Through Time, Time is Conquered
by apocryphalia

Summary

But only in time can the moment in the rose-garden,  
The moment in the arbour where the rain beat,  
The moment in the draughty church at smokefall  
Be remembered; involved with past and future.  
Only through time time is conquered.  
—T.S. Eliot, "Burnt Norton"

Aziraphale and Crowley and winter throughout the centuries.  
A series of vignettes written for drawlight's 31 days of ineffables prompt list.

Notes

This was written for drawlight's 31 days prompt list (day 1: mistletoe), but it also fits into the timeline/universe of the Material Culture series.  
In other words: I Googled the history of mistletoe because I'm soft.

See the end of the work for more notes
Crowley woke to the faint sounds of music being played through an ancient gramophone. He slipped out from under the ridiculous tartan bed covers, pulled on his black silk robe, and opened the bedroom door to investigate. As his bare feet padded over the cool floorboards toward the living room, the crackle of the music began to resolve itself into lyrics.

_Chestnuts roasting on an open fire, sang the gramophone, Jack Frost nipping at your nose…_

Crowley stopped at the end of the hall, watching Aziraphale bustling around the room, swaying slightly to the music as he strung garlands along the mantle and the window sills. A Christmas tree had appeared in their living room overnight, and it was already twinkling with string lights and gold and silver ornaments. A soft smile tugged at the corners of Crowley’s mouth and something warm bubbled up in his chest. He leaned against the doorframe, silently taking in the angel’s hideously festive red and green sweater adorned with white snowflakes, the careful movements of his hands over the fake pine on the mantle, his low humming in time with the music.

_Everybody knows a turkey and some mistletoe help to make the season bright…_

After making his final adjustments to the garland, Aziraphale finally turned and noticed Crowley in the doorway.

“Good morning, my dear,” he said brightly, beaming over at the demon.

Crowley cleared his throat, trying and failing to suppress his overwhelming affection in favor of an appropriately demonic distaste for the display before him. “Morning, angel. Feeling a bit merry, are we?” He cocked an eyebrow at the tree currently taking over one corner of the room, but his lips refused to stop curling into the tender expression they wore so much of the time now, with Aziraphale around.

“‘Tis the season,” the angel replied, flashing him a teasing smile. “Would you like to help? I thought it would be nice to decorate, since this is our first Christmas here, together…”

Crowley sighed, almost successfully feigning irritation this time. “Yeah, all right.”

He stepped over to the box from which Aziraphale had been pulling decorations, and plucked out a truly awful wreath, covered in white plastic berries, with a red and green tartan bow tied on top. He stifled a laugh and smirked softly at it, remembering another Christmas more than two centuries prior.

_A Mansion in London, December 1798_

Crowley wove gracefully through the crowds occupying the Baron’s large dining room. The long, formal table and its chairs had been removed, and now couples were swirling around the dance floor that had taken their place. The demon moved around the edges of the room, expertly avoiding the revelers, and slipped through a door at the back.

As she walked down the hall toward the kitchens, Crowley’s dress transformed from dark red silk to black cotton. Her stays loosened and the elaborate silver pins in her hair were replaced by a
simple, practical bonnet. She had been tasked with attending the Christmas party in order to tempt the homeowner, newly appointed to the House of Lords, and bring yet another member of Britain’s government to the side of Hell.

She shouldn’t have been surprised that Heaven would send its own agent to sway the baron in the opposite direction, or that Aziraphale, too, was smart enough to know that the best way to gather information was among the help. Still, something clenched in her chest when she saw the angel standing there, dressed as a waiter. She stopped short in the doorway to the kitchen.

“Cr—Miss Crowley,” he corrected himself quickly. “I suppose I shouldn’t be surprised to see you here.”

“Nor I you, Mr. Fell,” Crowley replied softly.

They stared at one another for a moment. Then one of the cooks, who was standing next to Aziraphale, nudged him with an elbow. “Well, go on, then,” she said, eyes flicking meaningfully to the doorframe above Crowley’s head.

She looked up. A sprig of mistletoe was fastened to the wood there. She glanced back to Aziraphale, confused, and saw that his eyes were wide.

He approached slowly, and stopped directly in front of her. “It’s a new tradition among the humans, my dear,” he whispered. He reached above her to pluck one of the berries from the sprig, then leaned in and closed the distance between them, placing a chaste kiss on her cheek.

Crowley felt her cheeks growing red. Aziraphale stepped away quickly, Crowley entered the kitchen behind him, and they both continued about their business. Still, for the rest of the night, Crowley kept finding her fingers resting over the place where Aziraphale’s lips had touched her.

A Cottage on the South Downs, December 2020

Crowley held the wreath up to Aziraphale, one eyebrow raised. “Really, angel?”

“It’s festive!”

“It’s hideous.”

Aziraphale scowled as he took the wreath from Crowley’s hands, although there was no real heat behind it. He brought it over to their front door and fastened it there on the outside.

“Hey, angel?” Crowley asked once he had closed the door and turned around. “Do you remember the first time we saw mistletoe at Christmas?”

Aziraphale thought for a moment, and then smiled. “In the kitchens of that baron’s house. 1798, was it?”

Crowley nodded.

“You wore that red dress with the black lace,” Aziraphale remembered, advancing slowly toward Crowley.

“I was wearing servants’ dress when you kissed me, though,” Crowley reminded him.

“You still looked stunning, my dear.”
Crowley looked away, suppressing a smile, cheeks pink. “You distracted me,” he said. “I spent the rest of that night avoiding you and clutching my cheek like some delicate maiden instead of tempting the baron.”

“Mission accomplished, then.” Aziraphale was now standing directly in front of him. He reached out a hand to cup Crowley’s cheek. “It was a very tame kiss, though.”

Crowley looked back up at him and grinned. “Shall we try it again?”

