Divine Intervention (aka God Ships It)

by TheLadyZephyr

Summary

There’s a battle strategy devised by humans many millennia ago that's designed to overcome an adversary who is particularly well entrenched. Some walls are too tall and thick for a frontal assault, and must instead be bested through sheer dogged stubbornness.

Crowley and Aziraphale didn’t know it, but they were about to be put under siege.

Fed up with an angel and a demon who are still avoiding any talk of Feelings, God starts to interfere. When it comes to the ineffable plan, sometimes things need a bit of a push.

Notes

See the end of the work for notes

One would assume that the omniscient being responsible for the creation of the Universe would in fact be beyond the reach of petty human emotion. Theologists would have you believe that while the Almighty God is more than capable of righteous wrath or unconditional divine love, they are above such common afflictions as spite, or boredom, or frustration.

Like many things theologians would have you believe, this is incorrect.

Just because the subtleties of God’s emotions are beyond the realm of mortal understanding does not mean they do not exist. The humans were made in my own image, after all.

On the day our story begins there was one particular emotion foremost in my ineffable consideration.
Let us assume for the sake of brevity that you are familiar with the events from the first six thousand years of human history, and begin our tale on a late Summer’s morning three weeks after the world did not end. The forecast in London was for clear skies and a balmy day, and an angel and a demon were making the most of the early morning sunshine by taking a pleasant stroll through St James’ park.

Observing the scant distance between their shoulders and the way they leant towards one another when they spoke, you might infer that they were no different than the myriad other couples out enjoying one another’s company. You would be wrong.

Crowley and Aziraphale were dissimilar to the other couples basking in the Summer sunshine firstly because the other couples were human, and Crowley and Aziraphale were not. More importantly, however, they were quite different than the other couples in one very particular and irritating aspect.

They were not actually a couple.

Six thousand years is a long time to wait for something, especially when the thing you’ve been waiting for should ideally have kicked off weeks ago. Thus, it was not entirely the fault of the Met Office (the United Kingdom’s national weather service) when the forecast sunny skies were unexpectedly obscured by gathering rain clouds. When it comes to the ineffable plan, sometimes things need a bit of a push.

“Oh dear.” Aziraphale looked away from the ducks squabbling over peas at his feet, and peered up at the sky. “I thought it was supposed to be clear today?”

Crowley flicked a pea off the railing in front of him, clocking a mallard square between the eyes. The bird quacked its offense at him loudly. “You know weather forecasts were one of ours, angel.”

The wind picked up, tugging at their clothes and sending ripples flickering across the water. Crowley frowned at the sky, raising a hand to pull down his glasses.

“Storm’s coming on a bit fast, isn’t it?” he asked.

Aziraphale tossed a last handful of peas into the water. “If it’s coming on fast then we best get a wiggle on.” The angel took a step away, but Crowley didn’t follow. He was still staring at the sky.

“Crowley?”

“It is,” Crowley insisted. “‘S a bit… well, funny.” He tugged his glasses all the way off and tipped his head back, squinting up at the ominous grey clouds.

Aziraphale reached out to place a hand on Crowley’s elbow. Crowley twitched at his touch, eyes flicking down to the point of contact. Aziraphale let go, and they both seemed to lose focus for a moment, staring at one another.

A cracking peal of thunder made them startle.
“Come on,” Aziraphale insisted, rubbing his hand on his chest. “We’re going to get wet.”

“Right.” Crowley agreed. He gave his head a shake and slid his glasses back on.

Crowley was quite correct about the storm, of course, though in this case ‘funny’ meant ‘summoned by the Almighty to increase the potential for romantic outcomes between two immortal entities too obstinate to seize their own happiness without divine intervention.’

With precise and non-coincidental timing, the rain started to fall at exactly the moment that Crowley and Aziraphale rounded a bend and found themselves in a secluded section of the park.

“Bollocks,” said Crowley, putting an arm over his head to block the splattering raindrops.

“It’s getting heavier!” replied Aziraphale, raising his voice over the pounding water.

“Bloody forecast,” muttered Crowley. He pointed off the path, to the silhouette of an oak tree barely visible through the sheeting rain. “Over there!”

They dashed over the lawn and under the tree’s sheltering branches. Crowley pulled off his glasses, scowled at the droplets that had collected on the lenses, and slid them into his inner jacket pocket. Aziraphale rubbed at his arms, shivering.

“How long do you suppose this’ll last?” the angel asked.

“Blessed if I know,” Crowley replied. He ran a hand through his hair, pushing the sodden strands off his forehead.

The wind shifted the tree’s branches, and a deluge of cold droplets shook loose onto them. Crowley yelped as the icy water slid down his back.

“Oh,” Aziraphale said, brow scrunching. He twisted to scan the deserted park around them, then nodded. “Here, let me.”

“What—” Crowley started to ask, then shut his mouth with a click.

Aziraphale unfurled his wings.

The angel shuffled closer, bringing the white feathers up over Crowley’s head. The demon’s eyes were very wide.

“There,” said Aziraphale with a smile, “much better.”

“Uh.” Crowley blinked several times, staring at the angel’s face. “Thankss.”

Aziraphale’s smile widened. “Reminds me of the day we met,” he said fondly. “Do you remember?”

Crowley dragged his eyes away, gaze flickering up to Aziraphale’s wing before he shifted his focus to the rain-soaked parklands. “Uhh, yup. Yes.”

They fell silent. The rain continued to drum down, blown into silvery sheets by the gusting wind. Crowley shifted, leaning in a little closer. Aziraphale adjusted his wing, curling it a bit tighter over and around the demon.

On very rare occasion, the figurative push required by the ineffable plan is best accomplished by one of a more literal nature.
A gust of wind swirled under the oak’s branches, danced through the fallen leaves, and surged up to catch the angel’s relaxed wing. Aziraphale stumbled forward, dragged off balance.

Crowley caught him.

They stared at one another.

The wind tugged at Aziraphale’s feathers again, and Crowley’s arms tightened around his waist. Aziraphale clutched at the material of Crowley’s shirt.

“Umm,” said Crowley.

“Err,” said Aziraphale.

Sometimes, even very clever creatures can be so dense that they try the patience of the entity responsible for the creation of time itself.

“Sorry!” Aziraphale let go and pushed away, movement jerky. “How clumsy of me.”

Crowley snatched his hands backward. “Nhhnn,” he said, giving a twitchy shrug. “It’s not—s’fine.”

They held eye contact for a handful of scattered heartbeats, then Aziraphale cleared his throat.

“I, ah, I think it might be getting lighter.”

It was. The rain softened, heavy drops easing to a fine drizzle, and the wind slowed.

There’s a battle strategy devised by humans many millennia ago that’s designed to overcome an adversary who is particularly well entrenched. Some walls are too tall and thick for a frontal assault, and must instead be bested through sheer dogged stubbornness.

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“For Heaven’s sake, Crowley, slow down!”

The Bentley zipped through the lunchtime traffic, leaving the usual cacophony of blaring horns and startled screams in its wake. Crowley smirked, taking his eyes off the road to raise an eyebrow at Aziraphale.

“You know, that took you a whole ten minutes longer than usual; I’m impressed,” he said languidly.

