, they were.

“Any word?” Beelzebub finally asked, glancing at him only to look away the minute he turned to meet her eyes.

“Nope. Still the Archangel Gabriel. No Falling, no punishment, no nothing. Metatron literally slapped me on the wrist.” It had been a rather stingy slap on the wrist, infused with Her retribution but he knew it had been half hearted. Done for show more than anything.

It annoyed him. He should be punished.
He just couldn’t figure out what for.

Maybe She couldn’t figure it out either.

“Good. You’d make a dismal demon. Probably be one of the ones that weep and wail for mother all the time.” The Lord of the Flies crossed her arms over his chest. “You’re so loud we’d hear you through all Nine Circles.”

Gabriel smiled faintly. “Perhaps I’d just sing songs of love and loss.”

“Do you know songs like that?” It was such a genuine question it took the archangel off guard. When he looked her way she was regarding him curiously. “Do you know unhappy songs?”

Gabriel hesitated, bought time by fixing his purple tie and clearing his throat. “I...well...no?”

Beelzebub didn’t look away, didn’t tease. “I do.”

He wasn’t sure where this conversation was going. He felt adrift, caught on the tide, being dragged towards something important but unable to control the direction or speed in which he got there. “You should share them some time,” he murmured, unable to look away from her. “I could use some variety.”

She turned her face away, looking back at the water. “If you sing that one you wrote for yourself.”

She remembered. She remembered the song he wrote that wasn’t for Her glory but for his own entertainment. He had only ever shared it with her the same as she shared her jab at creation with him.

He smiled faintly, sadly. “I don’t remember the words,” he confessed honestly. He forced himself to forget. It had nothing to do with the Lethe or ridding himself of guilt and pain.

There was a silence. She was looking at him out of the corner of her eye. He could feel it.

“I remember them,” she said after a time, softer than he was accustomed to from her. “I’ll send them to you.”

For some reason that he didn’t quite understand yet, Gabriel smiled.
Adam could still the warmth of his mother’s kiss on his cheek, the strength of his fathers hug around his body. In his mobile phone he held the numbers, university addresses, and e-mails his three dearest friends in all the universe. He was wrapped in love, emboldened by it.

It made taking a gap year or two easier.

His parents had been easy to convince when he told him he didn’t feel ready to go off to school. He wanted to travel a bit, he said. See the world. They agreed even more readily when he mentioned that his dear Godfathers were going to foot the bill and he’d have a chaperone. His mother only wanted postcards in return, his father the occasional phone call.

He was sure he’d be able to manage both while he was on earth.

It would probably be more difficult once he went to Alpha Centauri.

“Oh! I simply must see this Great Wall the Chinese built! Michael will no doubt love it as well!” Mister Raphael looked up from the book he was devouring and added the wonder to his growing list of things to see. He had a notebook of places and experiences that he was continuously adding to.

“It’s not that great. Pretty crumbly,” Mister Crowley noted as he checked Adams luggage for the fifth time. “You’ll love it.”

Mister Raphael laughed happily, dark eyes sparkling. They weren’t black as onyx anymore. He’d changed them to fit in better with the humans he’d be interacting with. They were still dark, so dark it was hard to differentiate pupil from iris, but the sclera softened the intensity of them. Adam thought it was a shame, as they were quite beautiful eyes, but understood the need for change.

Mister Raphael had gone unchanged for so long that now he was feasting on it. Gone were the robes, replaced by tight leggings and fashionable tunics in all manner of rich, jeweled colour. His feet were still bare but Mister Crowley had managed to wrangle him into sandals at least. His hair was still long but now braided and interlaced with beads and jangly things that made him look like some kind of New Age priest.

It wasn’t a bad look.
Mister Crowley seemed to have a love-hate relationship with it, teasing the archangel viciously one minute only to show up with a new addition to match into his wardrobe the next. If this seesaw attitude bothered Mister Raphael at all he never let on. Perhaps he was just used to how Mister Crowley could be.

Adam paced, looking at his phone constantly for any sign that the cab would soon arrive. Their flight was a few hours off and he had no doubt that, miraculously, there would be no problems checking in but this was the first trip away from England. He was nervous.

He wondered how he’d be once Mister Raphael deemed he was ready to go off planet. A quivering mess, probably.

A hand on his shoulder tore him from his anxious thoughts. Mister Crowley was looking down at him seriously from behind those dark glasses, studying his face intently. Adam waited, knowing that sometimes the right words took a while to sort out. He was probably going to tell him he didn’t have to go, that no one would judge him if it was too much, too fast.

“...you’re going to be amazing, you know that, right?” It was so honest, heartfelt, and completely unexpected that Adam’s throat suddenly felt tight. “You’re clever. Raphael, for all his other many quirks, is actually a really good teacher. You two will get along famously.”