They both looked up to see a sprig of mistletoe hanging from the ceiling above them. Neither knew who had actually caused it to appear.

Aziraphale nodded and leaned in to catch Crowley’s lips with his own. The kiss was soft and tender, but certainly much less chaste than their first. Crowley smiled against Aziraphale’s mouth. He kept one hand on the back of the angel’s neck, pressing their foreheads together after they broke apart.

“I love you, angel,” he murmured.

“I love you too,” Aziraphale replied, and kissed him again. Their Christmas decorating was forgotten for the rest of the morning.
Chapter Summary

An Arrangement is made on a snowy London evening.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

A Tavern in London, 1020 A.D.

“Look, angel,” Crowley said. “We’re the only ones here. None of my lot have bothered to check in for centuries, and I know yours haven’t, either.”

Aziraphale nodded, slowly. “But what you’re proposing…”

“What I’m proposing is that we continue as we’ve always done, and make both our lives a little easier along the way. How many times have we met up in places like this now? Had dinner, had drinks? Has anyone ever even noticed?”

“I suppose not.”

“Right. So let’s call a truce. All this wiling and thwarting and canceling each other out is getting exhausting.”

“I can’t simply do nothing, though, my dear—”

Crowley blinked. My dear? Something twisted uncomfortably in his chest, a sickening want he had been repressing for at least a millennium now. Aziraphale’s face had turned a faint pink, although that could easily be explained by the warmth of the tavern’s fire or the ale they had both consumed. His cheeks looked like apples, glowing red in the light of the fire, and Crowley wanted nothing more than to taste the forbidden fruit, to sample the warm flesh of the angel’s neck (and maybe other parts of him, currently hidden under the coarse linen of his clothing).

Crowley cleared his throat. “Neither can I. We can both do something when the occasion calls for it. But otherwise, we stay out of each other’s way and let the humans sin and be righteous all on their own.”

Aziraphale still looked vaguely uncomfortable—whether about Crowley’s proposed Arrangement or his own slip of the tongue, the demon wasn’t sure—but he nodded and reached out a hand for Crowley’s. “All right.”

Crowley took the offered hand, smiling hesitantly across the table at Aziraphale. His own hand felt inexplicably cold when he let go.

They lingered in the tavern for a while, ordering several more pints of ale as their conversation lapsed into familiar, friendly banter and local gossip. Eventually, once most of the humans had already departed for the night, Aziraphale decided it was time for him to leave as well. Crowley followed suit, pulling on his heavy winter cloak and bracing himself to leave the soft, warm light of the tavern and of the angel by his side.
“Walk you home?” he asked Aziraphale quietly.

“Sure.”

They exited the tavern into a world transformed by white. Thick, wet snowflakes were falling from the sky, and a blanket of white fluff had already coated the streets. It was eerily quiet in the darkness, with the chatter of humans and the clip-clop of horses’ hooves on the cobbledstones conspicuously absent. Their feet were the first disturbance to the fresh snow underfoot as they walked side by side, leaving their mark on the world around them.

Crowley pulled his cloak tighter around himself, teeth chattering. He missed the warmth of the desert sun, the gentle sea breeze off the Mediterranean. Why he had come all the way out to this freezing, godforsaken isle—

“Oh, Crowley, you’re shivering.” A weight settled onto his shoulders, a thick fur plucked from thin air. Crowley stopped walking and looked over at Aziraphale. A memory welled up within him, a stone wall and the first rain and a wing extended over his head, offered as shelter. He clutched the fur around his neck, stroking it gently. His feet itched to edge closer to the angel, to shelter in his light and his warmth, but he kept them firmly planted in the snow.

“Thanks.” He looked away, willed his feet to continue moving forward until they reached Aziraphale’s doorstep.

The angel and the demon lingered there for a moment, snow clinging to their hair and eyelashes, to their boots and cloaks, and the manifested fur that Crowley already knew he’d never dispose of. Aziraphale reached out a hand, clapped it onto Crowley’s shoulder.

“Goodnight, dear,” he said. “Do try to keep warm tonight.”

Then he was gone, and Crowley was alone in the snow, staring helplessly at the smoke curling out from Aziraphale’s chimney and the flickering light of his freshly lit fire.

Still, he reflected as he turned back toward his own home, fingers buried in thick fur, maybe this Arrangement would prove worthwhile after all.

Chapter End Notes

I'm also on Tumblr @apocryphalia!
Aziraphale glanced up at the sound of the bell over his shop door, preparing himself to chase away any would-be customer who had dared to enter. Instead, he was confronted with a young man dressed in the distinctive uniform of a telegram boy. He hurried out from behind the counter, remembering the missive he had sent to Crowley the evening before (BALLET TICKETS EIGHT TOMORROW STOP COME IF YOU LIKE). He took the response from the messenger, tossing the boy a coin in the process, and made sure the shop door was firmly shut behind him before opening the telegram.

It said, simply: PICK YOU UP AT SEVEN.

Aziraphale frowned at the paper in his hands, wondering why they wouldn’t simply meet at the theater and what kind of monstrosity Crowley would be picking him up in.

He tried to busy himself around the shop as he waited for seven o’clock, but found himself restless with anticipation for the ballet (and perhaps, subconsciously, for the company of a certain demon, who he hadn’t seen much of in the past century). Tonight’s performance at the Vic-Wells would be the international debut of Tchaikovsky’s The Nutcracker. Aziraphale had met the composer some forty or fifty years prior, after watching him conduct a symphony here in London. He had been terribly gloomy, but Aziraphale nonetheless admired his musical talent and his self-certainty.

He was ready to go at a quarter to seven, dressed in his best suit, and trying and failing to immerse himself in one of his latest acquisitions while he awaited Crowley’s arrival. At five minutes to seven, he heard the roar of an engine approach up the street and come to a stop outside the shop.