Aziraphale glared at him. “You are aware that if either of us is discorporated, obtaining a new body would be a nightmare of literally biblical proportions?”

Crowley’s smirk faded to a scowl. “I won’t discorporate us.”

“Just like you’d never hit a pedestrian?” Aziraphale asked, brows arched. “Or a cyclist, perhaps?”

The demon glowered. “That wasn’t my fault! You were talking about—” He stopped abruptly, and
coughed. “Put something on.”

Aziraphale tilted his head. “What?”

“Music. Put some music on.”

Crowley reached across to pop open the glove box, keeping one hand on the wheel, and fished out a disc. Without looking at it, he slid it into the CD player.

Now, Crowley was used to hearing the Bentley play music that was altogether different from that which he’d intended to listen to; it was a common enough occurrence. On this particular day, however, he was soon to discover that a little divine intervention could render his previous misadventures in musical roulette insignificant by comparison.

Crowley jabbed the play button.

“I can dim the lights and sing you songs full of sad things—"

“Nope!”

Aziraphale frowned as Crowley scrambled to press the eject button. “What’s wrong?”

“—We can do the tango just for two—”

The audio cut off abruptly as Crowley found the right button. “Mmmnnn, just don’t feel like that one.” He plucked the disc out of the player and held it out for Aziraphale. “Pick something else.”

Aziraphale squinted at the demon suspiciously, then took the disc and read the text printed on it. “What’s wrong with this one?”

“Just pick something else, angel.”

Aziraphale huffed out an irritated breath, and replaced the CD with a new one.

“Can anybody find meee… somebody toooo—”

Crowley hauled hard on the Bentley’s wheel, skipping across several lanes of traffic and narrowly avoiding a collision with a bus full of tourists.

“Crowley!”

“That one’s no good either,” Crowley replied, voice a little strangled.

“Honestly.” Aziraphale ejected the disc, lips pressed into a thin line. “Whatever’s the matter with you today?”

Crowley made several inarticulate hedging noises before he settled on “Just not in the mood, you know?”

Aziraphale shut the glove box. “What about the radio then?”

“Uh, yeah. Sounds good.” Crowley swallowed, and reached down to tap the console.

“—was magic abroad in the air. There were angels dining at the Ritz, and a nightingale sang in Berkeley Square…”
Aziraphale blinked. Crowley tensed, fingers gripping the steering wheel.

“I may be right, I may be wrong, but I’m perfectly willing to swear…”

The melody wound between them, pinning them in place as they listened.

“That when you turned and smiled at me, a nightingale sang in Berkeley Square…”

If you’d popped a balloon in that car, at that moment, both of them would have startled right out of their corporations.

“The streets of town were paved with stars, it was such a romantic affair…”

“Oh.” Aziraphale stared at the radio.

“…and as we kissed and said goodnight…”

Aziraphale looked up, and Crowley looked back, and the weight of the words left unsaid swelled to crescendo along with the music.

“Crowley…” Aziraphale began, then floundered, eyes skittering away.

Practise makes perfect. Both the angel and the demon had spent so very long not saying things that they’d gotten rather good at it. Once you’ve let enough moments slip through your fingers, you become woefully underprepared to catch one when the opportunity arises.

“…a nightingale sang in Berkeley square…”

Crowley rubbed at his chest, staring out the windshield with the sort of vague intensity of someone who isn’t actually absorbing anything they’re looking at. Aziraphale’s throat bobbed as he swallowed.

They sat, both taut and trembling as tuned piano strings. The moment fluttered in front of them, quicksilver and soft as the gentle notes pouring from the speakers.

“…I know ‘cause I was there…”

Crowley pulled over to the curb, and the Bentley slowed to a smooth stop.

“…that night in Berkeley Square…”

The last few notes spilled into the air, hanging in the space between them. There was still time, if they acted fast.

Neither of them moved.

The moment slid by.

“You’re listening to BBC radio three—”

Crowley turned off the car, and the radio cut out.
The vast majority of folks who believe themselves to be agents of divine will are in fact just deluded or arrogant. Often they’re both. In reality, most people acting under Godly influence aren’t even aware of the fact. It’s less bother that way.

“Excuse me?”

Crowley tried to keep walking, but Aziraphale stopped and turned to the woman with a polite expression on his face.

“Hello!” the angel said warmly. “Can I help you?”

Crowley sighed, and stopped as well, picnic basket swinging from his elbow. The flow of other pedestrians making their way down the crowded Richmond street parted around them.

“Hi!” The woman flashed a sunny smile. “Would you mind terribly; my friend and I were hoping you or your husband could take our photo?”

Shock flashed over Aziraphale’s expression for a moment, before he schooled it back to wobbly politeness. Crowley rocked back on his heels, eyebrows rising over his dark lenses.

“Ah… we—we’d be delighted to,” Aziraphale stammered.

“Thanks!” The woman handed the angel a smartphone.

“Oh,” said Aziraphale, taking it gingerly. “I’m not the best with… it’s probably best if my—err—if Crowley handles it.”

Crowley’s eyebrows snapped back down in response to Aziraphale’s beseeching expression. He took a breath to speak, then held it, and let out a sigh instead.

“Fine. Hand it over.”

Aziraphale beamed at him, and traded the phone for the basket. The woman and her friend struck a pose.

“Say cheese,” the demon drawled, teeth bared in a false smile. He took the photo, and handed the phone back to the woman.

When she got home later that day, she’d be disappointed to notice the photo was obscured by a lens flare reflected off the windshield of a passing car. Bad luck, she’d think. In reality, it’d taken Crowley quite a bit of skill to get the angles and timing right.

“Thank you,” said Aziraphale fondly as they re-joined the flow of foot traffic.

Crowley rolled his eyes. “Shut up.”

The reaching green tree branches peeking over the wall beside them rustled in the gentle breeze as Crowley and Aziraphale made their way down the street. The sky above was wide and blue, dotted occasionally with feathery white clouds. It was a touch too warm in the sun, and just shy of too cool in the shade, and the air around them was soaked with an aura of centuries deep dedication, care and passion that Aziraphale would call “lovely” and Crowley would call “a bit much.” In short, it was the perfect day for a picnic.

“Oh bother,” said Aziraphale as they reached the Victoria Gate to the Kew Gardens. The line for the ticket booths wound out of the entryway and down the street.
“Mmmm, what a shame,” Crowley replied. He raised an eyebrow at the angel, and started walking past the queuing humans.

“Crowley!” Aziraphale hissed, swapping the picnic basket to his other hip as he hurried after the demon. “We shouldn’t.”

Crowley tossed a grin over his shoulder. “Would you rather we waited until the cheese melted?”

Aziraphale frowned down at the basket, then hurried to catch up. “Well,” he said loftily, “I suppose it wouldn’t do any harm.”

Crowley’s grin widened.

A little demonic intervention shuffled the lines around, and the angel and demon slid smoothly into the queue a few places short of the ticket booths.

“Only for the sake of the cheese,” Aziraphale said sternly as they approached the booth.

Crowley’s smile turned fond. “Of course, angel. Two adults, thanks.”

The young man at the counter greeted them politely. “That’ll be thirty-six pounds please! Would you like to make a donation to the Gardens?”