“Yeah?” Adam choked out, unintentionally echoing the tightness he was hearing in Mister Crowley’s voice.

“Yeah. Don’t let him make you think he has all the answers. Do things your own way. Try things. Just...listen when it counts.” He leaned in, hissing in his ear conspiratorially. “Dick around with him if he pisses you off. He lovesss it.”

Adam laughed and mopped at his eyes with his shirt sleeve. He wasn’t crying! He just...felt a little damp there.

Mister Crowley straightened himself and withdrew a box from inside his coat. “Now. Earth’s sun is bright. High UV content. It’s nothing compared to some of the stars drifting around out there, though. The black doesn’t suit you kid.” He deftly plucked the ‘borrowed’ shades off of Adams forehead, where they were resting. Reclaiming them at last, despite having a new pair already.
The box was shoved into his hands. “These weren’t cheap,” Mister Crowley warned. “I won’t get you another pair.”

Inside Adam found a pretty pair of aviators. Golden framed, pink mirrored lenses. He beamed, chuckling as he noticed the inscription on the left arm: ‘<3 A.J.C./A.Z.F.’

He wasted no time in perching them on his face. In his pocket his phone buzzed. The cab was here. “How do I look?”

Mister Crowley smiled proudly, ignoring how Mister Raphael was regarding them affectionately.

“Amazing, kid. Amazing.”

Candles were lit, the table set, wine airing, and food prepared. A snap of his fingers and there was music drifting from the old gramophone. Handel. Crowley still like Handel, right?

Aziraphale hoped so.

Indulging briefly in vanity, Aziraphale peered into the lone dusty mirror that existed in his flat. He wasn’t used to this new outfit yet. The pants weren’t as soft as liked, the shirt a little too thin, the coat well tailored but not at all what he was accustomed too. Despite the similar colours to his former outfit it looked foreign, felt alien.

At least his bow tie was unscathed, much to Crowley’s apparent chagrin. At least the waistcoat was saved with the same demons clever working of the material. Quality waistcoats were hard to come by these days, it seemed.

He supposed he looked alright, though. Not perfect. Just alright.

“Stunning,” a voice purred from the stairs leading up to his flat. He turned to see Crowley lounging against the door frame, sunglasses tucking into his breast pocket, appraising him with keen yellow eyes. He was smiling in a way that made the angels human heart do little flips. “Absolutely gorgeous.”
“Oh, do stop,” Aziraphale flustered, blushing madly even under these slight compliments. “Did everything go well?”

The demon pushed off the frame, sauntering forward. “Yup. Adam will watch Raph on earth, Raph will watch Adam in the cosmos. They’ll either keep each other out of trouble or egg each other on.”

“Well, if they get in trouble we have an excuse to go break it up, don’t we?” He smirked, reaching out to cup Aziraphale’s cheek. “Good excuse for a holiday.”

“You don’t need an excuse to take me away, my dear,” murmured Aziraphale softly, placing a hand on the demon’s chest. Sometimes he fancied he could still feel the wound there. Sometimes, when he closed his eyes, he could still see it.

Crowley’s hand found his, entwining their fingers, pressing it to him until he could feel the steady beat of his heart. He understood. He told him he understood weeks ago. After the bookshop had burned he could smell phantom smoke when ever he breathed too deep or became alarmed when Aziraphale was slow responding to his calls.

He understood Aziraphale’s fretting and was nursing it out of him.

It took a moment for him to realize they were swaying together in time with the music. Crowley must have had the same realization because he was slipping his hand from his cheek to the small of his back, pulling their bodies closer together. “I’d like to take you to the stars. Teach you how to use all that new power,” he breathed in his ear. “We could make stars that only we know about.”

Aziraphale sighed happily, closing his eyes, pressing closer. His cheek dropped to the taller man’s shoulder. “Would She approve?”

“Yesss,” was hissed in his ear. “I’m almost sure of it.”

Aziraphale hummed, kissing his neck gently. “We should go.”

Crowley smiled against the shell of his ear, placing a kiss of his own there. “From Eden to the Edge?”
The angel pulled back, kissing him gently if only to have the chance to murmur against his lips.

“And beyond.”

Chapter End Notes

Here we draw to a close. I want to thank you all for reading and egging me along. Without your comments and enthusiasm I wouldn't write half as much as I do. Certainly not half as quickly. :P

I hope you all stick around. I'm not done writing things. I think I'll do a few short pieces before I dive into the next big idea. :)

Once again, THANK YOU ALL.

End Notes

So, if you'll wanna you can follow me over on tumblr at welcometoyielding.tumblr.com as I'm going to try to start throwing these up over that way and reblogging more. Also, I like asks. :P

Comments give me life. Comment away.

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!