He opened his door to find Crowley, dressed in a sleek black suit, leaning against a sleek black car. “Hullo, angel.”

“You got a… horseless carriage,” Aziraphale said dumbly.

“A car,” Crowley replied with a full-body eye roll. “You don’t like it?”

“No, I didn’t say that. I’ve never been in one of these before.”

“I shouldn’t be surprised,” Crowley smirked. “You’re still sending me telegrams. We need to get you a telephone, angel.”

Aziraphale scoffed. “What would I do with one of those?”

“Call me to invite me to the ballet,” he answered. “What are we seeing tonight, anyway?”

"Call me to invite me to the ballet,” he answered. “What are we seeing tonight, anyway?”
“The Nutcracker.”

Crowley wrinkled his nose. “Well, get in then.” He nodded toward the car.

“It’s Tchaikovsky,” Aziraphale said defensively as he rounded the car, heading for the passenger side. “And it’s the first complete performance of it in Europe.”

He settled stiffly into the passenger seat, while Crowley slid into the other side and started the engine with a gesture. The car lurched forward, and Aziraphale’s manicured fingers dug into the leather of the seat. Crowley was driving far over what he assumed to be the speed limit: they were going nearly forty-five miles per hour!

“Crowley, slow down!”

“Relax, angel,” the demon replied, looking over at him, and Aziraphale gripped the seat tighter. “There’s no speed limit anymore. Besides, this isn’t even as fast as I can go.”

“Please don’t go any faster, then,” Aziraphale said faintly.

When the Bentley finally pulled up to the curb outside the theater, he let out a shaky breath and turned to see Crowley grinning at him from the driver’s seat.

“All right, angel?”

“Fine, thank you.” Aziraphale huffed and straightened his bow tie, pointedly not meeting Crowley’s gaze.

The demon exited his own side of the car and walked around to open the passenger door. He offered an arm to Aziraphale, as though the angel were a maiden he was courting. Aziraphale shot him a fondly exasperated look and took the arm anyway as they made their way inside and to their seats.

The ballet turned out to be lovely. Aziraphale was enraptured by the music, and the performances were simply stunning. He was aware too, though, that Crowley spent much of the evening throwing him sidelong glances instead of watching the stage.

When they returned to the bookshop after another terrifying drive, Crowley once again opened the passenger door for him. They walked side by side up to the shop door. Aziraphale unlocked it and walked inside, expecting Crowley to follow, but when he turned around, he found the demon still lingering at the threshold.

“Would you like to come in for a drink, dear?”

Crowley swallowed, eyes unreadable behind his dark lenses. “Better not.”

Aziraphale frowned, and Crowley opened his mouth as if to say something more, then stopped and gave him a tight-lipped smile instead. One hand twitched toward Aziraphale, then disappeared into a pocket.

“Goodnight, angel,” Crowley said quietly. He turned away and was back in his car before Aziraphale could say anything more. The angel stood alone in his open doorway, watching the light of the gas lamps reflecting off the boot of the car until it disappeared around the corner, and feeling strangely empty without his friend.
Chapter End Notes

I'm also on Tumblr @apocryphalia! Come play with me there, if you like.
Crowley tries to avoid the Bentley's Queen-themed hints by listening to the radio, with less than desirable results.

This one turned out a bit silly, but I saw "cranberries" and couldn't stop thinking of the band.

If you aren't already aware, the first song Crowley hears is "Linger" and the second is "Dreams."

See the end of the chapter for more notes

_Somewhere in Soho, London, February 1993_

The Bentley was taunting him, Crowley was certain of it now. Tired of hearing “Somebody to Love” and “You’re My Best Friend” every time he drove to Soho, he had decided to take a chance on the radio instead.

_I'm in so deep_, it sang.

_You know I'm such a fool for you._

Crowley swallowed. His fingers twitched on the steering wheel, reflexively searching for a cigarette before he remembered Aziraphale’s recent insistence that they quit. He still wasn’t quite sure why; they were immortal beings at no risk for cancer, after all. Still, the angel had asked, and…

_You've got me wrapped around your finger._

…and Crowley had never said no to Aziraphale in nearly six millennia.

He took the turn onto Aziraphale’s street at 85 miles per hour as the radio vocalized his darkest feelings for him.

_Oh, I thought the world of you_

_I thought nothing could go wrong_

_But I was wrong, I was wrong._

For centuries, Crowley had been settled comfortably into their Arrangement, content with lunches and dinners and late nights spent drinking wine, laughing and bickering over nothing at all. He was unfazed by Aziraphale’s periodic references to their respective sides, his stubborn insistence on
some fundamental difference between them. He loved Aziraphale, he knew that Aziraphale was only protecting himself, and he knew that Aziraphale cared, and that was enough. It would have to be enough.

But then had come a flaming scrap of paper tossed into a duck pond, a miraculous rescue, an offering in a tartan thermos. Hearts had been laid bare, only to be locked away once more inside a vault, hidden from view.

*If you, if you could get by*

*Trying not to lie*

*Things wouldn't be so confused*

*And I wouldn't feel so used.*

He pulled up to the curb directly in front of the bookshop, his spot miraculously empty as usual.

*But you always really knew*, the car sang before he could turn off the engine,

*I just want to be with you.*

He slammed the door shut a little bit harder than strictly necessary, and shot the Bentley an apologetic glance over his shoulder as he headed for Aziraphale’s door.

The shop was nominally open, the angel hidden somewhere among its shelves, so he didn’t immediately react to the tinkle of the bell as Crowley entered.

“Hey, angel,” he called out.

“Crowley!” Aziraphale suddenly surfaced ahead of him, clutching a leather-bound volume. Behind him, he heard the click of the lock and the soft swish of the shop’s *open* sign turning itself to *closed*.

Crowley smirked, easily falling back into familiar patterns. “Don’t worry, I’m not a customer. I won’t touch any of your precious books.”