“Why not?” said Crowley, lounging against the booth as he pulled several notes from the inside of his jacket. “Round it up to two hundred.”

The man brightened. “Oh, thank you very much, sir!”

Aziraphale squeezed Crowley’s elbow, and leaned in close to murmur “That was nice of you.”

Crowley attempted a half-hearted glare.

“Here you are sirs,” the cashier said, handing them their tickets. His eyes flicked from the picnic basket to Aziraphale’s hand on Crowley’s arm. “Are you celebrating anything special?”

Aziraphale tipped his head to the side. “Sorry?”

“For your date, sir?” the man clarified. “I’m dragging my boyfriend here for a picnic next week, for our anniversary.”

“Oh.” Aziraphale’s fingers spasmed on Crowley’s arm, and Crowley turned away to smother a cough into his fist.

Aziraphale let go, movement overly casual. “No, just a regular—err—outing.”

The cashier beamed at them. “That’s sweet!”

The angel laughed nervously. Crowley was making a good show of being absorbed in studying the poster on the side of the booth.

“The Rose Garden is a lovely spot for a picnic at the moment,” the man continued. He winked. “Very romantic.”

“Ah. Rather.” Aziraphale’s hands twitched as he adjusted his grip on the basket.

“We best be off then,” Crowley interrupted, pushing himself upright. He jerked his head at the
They passed through the gate, avoiding eye contact with scrupulous determination, and started walking down the path. Neither spoke as they drew away from the crowded area around the gate, feigning interest in the trees lining the pathway. Crowley cleared his throat as they reached a crossroads.

“Well…” He peered down the right-hand path, towards the spot the ticket salesman had suggested. They met each other’s eyes for the first time since they’d entered the Gardens.

“How about the Arboreum?” Aziraphale suggested, voice cracking a little.

“Great!” Crowley replied, a bit too quickly. “Overdone, anyway, roses.”

“Quite,” Aziraphale agreed.

They both took one last look towards the Rose Garden, then turned and walked down the path to the left.

In the nine decades that Crowley had owned the Bentley he had never once bothered to lock it. He simply believed that no-one would dare touch it, and as a result no-one had. This system would likely have continued to work for the foreseeable future, were it not for the slight manipulation of the fabric of the universe that left the car open to nefarious consideration in the early hours of one Sunday morning.

The Bentley occupied its usual pride of place directly in front of Aziraphale’s bookshop, left there the night before while its owner and the shopkeeper spent the evening drinking profusely and avoiding any talk of feelings with long practised ease. Inside the shop Aziraphale was puttering about re-shelving books and humming quietly under his breath. He was being careful not to wake the demon still slumbering on the couch, but he needn’t have bothered; Crowley hadn’t sobered himself up before collapsing in a sprawl of limbs, and wasn’t likely to wake for much short of another apocalypse.

Hence, when a skittering torchlight danced across the windows, Aziraphale was the only one who saw it. He paused, halfway through the act of pulling out a book, and frowned.

“Billy, be careful you twat.”

“Shove off, I need to see what I’m doing.”

Aziraphale tilted his head, and replaced the book.

“Stop shining it all over the place then.”

“Pass me the other screwdriver, I’ve nearly got it.”

The voices were floating in through one of the windows, which had (quite fortuitously) been left open a crack. Aziraphale crossed the room and squinted through the glass.

The Bentley’s doors were open. Wavering torchlight illuminated the two dark figures inside the car
as they hunched over the console.

Aziraphale’s jaw dropped.

“St—STOP!!” he bellowed, and the bookshop’s doors swung open with an ear-shattering boom.

Crowley lurched upright and fell off the couch in a heap.

The men in the car froze. They turned to face the open shop door with startled terror not unlike a pair of deer caught in the headlights of a speeding lorry. The metaphor was in this case particularly apt, as Aziraphale stepped onto the street and descended on them with all the inevitable momentum of an eighteen-wheeled, articulated juggernaut.

The torch puffed out with a burst of sparks. The shadows cast by the streetlights warped and lengthened, stretching out from Aziraphale’s feet as he stalked towards the car.

“How dare you?” he hissed, and his voice buzzed like a swarm of locusts, heavenly wrath and judgement rolling ahead of him in an invisible wave.

“Oh shit.”

The men unfroze at the same time, clawing and scrambling in a bid to exit the car. They managed it just as Aziraphale reached the headlights. Despite neither man being much accustomed to moving with speed, the pace they set as they sprinted away was one of remarkable swiftness. The biggest difference between a quick human and a slow one is simply a matter of motivation, and they were very motivated.

Aziraphale watched them leave, hands clenched into fists, still trembling with fury.

“Aziraphale…?” Crowley stood in the open doorway, hair entirely out of place and yellow eyes wide with shock.

“Crowley!” Aziraphale’s wrath fell away in an instant, and he wrung his hands as he turned to him. “I’m so sorry my dear, I think they’ve damaged your music player.”

Crowley stepped onto the street, face still slack with numb surprise. His eyes flicked from Aziraphale, to the Bentley, to the empty street where the men had disappeared, and back to Aziraphale again.

The angel leaned over to examine the damage to the Bentley’s console. “I’m afraid they’ve quite made a mess of things,” he said wretchedly as Crowley approached. “Can you fix it?”

“Aziraphale,” Crowley repeated, a whisper of breath. He swayed to a stop in front of the angel, bracing a hand on the car door.

Aziraphale looked up to meet his eyes. His breath hitched.

“Thank you,” Crowley said fervently.

“Oh.” Aziraphale froze in place, still staring. He was boxed into the little triangle of space between Crowley and the open door. “Don’t mention—ah, I mean… you’re welcome.”

Crowley broke eye contact first, bending to peer into the car. “Bastards,” he muttered.

Aziraphale gave himself a little shake. “Yes,” he agreed. “They were, rather.” He leaned back against the door so that Crowley could slide past him and sit behind the wheel. “Can you fix it?”
Crowley smoothed his hand over the Bentley’s dash. “You know, I think I can. They haven’t
damaged the car, just the head unit.” He looked back up at Aziraphale, a smile quickening on his lips. “Thanks to you.”

Aziraphale coughed. “Ah. Well. I wasn’t going to…”

“Went a bit ‘avenging angel’ there, didn’t you?” Crowley asked, raising an eyebrow.

Aziraphale laughed nervously, colour touching his cheeks as he looked away. “Did I?”

“Mmm.” Crowley’s unblinking eyes were fixed on Aziraphale’s face. “Bit impressive, really.”

“Oh.” Aziraphale ducked his head, glancing up to meet Crowley’s eyes for a fractured moment. “I was?”

The skin around Crowley’s eyes crinkled as he smiled. “You were.”

Aziraphale looked very pleased, a beaming smile lighting up his face. He drummed his fingers on the Bentley’s roof, pressing his lips together in an obvious attempt to smother the grin.

“Well.” He cleared his throat. “Come on then, bit chilly out here without a coat.”

They still weren’t ready to take that final step. But they were, thankfully, getting closer.

As a rule, Aziraphale didn’t get much mail. Certainly much less than Crowley, who had been fighting a losing battle against junk mail since he’d invented it some centuries before. Since there were only a handful of letters on Aziraphale’s floor, the deep red envelope was immediately noticeable amongst its tamely coloured neighbours.

It sat waiting while the angel made his morning cocoa, a piece of divine will resting innocently between a letter from a rare book broker in Madrid, and a thank you note from the Albert Kennedy Trust expressing gratitude for Mr. Fell’s sizeable donation.

Aziraphale shuffled to the door, steaming cocoa in hand, and stopped short when he noticed the envelope.

“What on earth…” He bent to scoop up the letter, twisting it around to examine the reverse side. There was a logo and return address embossed in a fancy font; Aziraphale recognised the logo. He crossed to his desk, plonking his mug down and tearing open the envelope.

“Congratulations Mr. Fell, Battersea Arts Centre is pleased to announce that you and your partner have been selected as the lucky winners of two tickets to—oh!”

Aziraphale skimmed the rest of the letter quickly, then plucked up his telephone and started dialling numbers with tangible excitement.

“Nghuh…”

“Crowley! You didn’t tell me you’d entered us in a competition to see A Love Clandestine!”

“Whah…” Crowley’s voice was thick with sleep.
A Love Clandestine!

“Love… what?!” Crowley was abruptly very awake, lurching upright.

“The new play I’ve been talking about for months now! We won tickets to the opening night! I do hope you didn’t tamper with the results, that wouldn’t be very sporting for the humans—”

“Aziraphale,” Crowley interrupted firmly, rubbing at his eyes with the back of his hand, “what’re you on about?”

Aziraphale adjusted his grip on the receiver, huffing out an annoyed breath. “Tickets for the premiere of A Love Clandestine this evening; it’s an exclusive showing, invite only. Very posh. I didn’t know you’d entered the competition.”

“…right.”

As you have no doubt correctly surmised, Crowley had not, in fact, entered any competitions. He was at that moment casting his mind back over the last few (admittedly chaotic) months, and trying to remember doing something that he’d never actually done.

“Well, did you?” Aziraphale asked.

“What?”

“Rig the competition?!”

“No!” said Crowley, entirely truthfully. “Of course not!”

Aziraphale sat back, appeased. “Well. Thank you. It means a lot to me.”

“Ah.” Crowley licked his lips. “S’fine. No problem.”

“Pick me up at six, then?” Aziraphale asked, tugging absently on the telephone cord.

“Uh, yup. Yeah. See you then, angel.”

They hung up. Crowley stared at his phone for a moment, then lowered his hand to his lap.

If Aziraphale had taken the time to read the invitation more thoroughly, he may have noticed several important things. Firstly, rather than a generic term like “guest” or “plus one” the letter specifically used the word “partner” on three separate occasions. Secondly, the last line of the third paragraph drew attention to the event’s “intimate setting.” Lastly, and perhaps most telling, the final paragraph before the when and where details promised “a romantic night like no other.” Caught up in his excitement, Aziraphale did not notice these points, and thus ensured that neither he nor Crowley were adequately prepared for what the evening had in store for them.

At fix minutes to six the Bentley pulled up outside the bookshop. Crowley turned off the engine, and sat gripping the wheel for several long moments. Aziraphale had had a lovely stress-free afternoon deciphering a new text an acquaintance had sent him. Crowley had not. Crowley had spent the afternoon turning the phrases it means a lot to me and very posh over in his mind, and dithering.

He glanced nervously towards the shop’s door. It was still closed. He looked down at himself, plucked at the cuff of a glossy sleeve, frowned, and snapped his fingers. His outfit changed to the familiar one he’d worn for the last half decade; black jeans, black jacket, black vest. He blew out a
breath, nodded, and reached to open the door.

Then he stilled with his hand on the handle. Looked down again.

“Argh.”

He clicked his fingers a second time, and got out of the car in a rush.

Inside the shop, Aziraphale glanced up at the clock, and made one last note on his translation. He cross referenced the line of text, then nodded with satisfaction and put down his pen. The sound of a car door shutting thudded from outside. He looked up with a grin.

He flicked his ink-stained fingers, dark blotches disappearing with a soft chime of power, and trotted to the door.

“Crowley!” he said cheerfully as he opened the door. “Right on time, my—”

He cut himself off with a startled inhale, eyes wide.

Crowley was lounging against the side of the Bentley’s bonnet, hands in his pockets. He cleared his throat, turning aside and running a hand through his hair.

“Aziraphale.”

Aziraphale stared.

Crowley’s regular clothes had been replaced. He wore a sleek black suit over a glossy dark shirt, collar flared artfully above the black tie at his throat. Intricate designs outlined in deep, subtle reds traced over his vest, and his hair was swept back in soft waves.

“Oh, Crowley!” Aziraphale breathed. “You look splendid!”

Crowley coughed, still avoiding looking at Aziraphale. He muttered something under his breath that might have been “Thanks.”

Aziraphale spent another lingering moment sliding his eyes over the new clothes, then bit his lip and turned away. “Give me a moment to close up, and then we can go.”

By the time the angel was getting into the car, Crowley looked a little less likely to run for the hills at the slightest provocation. They drove through the city, retracing the paths of familiar, well-worn conversations, and by the time they reached Lavender Hill the demon looked close to relaxed again. Unfortunately, or perhaps fortunately (in the grander scheme of things), this state of serenity was not going to last.

Crowley parked the Bentley indifferently over a yellow-lined curb, and they joined the crowd of formally dressed humans gathered outside the theatre. Aziraphale was beaming, twisting about to watch the chattering crowd.

“Crowley, look!” he said, bouncing on his toes. “Aren’t the flowers marvelous?”

The columns on either side of the theatre’s entryway had been wrapped with roses and fairy lights. More roses spilled delicately from the balcony above.

“Very nice,” Crowley agreed, biting back a smile.

A man with dark skin and long hair bound in a bun stepped up beside them, hand in hand with a
shorter man wearing a navy blue blazer. “They’ve done a bang-up job, haven’t they?” he asked, giving them a friendly smile. “Very romantic.”

“Oh, yes they have, rather,” Aziraphale replied, returning the smile.

“You’re a sop, Eric,” said the man in the blazer.

“Damn right I am,” grinned Eric. “I practically had to promise our first born to get tickets to this; I’m going to savour it, love.”

“Sorry about him,” said Eric’s partner fondly, “it’s like socialising with a golden retriever.”

“Not a bother at all!” insisted Aziraphale. Crowley kept silent, observing the crowd with languid interest. “I’m excited too,” the angel told Eric. “I’ve been waiting for this one for a while now.”

“Me too, mate!” Eric tugged his partner closer, bumping their shoulders together. “Famous director? Love story? Exclusive couples’ event for the premiere? Sign me the hell up.”

Crowley’s head snapped back around, eyebrows climbing over his sunglasses. Aziraphale blinked.

“Anyway,” said Eric’s partner, “we’ll get out of your hair. Come harass somebody else, hon.” He stepped away, pulling a cheerfully waving Eric after him. “Enjoy the play!”

“Uh. Y—you too!” Aziraphale stammered.

“Aziraphale…” Crowley said slowly, scanning the crowd with more purpose.

To their left a woman in a glittery dress was draped on the arm of a tall man in a charcoal suit. They were chatting to two other humans; a blonde lady in a white pantsuit, and a stout person with a dark pixie cut. Everywhere Crowley and Aziraphale looked they picked out the matched sets; held hands, and loving glances, and affectionate laughter.