Aziraphale shot him an exasperated look. He laid down the book he was holding on the nearest shelf—not, Crowley suspected, the same one from which he had picked it up—and started toward the stairs. “Tea?” he called to Crowley over his shoulder.

The demon shrugged and followed him. He coiled himself into one of the ancient chairs at Aziraphale’s ancient kitchen table, watching the expert movements of the angel’s immaculate hands as he prepared their tea and fished a tin of biscuits out of a cabinet.

Crowley wrapped his long fingers around the steaming mug Aziraphale slid in his direction, savoring the slight burn of the ceramic under his skin. Aziraphale said something to him, but Crowley was too entranced by the movement of his lips and the subtle creases in the corners of his eyes to hear the words.

“Crowley? Are you all right?”

He shook himself. “Sure, angel. Just didn’t sleep.” This was not untrue, as he had spent much of the previous night *day* dreaming (about a certain stuffy angel, of course) rather than *dreaming*.

Aziraphale frowned. “I don’t understand that habit of yours.”
Crowley shrugged, absentmindedly fidgeting with the dial of the ancient radio on Aziraphale’s kitchen counter. He accidentally switched it on, only to hear an uncomfortably familiar voice crackling through the speakers.

Then I open up and see
The person falling here is me
A different way to be.

I want more, she sang.
Impossible to ignore
Impossible to ignore.

Okay, someone was definitely taunting him. Crowley’s eyes rolled up toward the ceiling behind his sunglasses, a scowl on his lips.

Chapter End Notes

I'm also on Tumblr @apocryphalia! Come say hi, if you like!
Fire

Chapter Summary

Over a year after the apocalypse-that-wasn't, to Aziraphale's delight, Crowley makes some unexpected progress.

Chapter Notes

Hello I promised the fluff and look, I have delivered! (I'm a little impressed with myself for resisting the urge to turn the prompt "fire" into an angsty mess.)

See the end of the chapter for more notes

A Cottage on the South Downs, 2020

The first time Aziraphale lit the fireplace in their new home, Crowley went stiff and quiet, lost somewhere in a burning bookshop and a pillar of hellfire. Afterward, the angel quietly let it fall into disuse, dust gathering on the mantle and inside the chimney.

He watched the subtle twitch of Crowley’s fingers when he lit the stove to brew tea and cocoa. He remembered the mysterious disappearance of every match and candle in the bookshop post-Armageddon, the quiet extinguishing of the candles on their tables at more than one restaurant.

Aziraphale remembered, and he watched, finely attuned to the presence of fire whenever Crowley was by his side. He silently avoided restaurants that had fireplaces or thought candles made for a romantic atmosphere. He made his cocoa while Crowley was out in the garden, or warmed his tea via miracle, even though it never tasted quite the same.

When December rolled around, he brushed the dust off the mantle and strung it with garlands instead. He hung stockings, letting them dangle over the empty fireplace. He strung electric lights over the Christmas tree and the front of the cottage, but there was not a candle in sight.

So it was something of a shock when a fire suddenly roared into life in the bare grate. They were curled together on the sofa, Crowley draped over Aziraphale’s legs with a blanket thrown over his own. Aziraphale looked over at the demon in alarm, but Crowley only blinked sleepily up at him, still perfectly relaxed.

He gave Aziraphale a small, knowing smile. “M cold,” he said.

Aziraphale beamed at him and planted a soft kiss on his forehead. He wrapped his arms around Crowley, one hand temporarily letting go to wave idly toward the demon’s body. A thick, fuzzy pair of socks appeared on his bare feet and a second blanket suddenly covered their tangled legs. Crowley let out a small, contented sigh and wriggled closer into Aziraphale’s side.

“Better?” the angel asked.
“Mmhmm.”

They stayed there for hours, Crowley dozing against his angel while Aziraphale watched the dance of the flames in the fireplace, in awe of the creature in his arms.

A fire graced their shared home with warmth and light for the rest of the long winter.

Chapter End Notes

I'm also on Tumblr @apocryphalia! Come say hi, join in my nonsense, if you like. :)}
Bells

Chapter Summary

Crowley and Aziraphale cause some mischief when one of the more distasteful fixtures of the Christmas season shows up outside the bookshop.

Chapter Notes

The prompt for this one was supposed to be sleigh bells, but one of those damn Salvation Army guys was outside my work all day yesterday, and I couldn't get this idea out of my head.

Soho, London, December 2019

The ringing of a bell that was not the one over his shop door drew Aziraphale’s attention. He glanced up to see a man in a red apron and a Santa hat standing on the street outside, next to a distinctive red kettle. The angel narrowed his eyes, debating whether he ought to make the man suddenly remember another very urgent commitment, very far away from his shop.

A young couple were also passing by on the street outside. One looked curiously toward the bookshop, but when they approached the bell-ringer out front, the other tugged on her arm and they quietly crossed the street. Ah. Perhaps the man could be of some use to him, after all. Aziraphale decided to leave him be for the moment, and busied himself with repairing the bindings on some delicate first editions.

He stopped noticing the ringing of the bell out front as he worked. Some time later, though, a sudden silence drew his attention, followed by the ring of the bell over his door. Crowley sauntered into the shop, sunglasses dangling from his fingertips, a self-satisfied smile tugging at the corners of his mouth. Outside, the bell-ringer was already halfway up the street, red kettle swinging wildly from his hands as he ran, leaving a trail of paper notes and small change behind him.

“What did you do?” Aziraphale leveled an accusing look at Crowley.

The demon grinned. “Just gave him a hint that he might be right about the forces of evil running amok in the world, and all that.” He folded his sunglasses into a pocket inside his jacket, turning to Aziraphale with one eyebrow raised. “Surprised you didn’t chase him off yourself.”

“He was deterring customers,” the angel muttered with a slightly guilty look.