“Ah.” Colour rose on Aziraphale’s cheeks. “I hadn’t realised… perhaps we should—I mean, do you think—”

“Doesn’t matter, does it?” Crowley said, the tension in his shoulders belying the forced nonchalance in his tone.

“I shouldn’t think so,” Aziraphale replied. Neither of them were looking at one another.

“Be a shame to miss out.”

“Rather. I mean, no-one has to know—”

“Exactly. We can just…”

“Exactly.”

The doors opened, and the crowd began to shuffle forward with an excited murmur. They fell into charged silence as they moved with the flow of people. Crowley flexed his hand, then tightened it into a fist.

The crowd tightened as they neared the doors. Their shoulders brushed as they stepped between the rose-covered columns. Aziraphale stole a glance; Crowley was focused straight ahead, jaw clenched.
They stopped to let a couple move ahead of them, and the back of their hands grazed, skin smooth on skin. Aziraphale’s hand twitched, and Crowley jumped, then attempted to cover the motion by rolling his shoulders.

The line ahead of them moved slowly, the usher at the door checking tickets before waving people through.

Aziraphale fidgeted, tugging at his cufflinks, then let his arms fall to his sides again. They took another step forward, and this time when their hands brushed neither jerked away. The angel blew out a shaky breath. Then he set his jaw.

Courage is one of those traits that is theoretically unique to humanity. Angels aren’t supposed to require courage; bravery isn’t a necessary component for following instructions with unquestioning obedience. Then again, angels aren’t supposed to dance, either.

Aziraphale moved the scant inch necessary to tangle his fingers with Crowley’s.

Crowley stiffened, eyes darting down to their hands then up to Aziraphale’s face.

“Just in case,” the angel whispered. “Err, appearances, you know.”

Crowley opened his mouth, shut it, cleared his throat and tried again. “Right.” He returned Aziraphale’s grip.

They showed their tickets to the usher at the door, and were directed to their seats. The floor in front of the stage was laid out with comfortable upholstered chairs, angled together and arranged in pairs. The angel and the demon found their places, both too preoccupied with the warmth of the other’s hand to take in much of the décor. They sat, linked hands resting on the fabric between them.

“The set looks nice,” Aziraphale said after a stretch of silence.

“Mmm. Yup.” Crowley was looking to the left. The couple in the glittery dress and grey suit were seated next to them. The man’s arm was resting along the back of the chairs, and the woman was snuggled into his side.

They waited for the rest of the attendees to find their seats, hands still grasped together. Aziraphale’s foot tapped nervously, and Crowley was still scanning the crowd around them.

Aziraphale cleared his throat. “I like your hair like that,” he murmured, eyes flicking to Crowley and away. “It’s very—err—dashing.”

Crowley spun around, pulling back in surprise. Aziraphale kept his gaze fixed on the stage. Crowley made a noise in his throat, lips parted.

The lights dimmed.

*A Love Clandestine* is quite a splendid production, and under normal circumstances both Crowley and Aziraphale would have enjoyed it immensely (though Crowley would have denied that fact vehemently). Unfortunately for the group of passionate and creative people responsible for the play, both the angel and the demon were entirely too distracted to take in much of anything.

Seventeen minutes in, Aziraphale shifted his weight, and the side of his leg fell gently to rest against Crowley’s.
After thirty-two minutes, Crowley's slouch deepened enough that his shoulder pressed against Aziraphale’s arm.

Fifty-eight minutes and Aziraphale started to smooth his thumb over the back of Crowley’s hand.

Ninety-one minutes after the play had begun, with determination not unlike that required to drive a car through a burning wall of fire, Crowley pulled his hand out of Aziraphale’s grip and settled his arm on the back of the angel’s chair instead. Aziraphale hesitated, then relaxed, leaning back against Crowley’s arm.

Both of them startled when the lights came up for intermission. Aziraphale bolted upright and Crowley had snatched his arm halfway back when they both seemingly remembered that being seen was the whole point.

“Well,” said Aziraphale, bouncing his leg, “that was, err, jolly good, wasn’t it?”

“Yup,” agreed Crowley, he pulled his arm the rest of the way in. “Love the, uh…” He gestured vaguely at the stage.

“Yes!”

“Very, uh…”

“Quite.”

Crowley licked his lips, then stood up, scratching at the back of his head. “Fancy anything to drink?”

“Oh, yes.”

Thanks to the barest deific manipulation of coincidences, Eric and his partner were at the end of the queue to the bar when Crowley and Aziraphale joined it.

“Jer, look!” said Eric brightly as they approached. “Hi again, you two.”

“Hello,” replied Aziraphale. Crowley tipped his head in a polite nod.

“Certainly living up to expectations, isn’t it?” Eric asked, bouncing excitedly on his toes.

“Oh, yes, yes, very much so,” Aziraphale answered, “I loved the bit with the, err…” he floundered for a moment. “You know, I don’t believe we introduced ourselves properly earlier.” He held a hand out to shake. “I’m Aziraphale.”

Eric shook the angel’s hand energetically. “Lovely to meet you, mate, I’m Eric. This is my husband, Jeremy.”

“Lovely to meet you both,” Aziraphale replied, shaking Jeremy’s hand too. “This is my—err—this is Crowley.”

“Charmed,” said Crowley.

“Love your shades, mate,” Eric told him.

The corner of Crowley’s lips turned up. “Thank you.”

“Have you seen any other productions recently?” Aziraphale asked politely as the line moved
Jeremy shook his head. “We don’t go as often as we’d like, but we always make the effort for our anniversary.”

“How splendid!” Aziraphale smiled. “Have you been married long?”

“Six years,” Eric replied, teeth flashing. “How about you two, been together long?”

“Oh!” Aziraphale twitched, hands fluttering as he fidgeted with his sleeves. “Ah, well, it’s been—err—”

“A while now,” Crowley interrupted. There was the barest smudge of colour across his nose and cheeks.

Aziraphale’s head snapped around to face the demon. “R—right.” He laughed nervously. “Feels like we’ve known each other forever sometimes.”

Eric was grinning at them. “Good for you. I gotta say, I love your aesthetic. Very yin and yang.” He gestured between them. “You look great together.”

Another anxious laugh bubbled out of Aziraphale’s throat. “How lovely of you.”

The queue shuffled forward, and Eric and Jeremy turned away to order their drinks. Crowley rubbed a hand over his mouth, glancing around before leaning close to murmur “Like forever, huh?”

Aziraphale nudged him with an elbow. “Technically accurate, my dear. For their understanding of time, anyhow.”

Crowley grinned.

“Enjoy the rest of the show!” Jeremy said as he and Eric collected their drinks. “It was nice chatting to you.”

They bid the couple farewell, ordered their own drinks, and made their way back to their seats again. This time, when the lights fell, Crowley barely hesitated before stretching his arm along Aziraphale’s chair back.

They settled in to watch the second act, taking in a little bit more of what was happening than they had the first time around.

“Who’s she again?” Crowley murmured, leaning close to Aziraphale’s ear. The angel’s leg twitched.

“Crowley—” Aziraphale turned to glare at him.

This was a mistake.