Crowley threw his head back and laughed. He fixed Aziraphale with an expression of unbearably fond amusement. “You know the Salvation Army is awful, though, right?”

“Should be right up your alley, then.”
“No, those wankers are definitely one of yours.”

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Amazingly, the man was back in front of the shop the following morning. He must be either very brave or very stupid, Aziraphale thought, but he still appeared to be doing his job of discouraging foot traffic from the types of non-pious people most likely to attempt to buy the angel’s books. Aziraphale shrugged to himself and returned to his work, the rhythmic ringing of the bell fading into the background.

As if on cue, nearly twenty-four hours to the minute from Crowley’s initial interaction with the man, the sound of his bell was replaced by the one over the shop door. Aziraphale looked up to see Crowley entering the shop once more, still wearing his sunglasses, but with the same self-satisfied smirk he had worn the day before. The man outside was attempting to pick up a five-pound note from the sidewalk, only to find it mysteriously stuck to the concrete. Bills and coins littered the space around him, having been dumped from the kettle by a supernaturally strong gust of wind just as Crowley passed him by.

In spite of himself, Aziraphale chuckled, smiling over at Crowley. “How absolutely demonic of you, my dear.”

“Just you wait, angel,” Crowley replied. “He’s going to spread all kinds of low-grade evil when he finally decides to give up and leave. And then other people are going to come by and find the money, and they’re going to try to pick it up, and they’re going to get frustrated and walk off and spread all kinds of low-grade evil… it’s very efficient.”

“Of course, dear.” Aziraphale shot him a knowing smile, and he could have sworn Crowley’s cheeks turned faintly pink in response.

The demon cleared his throat. “Anyway, what are you thinking for lunch?”

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When they returned from their meal, the bell-ringer was still stubbornly planted outside the shop. He had given up trying to retrieve his earlier donations from the sidewalk, but had righted the kettle and continued trying to solicit more. As Aziraphale unlocked the shop door, the kettle was suddenly upturned again. The man stared down at the sidewalk in defeat, shoulders sagging.

Crowley stopped in the doorway behind Aziraphale, an astonished grin on his face. “I didn’t do that.”

The angel turned to him and shrugged, his look of feigned innocence marred by a poorly-suppressed smirk.

_I love you, you magnificent bastard_, Crowley almost said, catching the words on his tongue and swallowing them down before they could tumble out.

“I need a drink,” he said instead, making for the stairs to Aziraphale’s flat.

They toasted to miracles together, laughing the night away at Aziraphale’s kitchen table while the man outside sullenly packed up his empty kettle and left. The money quietly unstuck itself from the sidewalk behind him.

The next morning, the LGBT community center up the street found an envelope full of small bills and spare change had been anonymously dropped through their mail slot.
Chapter End Notes

I'm also on Tumblr @apocryphalia!
Silent Night

Chapter Summary

It was only in the darkness and the silence of snowy nights like these that Crowley could admit how far gone she really was, what she really wanted.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Somewhere in London, 1020 A.D.

On an empty street, surrounded by darkness and the softly swirling snow, the demon stood alone.

Crowley’s fingers curled into the fur around his shoulders, trying to recapture the warmth of Aziraphale’s presence. His breath fogged the air in front of him and his feet crunched lightly in the snow as he walked. Otherwise, all was silent.

His mind replayed his earlier conversation with the angel on a dizzying loop. My dear. It felt as though the words had reached into his chest, cracked open his ribcage, and burrowed somewhere deep inside of him.

My dear. Mine. Memories of other meetings, dinners and drinks long past, suddenly took on a new and hopeful light in his mind, making the open wound in his chest ache. Of course, Crowley had been calling Aziraphale angel for centuries now, always protected by the plausible deniability of its literal meaning. This was something different, something so achingly, infuriatingly Aziraphale: intimate, yet so casually said that it couldn’t possibly mean anything close to angel (always said with the possessive pronoun silently implied, always deniable).

With his fingers buried in his angel’s fur, snow crunching quietly under his feet, Crowley walked on, alone.

An Official London Residence, 2013 A.D.

Crowley leaned over the railing of her second-story balcony, watching the pristine white snow accumulate in the darkness below. She was bundled in a long, elegant black coat, a hat covering her perfectly coiffed hair, but her long fingers trailed, bare, over the edge of the railing. She savored the sting of the cold air blowing across her exposed hands and face.

Across the Dowlings’ vast property, a single square of warm yellow light revealed the location of the gardener’s cottage and Aziraphale’s own wakefulness. The open wound in Crowley’s chest pulled in its direction like a magnet, north drawn always to south. She considered tiptoeing downstairs to the wine cellar, taking a few bottles of some vintage or other, and making the trek across the lawn to his doorstep.

Fancy a drink, angel? she’d ask, feigning simple insomnia. She could bathe in the warmth of his company all night, revisit a time before the end of the world hung over their heads.

But it was only in the darkness and the silence of snowy nights like these that Crowley could admit
how far gone she really was, what she really wanted.

She wanted more, and she couldn’t be around the angel until this desperate need receded back into
the hole inside her ribcage where it belonged.

_A Cottage on the South Downs, 2020 A.D._

Crowley stood alone in the garden. The first snowfall of the year swirled around him, the first
snow at their new home. His and Aziraphale’s, together.

Crowley pulled his tartan blanket tighter around his shoulders, remembering another snowy night,
a thousand years before. The ghost of a fur cloak, still tucked away in a box inside the cottage,
echoed under his fingertips. Inside, their first fire still blazed in the hearth.

Something in Crowley’s chest ached, a shadow of the wound that once beat where his heart should
be.

Behind him, he heard the cottage door creak open, and a beam of light suddenly covered him,
followed by the soft crunch of footsteps over newly fallen snow.

"Are you all right, darling?" Aziraphale asked quietly.

Crowley turned slowly, taking in the sight of his angel—truly _his_ , now—silhouetted in the warm
light pouring out from the doorway of their shared home.

"Never better," he answered truthfully, and closed the distance between them, pulling Aziraphale
into his arms for a gentle, unhurried kiss.

Chapter End Notes

I’m also on Tumblr @apocryphalia if you want to come play with me over there! <3
Post-Armageddon, Crowley and Aziraphale take a trip to the National Gallery. 15th-century art brings back very old memories.

Chapter Notes

Back to the roots of this series on this one, folks! The painting they're looking at here is very real, actually in the National Gallery, and is Francesco Botticini's *The Assumption of the Virgin*.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

**National Gallery, London, 2019**

Crowley stared up at the panel painting before him. *Bloody altarpieces.* The fifteenth century had been marginally better than the fourteenth, but the humans had still been a long way from letting go of their fixation on religious subject matter in art.

He glanced to his right, taking in Aziraphale's vaguely reverent expression, the slight part of his full lips, his unfocused eyes. Something twisted in his chest, a clawing emptiness he had not been able to shake for six millennia.

He looked back to the painting. Its angels did not have nearly enough eyes, wings, or wheels to be a true representation of the choirs, but the hierarchy was unmistakable. Crowley's eyes were drawn involuntarily upward, toward the angels of the first sphere. He could almost hear their singing, echoing in his mind across time and space, across a lake of boiling sulphur. He could still taste the words of their song like thorns on his tongue, could feel the hollow praises being ripped from his throat.

He swallowed, still staring upward, and it tasted like blood.

“Crowley, dear, are you okay?” Aziraphale’s voice cut across the song in his mind. His fingertips rested hesitantly on Crowley’s sleeve. “You're looking a bit pale.”

Crowley tore his eyes away from the painting and looked into Aziraphale’s impossibly blue ones, a placid lake at the eye of the storm that raged within him. “*Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of Her glory!*” he recited with contempt. The rough English translation sounded harsh on his tongue, the words too thick in his mouth. Something fundamental within him rebelled at the song, even converted out of the long-lost language in which he had once formed the words.

Aziraphale was staring at him, slack-jawed with eyes wide. “You…”

Crowley nodded miserably.
“I remember you,” the angel said quietly, realization dawning on his face. He was still looking in Crowley’s direction, but no longer looking quite at him. “You were beautiful.”

Crowley’s jaw dropped. His eyes were wide behind his dark lenses.

“That is to say…” Aziraphale quickly corrected himself, “You still are. I mean…” His face began to turn a delightful shade of pink, and Crowley ached to reach out toward him, to take those impossibly pink lips into his own bloody, bramble-filled mouth, to drown in the waters of his eyes and to soothe his own jagged edges on the gentle curves of the angel’s body.

Instead, grateful for the tinted glass hiding the exposed shreds of his traitorous heart, Crowley settled his mouth into a practiced, teasing smile. “Careful, angel,” he said lightly, “or I’ll start to think you actually like me.”

“Of course I do,” Aziraphale replied earnestly. Crowley’s heart leapt in response. He could feel its beat inside every vein of his body.

Aziraphale cleared his throat and looked over at Crowley with a warm, familiar smile. “How do you feel about lunch, my dear?”

Crowley laughed, full of affection, and agreed. He would follow Aziraphale anywhere he wanted to go.

Chapter End Notes

As always, I invite you to come play with me over on Tumblr if you like!
Chestnuts

Chapter Summary

Crawly looked up at the strange, spiny fruits hanging from the tree above him, and he wondered about his corporation.

Chapter Notes

Trying out a very different style with this one, but I hope it works. (I rewrote this whole ficlet from my original idea from the prompt just to do this. I'm having a weird gender day. I took it out on Crowley.)

See the end of the chapter for more notes

The Garden of Eden, 4004 B.C.

There were many trees in Eden. There was the Tree of Knowledge, of course, but so, too, were there great oaks and maples, pines and willows, and trees bearing fruit and nuts of every imaginable variety—an assortment of plant life that would never again be found in the same place once the gates were sealed.

One of the trees in the Garden of Eden was a chestnut, of the type that would later be known as Castanea sativa. It was under this tree that Crawly was currently sitting.

The Serpent of Eden looked up at the leaves of the tree, and down at the lush greenery coating the soft earth around him, and he wondered.

He wondered about the angel he had met at the Eastern Gate, what he was doing now, and what would become of him. He wondered about the flaming sword, about Adam and Eve, and about what awaited them all outside the walls of the Garden. Crawly wondered about everything. It came as naturally to him as breathing—even more so, considering the breathing was more a curious instinct of his corporation than a true necessity. He had always had too many questions, and it was his habit of asking them that had landed him here, alone in an empty Garden under a chestnut tree.

Crawly looked up at the strange, spiny fruits hanging from the tree above him, and he wondered about his corporation. He had not been quite comfortable as a snake; unfurling himself from the shiny black skin and allowing his wings to open toward the sky had felt like a first breath of air after a long time underwater. Now, though, he wasn’t certain whether he felt quite comfortable as a man, either. His skin felt too tight around him, as though something were trying to claw its way to the surface. It wasn’t his wings; those rested against the bark of the tree behind him, dark feathers shivering lightly in the breeze.

Crawly looked down at his skeletal body, and he thought of Adam and Eve, and he wondered.

His body looked like Adam's, Crawly realized, but not all human bodies looked like theirs. Eve had been different. (He had liked Eve. She, too, was full of questions.)
Crawly closed his eyes, remembering Eve, and he concentrated. A subtle shift took place beneath his dark gown: his sharp edges softened, his chest expanded and became round. His waist tapered to a finer point, and his hips widened ever so slightly.

Crawly stood and plucked a pod from the chestnut tree. She looked around at the Garden, and its lush greenery, and the wall that surrounded it, and she smiled.