Crowley and Aziraphale both froze. Aziraphale’s movement had left them face to face, noses barely a shiver away from touching. Aziraphale blinked several times in a row, and when
Crowley’s lips parted in surprise, the angel’s eyes dropped to watch.

Crowley hissed in a breath. Aziraphale kept staring, hands tightening into fists.

One of the great contradictions of the universe is that while thought is required to catalyse action, *too much* thought will render action impossible. Unfortunately, both Crowley and Aziraphale were currently thinking quite a lot.

They both pulled back at the same time.

Neither of them followed much of the plot of the second act, for reasons quite opposite those that’d distracted them from the first act. They sat stiffly, each caught up in their own doubts, which spun around as multiplied as doubts are want to do.

They didn’t linger after the show, and their conversation on the drive back to Soho was more stilted than words between them had been since the days before the Arrangement. Crowley dropped Aziraphale off without getting out of the car.

Those theologians who claim the Almighty isn’t capable of frustration have clearly never dealt with supernatural entities so infuriatingly incapable of allowing themselves to experience happiness. The phrase ‘like herding cats’ comes to mind, except these particular cats are older than time itself, and keep wandering tantalisingly close to the place you’d like to herd them, then pouncing away.

Even divine patience has a limit.

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Not every plan has to be exceedingly complicated in order to be a good one. Sometimes simple is best.

Aziraphale and Crowley were drunk. There was no divine will involved with that side of things; they’d come up with the idea entirely on their own when the awkwardness from their last encounter carried through to lunch the next day.

There was, however, divine will influencing one of Aziraphale’s antique rugs. The rug in question was one that Aziraphale had obtained in Baghdad in 896, and it had enough dust packed into its weave to strike fear into the hearts of several city blocks worth of asthmatics. Currently it was lying innocently in its place on the floor of the bookshop, waiting for an opportune moment.

“Crowley, you *can’t,*” Aziraphale insisted, swaying forward from his seat on the couch.

“Why not?” Crowley slurred. He raised his eyebrows archly, and slipped a little further down into his sprawl on the armchair. His legs were dangling over the armrest.

Aziraphale drew his brows together in concentration. “It’s imoll… inmoral…imm—it’s not right.”

Crowley made a face. “*He* ran into me, angel. H’come you’re not lecturing him?”

Aziraphale lowered his scotch glass. He would have looked stern, except for the fact that he was listing haphazardly to one side. “Crowley. You can’t transform yourself in front of humans for the sole purpose of terrorising them.”
“But—”

“Even if they run into you first.”

“Pffft.” Crowley blew a heavy breath through his lips, and leaned back to rest his head on the armrest. His eyes flicked across to Aziraphale, a lopsided sly grin on his face. “You thought it was funny.”

Aziraphale cleared his throat. “Nonsense.”


Aziraphale pressed his lips together, and took a drink from his glass. His eyes were dancing. “I suppose he was a little rude.”

“Mmmm, yesss.” Crowley stretched, the movement smooth and languid. “More scotch?”

Aziraphale threw back the last of his glass. “Please.”

Crowley rolled himself to his feet, plucked the bottle up by the neck from where it rested on the coffee table, and stalked around to the sofa. He tumbled into the spot next to Aziraphale with loose-limbed grace, then held the bottle out in offer.

Aziraphale held up his glass, still swaying a little. Crowley reached forward to steady it. His fingers slid against Aziraphale’s.

“He did get a fright, didn’t he?” Aziraphale whispered as Crowley filled the glass.

They met each other’s eyes, then dissolved into giggles. Crowley took his own glass off the coffee table and refilled it as well, eyes shining.

“Bastard,” he said affectionately, bracing his elbow against on the back of the couch and resting his head on his hand.

Aziraphale’s eyes flicked downwards, a pleased smile curling across his lips. “Oh, hush.”

Crowley rolled his eyes. He tossed back another mouthful of scotch, letting out a contented humming noise and closing his eyes. Aziraphale paused midway through raising his own glass, heavy lidded gaze on Crowley’s face.

“Anyway!” the demon said, sitting up straighter. “You could argue I was just encouraging him to be more respectful of his peers. Practically a good deed.” He drew the last two words out sarcastically.

Aziraphale laughed again. “Since when do you do good deeds?” he teased, tapping Crowley’s knee playfully with a finger.

Crowley’s expression turned sombre. He shifted, and the motion caused Aziraphale to slip a little closer across the cushions. “I mean… I guess there’s not really any point anymore, is there? For either sort?”

“Oh, Crowley.” Aziraphale reached up to where Crowley’s hand hung from the couch back, and encircled his wrist with his fingers. Crowley stared down at the point of contact. “I think… well, I think the point is that we can choose what sort now.” Aziraphale made a vague motion with his other hand. “You know, either way. Deeds.”
“…right.” Crowley was still staring at the fingers pressed around his wrist.

Aziraphale looked down, and seemed to notice his grip on Crowley’s arm for the first time, eyes widening. He pulled back in a rush. The motion sloshed a liberal amount of liquid from his glass onto the couch cushions. Both of them sprang to their feet to avoid getting wet.

“Oh, fuck.”

“Angel!” Crowley’s mouth parted in a surprised grin.

“Err…” Colour rose on Aziraphale’s cheeks.

“Since when do you swear at spilled scotch?”

“Well…”

“Full of surprises these days, aren’t you?” Crowley looked delighted.

Aziraphale cleared his throat. “I’d best get a tea towel.”

“Don’t want me to miracle it away?” Crowley asked, following after the angel as he moved towards the door.

“Better not,” replied Aziraphale, looking over his shoulder. “Not without sobering up.”

“Fair point.”

They’d learnt their lesson about attempting intoxicated miracles some centuries before, in an incident that involved two chickens, a wagonload of artists’ paints, and a mob of enraged villagers. Making suitable excuses to their respective head offices had required some very creative stretching of the truth.

“Let me help, then,” Crowley continued, catching up to Aziraphale.

The angel turned around, walking backwards. “Not to worry, it was my fault—”

Aziraphale’s foot landed on one corner of an antique rug.

“—and the fabric isn’t one that’s prone to staining—”

The rug’s moment had finally arrived.

“—so it shouldn’t be a bother—”

Aziraphale’s other foot came down on the rug with a tiny puff of dust.

“—to get it out.”

The rug slipped, sliding the barest distance across the floorboards.

Aziraphale tripped.

“Oi!”

Crowley lunged forward as Aziraphale tipped backwards. He tried to grab the angel’s hand, missed, overbalanced, and toppled forwards himself. They crashed to the floor in a tangle of limbs, foreheads smacking together.
Aziraphale groaned. The back of his head had been saved from a jarring introduction to the floor thanks to the arm Crowley had looped behind his neck, but the rest of him hadn’t been so lucky. Crowley hissed a pained breath into the hollow of Aziraphale’s throat. They both remained there for a moment, winded.

“Are you alright?” Aziraphale croaked, opening his eyes blearily to stare at the ceiling.

“No,” Crowley grunted, head still buried in the crook of the angel’s neck.

Aziraphale shifted, biting back a gasp. Crowley moaned, and lifted his head. He blinked dazed eyes, and then his gaze sharpened. “Ah.”

The movement left him hovering over Aziraphale’s face, noses nearly touching. Aziraphale had one hand balled in the fabric of Crowley’s jacket over his shoulder blade, and the other had somehow slipped inside the jacket, fingers splayed over the small of Crowley’s back.

They froze into unnatural stillness, wide eyes locked together across the bare inches between them.

It would take a miracle for them to miss this moment. A hitch of breath, a shiver, the barest relaxation of taut muscles; all it would take for their lips to brush together. Six thousand years in the making and the time was now.

Then, the phone rang.

The shrill warble cut through the air, and Crowley and Aziraphale wrenched themselves apart.

“Getting late—”

“I should get that—”

“Got something important—”

“Rude of me not to—”

Aziraphale hurried to the phone, and Crowley rushed to the door, both babbling excuses over the top of one another. They paused, Crowley’s hand on the doorknob, Aziraphale’s hand on the receiver. The phone continued to ring.

“I’ll… see you later then, angel.”

“Err, will do. Goodnight.”

“Goodnight.”

Crowley slipped through the door and into the evening air, shutting it behind him. He’d left his glasses on the coffee table.

Aziraphale picked up the phone. “Hello?”

“Mr. Fell! I’m calling about a car accident you were involved in recently; you are eligible for compensation!”

When faced with failure in an endeavour you’ve dedicated a lot of energy towards, it’s very reasonable, or even sensible, to experience frustration. The level of frustration is usually directly proportional to the amount of effort one has wasted. A writer for example, faced with a subpar manuscript, might glean some small satisfaction from crushing their papers into a ball and hurling
them into a wastebasket.

With this in mind, it may interest you to know that as Crowley drove away and Aziraphale politely bullied a telemarketer into re-examining her career choices, several new solar systems in the far reaches of the galaxy were crushed into fiery entropy, and snuffed out of existence.

Distance, and perspective. Both can be beneficial when one has run into a seemingly impassable blockade preventing oneself from reaching a goal. Thus, there were no more clever hints or less-than-subtle prompts in the offing for Crowley and Aziraphale. No compromising situations waiting to spring on them, or helpful strangers intent on bringing conspicuous topics up for discussion.

Aziraphale was late. One of the unfortunate side effects of having been around since the creation of time is that it tends to mess with one’s perspective on its passage. When you’ve spent over six thousand years in the planet, an hour or two is small change by comparison.

“Oh dear.” Aziraphale looked up at the clock hung on the café’s wall. “Oh dear,” he repeated.

It was early in the morning, chillier than usual for the time of year, and the little restaurant was crowded with chattering humans. The line ahead of Aziraphale shuffled forward. There were still four people between him and the counter. He glanced at the clock again.

“I suppose I shouldn’t have stopped,” he muttered to himself.

“Sorry?” asked the woman in front of him in line.

“Oh, err, I was just saying, there’s an auction—very important—but the croissants, so I thought…” The woman was staring at him blankly. “Err, never mind. Talking to myself,” he finished with an awkward smile.

She nodded at him with a stiff smile of her own, and turned back around. Aziraphale sighed, glancing back at the clock.

A young lady exhibiting the half-suppressed panic of someone new to working in hospitality slipped past Aziraphale, frowning at the plates she was balancing carefully. She set them down on one of the tables.

“So sorry for the wait!”

Any reply the couple at the table would have given was cut short by the growling purr of an expensive engine. A sleek, glossy sports car pulled out of the traffic and screeched to a halt across the café’s driveway. The driver got out. His name was Chadwick Jennings, and it should tell you all you need to know about him that despite the fact that the Jaguar F-TYPE does not come standard with the company’s signature hood ornament, Chadwick had paid to have it added. ‘Gaudy’ and ‘gratuitous’ were the type of words Chadwick would have taken as compliment, not criticism.

“Oh.” The harried waitress exchanged a worried look with her counterpart behind the till. She scurried to intercept Chadwick as he strode past the café, tapping on his smartphone. “I’m so sorry, sir, you can’t park there.”
Chadwick bared his teeth in a too-white grin. “Why’s that, love?”

The line in front of Aziraphale shuffled forward again; there was only one customer ahead of him now.

The young lady cringed. “Uh, it’s a no parking zone… we’ve got a delivery coming soon and they won’t be able to park.”

“Don’t worry, love, I’ll only be a minute.” Chadwick tried to step around, but the waitress blocked his path.

“I’m sorry sir, you’ll have to move your car. You can’t park there.”

Chadwick stopped, and gave the woman his full attention for the first time. He slid his phone into the inner pocket of his expensive suit jacket. “I think you’ll find that I can.” He gestured to the car, voice dripping with condescension. “In fact, I already have.”

Aziraphale floundered, looking between the woman and the clock. “Oh dear.”

The waitress’ eyes widened in shock. “But sir—”

“Listen, sweetheart. It’ll be fine, I’ll be back before you can miss me.”

Aziraphale took a step towards them, then paused, and turned back to the counter. “I just don’t have time,” he muttered decisively. “It will be fine.”

Crowley stretched, and snapped his fingers at the blinds over the bookshop’s window. They rolled up obligingly, letting in a little more of the early afternoon sun. He settled back down on the couch.

He’d barely closed his eyes when the front doors opened with a crash, and Aziraphale tumbled inside. Crowley sat up, sunglasses tumbling from where they’d been resting on his chest.

“Aziraphale?”

“Crowley! Hello, so sorry, in a terrible rush.” Aziraphale crossed quickly to his desk, throwing the demon a distracted smile as he passed. “Oh, where did I put it. I wrote the address here somewhere…” He started rummaging through the mess on his desk, snatching at pieces of paper.

Crowley watched him, lips lifting in an amused smile. “Where’ve you been?”

“I’ve been—oh where did I put the damned thing?” Aziraphale patted down his pockets, then pulled out a metal figurine and set it on the desk.

Crowley stared at it, stupefied. “Angel… is that a Jaguar hood ornament?”

Aziraphale paused in the act of yanking open drawers, and looked up at the figurine.

“Oh,” he said sheepishly. “Err, yes it is.”

Crowley crossed the room to poke the metal cat, looking completely perplexed. “Aziraphale… why do you have a Jaguar hood ornament in your pocket?”
“Umm.” Aziraphale wrung his hands.

Crowley looked up, raising his eyebrows.

“Look, she was having a very bad day! And he was being dreadfully rude, but she stood up to him anyway, and I was going to leave it, I was, because I didn’t have time, but I had to do something.” He resumed pawing through the desk’s contents, avoiding looking at Crowley. “So I made him move the silly car, and then I got talking with the lovely young lady, and she’s working so very hard and studying too, and it wasn’t fair that she had to put up with his rubbish on top of everything else.”

Crowley stared.

“Then I got mad,” the angel continued, slamming a drawer shut, “because why should he get off scot free when he’s going around being so vulgar to people, so I—”

Aziraphale cut himself off, eyes darting up to meet Crowley’s. “Well…”

Crowley tipped his head to the side. “So you did what?”

Aziraphale looked down and then away, clearing his throat. “Well, I tracked down his car and I…”

Crowley’s mouth dropped open. “Angel, did you… did you steal it?”

Aziraphale blushed. “Well…”

A slow smile kindled on the demon’s face, wide and unselfconscious.