Chapter End Notes

As always, I invite you to come play with me on Tumblr, if you like.
Chapter Summary

*Let me tempt you.*

Chapter Notes

Crowley is reciting from *Catullus 99* at the end.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

*Rome, 41 A.D.*

Aziraphale was well on his way to *absolutely sloshed*, although he was currently hovering somewhere in the vicinity of *pleasantly quite drunk*. The salty tang of oysters still clung to his lips, now mingling with the tannic bitterness of wine.

The angel’s tongue darted out to sample the flavors on his own lips, and he could have sworn he saw the golden eyes of the demon across from him zero in on its movements. For a brief and terrifying moment, Aziraphale wondered if Crowley’s lips, too, would taste of salt and brine and fermented fruit. He wondered what other flavors might lie beneath, whether Crowley would taste of sulfur, or the earth with which he had worked for centuries, or perhaps something sweeter still.

Crowley was absolutely radiant in the dim light of the restaurant, resplendent in gold and silver and copper. Aziraphale watched the play of the firelight over his hair, the silver crown of laurels that rested atop it. He watched the flash of gold behind the rims of dark lenses as Crowley’s head dipped down and his eyes struggled to focus on Aziraphale.

“My point—” Crowley hiccupped, and the angel was torn out of his reverie, face hot in the glow of the nearby fire. “My point is… Saturnalia.”

“What?”

“Saturnalia. The whole thing, right, is that everyone ssswitches roles, yeah?”

Aziraphale nodded, still staring into Crowley’s eyes. They were like pools of molten metal.

On second thought, he was now quite close to *absolutely sloshed*.

“Tha’s part of it. Yes,” the angel replied, trying to pick up the threads of the conversation.

“Right, so, if you’re going to be hanging about in Rome…” Crowley reached for the jug of wine on their table and, finding it empty, paused to scowl at it. “Doesn’t that mean you’d have to go around tempting and, and wiling and… all that?”

“You’d have to… thwart me, then,” Aziraphale answered. The way he said the words sounded like an invitation.
Crowley leaned closer to him across the table. “S’pose I would.”

When the demon moved, he positioned himself directly in front of the fire, which now lit him from behind. It reflected off his crown, throwing shards of silver light glittering across the room.

Aziraphale swallowed and licked his lips nervously. This time he was definitely not mistaken: Crowley’s eyes tracked the movement of his tongue. His gaze slid involuntarily from those pools of gold down to the demon’s mouth.

Suddenly, Crowley’s lips covered his own, and they tasted better than Aziraphale’s fleeting thoughts could have possibly imagined. There was salt and wine, yes, but also smoke and earth and something uniquely Crowley underneath it all.

The angel’s heart stuttered in his chest. He reeled backward, suddenly sober without the aid of a miracle.

“I... have to go.” The words tumbled out of his mouth in a rush.

Crowley watched him stumble away and out the door. “*Nunquam iam posthac basia surripiam* ,” he muttered to the empty table, finding himself suddenly very alone.

Chapter End Notes

The usual invitation: come talk nonsense with me on [Tumblr](https://www.tumblr.com)! :)
Chapter Summary

Crowley reflects on pining and resinated wine during the First Crusade.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Constantinople, 1096 A.D.

Crowley broke the seal on the jug of wine and poured two generous helpings, fingers sticky with pine resin. He lifted a hand to his mouth and darted out a serpentine tongue to sample the harsh turpentine, watching the blue eyes across the table flicker down toward his hand and skitter away.

He pushed one of the cups across the table to Aziraphale and raised his own toward the angel. "Militibus Christi," he said, voice dripping with sarcasm.

Aziraphale grimaced as he took a sip of his own drink. Whether it was in response to Crowley’s toast or to the retsina itself, the demon wasn’t sure.

“I assume that’s why you’re here,” Crowley continued, yellow eyes trained on Aziraphale’s expression from behind dark lenses, carefully watching for the minute shifts that might reveal opinions the angel couldn’t speak aloud, opinions to which Crowley could give voice instead.

Aziraphale sighed and nodded. “Head office supports the holy wars, naturally. I’m to ensure the success of the crusaders.”

“I’ll be here, taking credit for the carnage they leave in their wake.” Crowley raised one eyebrow pointedly toward Aziraphale, mouth set in a harsh line. He couldn’t quite keep the edge of bitterness out of his voice.

Aziraphale paled. Crowley’s hand twitched toward him, nearly reaching out to cover the one the angel rested on the tabletop before he thought better of it. His voice softened as he added, “You could stay here with me. Wait it out, let the humans do as they do, and then we both take credit for it in the end.”

Aziraphale swallowed and looked away, eyes growing distant. “You know I can’t.”

Crowley nodded and stared down into his wine, taking in the unique aroma of the resin. He had harvested it once, long before they had come to this fragile Arrangement of theirs. His hands still remembered the motions: score the bark of the tree, peel its skin back until it leaked sticky blood. Watch as it dripped, slow and thick, into a vessel held underneath. Bring the resin back out of the forest and into the city, where it could be made anew, mixed into wine must or hardened as a seal. Creation brought forth from destruction.

Aziraphale had found him there once, among the trees. It was sometime in the sixties, the first time he had seen the angel since one fateful night in Rome. (Who was he kidding, the year was scored into his heart like the slice of his own blade down the trunk of an Aleppo pine. It had been 67 A.D. Neither of them knew it yet, but they had established a pattern that would repeat in 1900 years’
“I know, angel,” Crowley said now, quietly. “I’m sorry.” (I’m sorry, he had said then, blaming the wine. Never, ever his own traitorous heart, raw and open like the flesh of an Aleppo pine. They had never spoken of Rome again.)

Crowley reached out with the jug of wine in his hand, refilled the angel’s cup without being asked. Aziraphale smiled softly at him from across the table. It was a smile that echoed back centuries of nights just like this, alone and comfortable in each other’s company.