“Look, I wasn’t going to!” Aziraphale pleaded, “I was going to leave it alone, I was, but he was just so…” The angel waved his hand in a furious gesture, then his shoulders drooped, anger deflating.

“Anyway,” Aziraphale said miserably, “now I’ve missed the auction by hours.” He sank into the desk chair, and leant forward to put his head in his hands. Because of this, he couldn’t see the way Crowley was staring at him.

Crowley was, in fact, wearing much the same expression as he’d worn standing on the wall of Eden, when he’d learned about an angel who’d given away his flaming sword, and thought this one is different.

“I can’t believe I missed it,” Aziraphale said, voice muffled by his hands. “That was the only first edition of Les Prophéties d’Enguerrand that’s been up for sale in the last five hundred years.”

“Oh right,” Crowley said, giving his head a little shake. “Hang on.” He walked back to the couch, and picked up a parcel off the floor.

Aziraphale looked up as he approached, frowning.

“Here.” Crowley passed Aziraphale the parcel.

Aziraphale transferred his frown to the package, then his eyes blew wide in shock.

“This is my note!” he exclaimed, pointing at the white card tucked under the string wrapping the bundle. “The one with the time and address for the auction.”

Crowley put his hands in his pockets. “Well, yeah.” He was still watching Aziraphale with half-
lidded eyes, soft smile lingering on his lips. “How else would I know where to go?”

“You…” Aziraphale blinked at him, then snapped his gaze down to the parcel. He untied the string with shaking fingers, and pulled open the wrapped paper.

It was a book.

“That’s the one, yeah?” Crowley asked, tapping the cover with a finger.

Aziraphale was still staring at the book, lips parted. “You…” he repeated, breathless, “you got…”

He looked up, and the expression on his face was much the same as the one he’d worn standing in the ruins of a bombed church, when he’d watched a demon striding away through the rubble and thought oh, I love him.

Their eyes met.

Love is the best part of creation. All the greatest and most interesting things that humanity does happen because of love. Love of community, of challenge, of knowledge, of self. There are more ways to love than there are luminous balls of plasma burning in the vast depths of the universe, and humanity hasn’t even come close to discovering them all yet.

Love is ineffable. You can’t define it, can’t pin it down. If you tried to catch it thus you’d inevitably miss some vital part, left outside your snare of words. What you caught would be but a reflection of its reality, a tiny piece of the whole.

Crowley looked at Aziraphale, and Aziraphale looked at Crowley, and both of them were thinking about the exact same thing.

They spoke at the same time.

“Look I need to say—”

“Crowley, I was wondering if perhaps—”

They stopped, then Crowley rubbed at the back of his neck and Aziraphale breathed out a laugh.

The angel stood up, placing the book carefully on the chair. He stood facing Crowley, hands clenching and unclenching at his sides. “You go first?”

Crowley licked his lips. “Yeah. Yeah, alright.”

Aziraphale’s grandfather clock chimed the hour, and they both glanced at it.

“Right.” Crowley took a deep breath. “Angel. Aziraphale.” He winced, and looked to the side. “Look, it’s—it’s always been you and me, yeah? I mean, even when it wasn’t. I know at the start you didn’t…but ’s different now, yes?”

“On our own side,” Aziraphale murmured. He was holding himself very still.

“Right!” Crowley agreed, nodding. “That’s what I… yeah. So, anyway. Look, I think the thing is, we’ve both known for a while. At least, I know about me. And I… well I hoped about you.”

He moved his hand in an aborted twitch, reaching forward then pulling back again.

“And now that it really is you and me; no—” he waved a hand vaguely “—Sides… it seems…
seems a bit silly not to tell you, really.”

“Crowley…” Aziraphale took a swaying step closer. Crowley fell silent. The yellow of his eyes had bled out to cover the white.

“Tell me.”

“I—” Crowley shivered. “I… argh, fuck this, I’m in love with you. Have been since… forever, probably.” He looked up at the ceiling, shoulders hunched. “So it’s… I’m yours, I mean. However you’ll have me.”

Aziraphale took a breath. Then another.

“Crowley…”

Crowley tensed, eyes still on the ceiling.

“Look at me.”

Aziraphale stepped forward, raising a hand. His fingertips brushed the side of Crowley’s jaw, and Crowley’s eyes jolted down.

Aziraphale returned his gaze, hand hovering next to the demon’s face. “Crowley, you are… I lied to myself about you for the longest time, you know.” He smiled. “Got rather good at it, I’m afraid. Lied that I wasn’t happy to see you. Lied that I didn’t miss you.” His smile wobbled, and fell. “Lied that I thought you were evil. Lied that you weren’t my—my friend.”

Crowley was breathing shakily, unblinking eyes fixed on Aziraphale’s face.

Aziraphale let his fingers trail down under Crowley’s jawline, twisting his hand so his thumb rested featherlight against the demon’s cheek.

“And then… well then you were you, of course, and I—I couldn’t lie to myself any longer. But I never had your optimism, my dear. It just seemed so… impossible.”

He brushed his thumb across Crowley’s skin.

“Then… well, then everything, really. And, ah, here we are. Together.”

His hand stopped moving, trembling as he held it in place.

“I mean—what I mean to say is… I’m in love with you too. You already have me. For the rest of my existence, you have me.” His smile returned, tremulous. “So sorry it took so long.”

Crowley kissed him.

His hand came up to mirror Aziraphale’s, and they stepped forward in a single motion, and their lips slid together for the first time in six thousand long, long years.

Six thousand years is a long time to wait for something, but some things are absolutely worth waiting for.

Aziraphale wrapped his arms around Crowley’s waist and pulled him up off the floor, and Crowley broke their kiss to let out a spluttering laugh.

Free will can be a bothersome thing. Sometimes it seems like it would be easier to simply make the
choices, move the pieces where they’re supposed to go, rather than change the layout of the board.

Crowley and Aziraphale rested their foreheads together, twin grins wide and sweet.

Free will can be a beautiful thing. Life is choices; choices define us. Aziraphale chose Crowley, and Crowley chose Aziraphale. That is something infinitely precious, even amongst all the glory of creation.

An angel and a demon stood trading kisses in a bookshop in London, and somewhere just outside the fabric of the Universe an omniscient being looked down on them, and smiled. Free will may be irksome on occasion, but existence would be painfully dull if they couldn’t surprise me every now and then.

Surprise is another human feeling that religious scholars will tell you God is incapable of experiencing. As usual, they’re very much incorrect. Why would I create such a marvellously diverse range of sentiments just to deny myself the pleasure of having them?

On the day our story ends there were several human emotions foremost in my ineffable consideration.

Pride. Satisfaction.

And, most especially, love.

End Notes

Thanks for reading folks! I had the best goddamn time writing this glorious piece of silliness; it blew so far outside the scope of my original plan but I'm so glad it did.

If you liked this you may also like my fluffy series about Crowley calling Aziraphale "Sweetheart" without realising, or my historical piece about Aziraphale's journey over the years as he falls in love with Crowley. I've also done a series of mostly-fluffy Good Omens ficlets.

If you'd like to reblog this fic on tumblr (thank you beautiful person!) you can find it here.

Onward to the next fic!
~Zee

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