Crowley’s pine-tree heart leaked resinous blood, slow and steady, sealing up the wounds in his flesh.

Chapter End Notes

Militibus Christi = to the soldiers of Christ, or the Crusaders.

Come hang out with me on Tumblr, if you like!
Ice Storm/Ornament

Chapter Summary

Crowley reflects on the nature of ornament.

Chapter Notes

I'm hopelessly behind on these, so I decided to just skip over the ones I've already missed. I also combined the prompts for days 16 and 17 because I couldn't resist ornament :)

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Soho, London, 2019

What is ornament? Decoration. Embellishment. Useless except in its capacity to be beautiful.

Crowley watches Aziraphale carefully extracting bauble after bauble from the box on the shop’s counter, carrying them over to the towering fir in the corner. He watches as Aziraphale surveys the tree, over and over, finding the perfect placement for each one. He doesn’t miss the way the angel cradles each ornament gently in his soft fingers as they make their way from the box to the tree, or the way the string lights already twined around it illuminate the soft lines of his face, reflect off his pale hair like the halo he doesn’t have.

Ornament. Crowley thinks of haloes, of medieval altarpieces, of angels and saints dripping with gold. He pushes the long line of his body away from the doorway in which he’s been leaning, shoves his bony fingers into too-small pockets as he approaches Aziraphale.

The only function of ornament is to be beautiful. Except that’s not quite right, is it?

Ornament is identity. Ornament is a light among the darkness of the world.

Crowley looks out the ancient windows of the bookshop, through the warped 19th-century glass, and watches the frozen raindrops bounce and scatter off the building, sees the accumulation of ice at the bottom of the glass. He looks back toward Aziraphale, and sees the tree, lit up like a beacon of hope amid the storm raging outside. He isn’t any great fan of Christmas, but even he has to admit that this display has its appeal. He thinks of all the winter holidays and festivals the humans have developed, an unbroken line going back centuries upon centuries. When the world outside is at its darkest, they have always found a way to bring warmth and light and hope back into it.

Crowley approaches the box, takes out a single golden ornament. He is careful holding it, just as Aziraphale had been. He mimics the gentle slope of the angel’s fingers, curled around the delicate object. It is almost certainly worthless, but it’s probably been in this shop since 1800, and it’s clearly important to Aziraphale, which makes it precious. He watches the angel as he takes it carefully toward the tree.
Ornament is identity. Crowley takes in the look of Aziraphale, buttoned up past the delicious collarbones he glimpsed in the looser styles of centuries past, and still occasionally catches himself fantasizing about. His eyes rake over the angel’s carefully cared-for but ancient waistcoat, his meticulously pressed trousers, his perfectly shined shoes. He remembers playing with his own personal adornment in years past, growing out and cropping rust-red hair, lacing into corsets and later, Doc Martens, donning pearls and neckties. He remembers the many styles of dark lenses that have covered his face over the centuries, and for a brief moment, hot envy courses through his veins for Aziraphale’s ability to define and ornament himself without restrictions.

Crowley carefully carries the ornament over to the towering fir tree in the corner of Aziraphale’s shop, searching for the perfect place among its needles with his newly-vulnerable, uncovered eyes. He spots another shimmering sphere, the same wide-open sky blue of the angel’s eyes, and he slides the golden one onto the branch next to it.

“It’s perfect, dear,” Aziraphale says as he stops next to Crowley, admiring the tree. He passes over a steaming mug, which Crowley takes with grateful fingers. Together, they turn to watch the storm outside, safe in the warmth and light of the shop and in one another’s company.

Ornament is a light among the darkness of the world. And Aziraphale is a light among Crowley’s world.

Chapter End Notes

Come say hi on Tumblr if you like!
Chapter Summary

Aziraphale is haunted by his own memories of fire, and by a box of burned books left untouched in his shop.

Chapter Notes

CW on this chapter for Nazis, vague references to things that Nazis did, historical homo/transphobia. Sorry, and Merry Christmas?

See the end of the chapter for more notes

England, 2020

Aziraphale was an angel. As such, he knew exactly what happened to the souls of the dead, and he did not believe in ghosts. Still, there was a certain box of books he had kept in the back room of his shop for the better part of a century which he rarely dared to open, unable to shake the feeling that it was haunted by the horrors inflicted on its authors.

When he and Crowley relocated to their new home in the South Downs, the box miraculously found itself at the bottom of a pile of similar-looking boxes in his new office. Over the following months, Aziraphale slowly and meticulously unpacked the boxes in the pile, shelving each book according to a haphazard system that made Crowley twitch. It was autumn by the time he made it to the bottom of the pile, the first truly cold day of the year. Aziraphale had wrapped himself in a thick blanket and carefully piled logs into the fireplace. When he finally lit the tinder, ready to curl into the sofa with a book and Crowley in his lap, he was instead confronted with the demon's distant stare, with Crowley's hands balled into fists at his sides, his jaw stiffly set. Suddenly, a year’s worth of tiny moments came crashing down on him: candles mysteriously extinguishing themselves, matches disappearing from the bookstore, Crowley hovering over him anxiously while he lit the stove for tea. Of course, Aziraphale realized. Of course he doesn’t like fire anymore.

Later, when the fireplace was long since extinguished and Aziraphale was assured of Crowley’s safety, he settled himself into his office with a glass of rich red wine. After carefully extracting a number of delicate scrolls and some medieval illuminated manuscripts from their crates, the angel lifted the lid of a particular box and found its contents wrapped in a worn red cloth. He froze, the tips of his fingers aching with the ghosts of old burns.

Berlin, 1933

A fire raged in the midst of the public square. Aziraphale stood among a crowd of onlookers, watching uniformed men in red armbands haul the contents of the Institut für Sexualwissenschaft’s archives from the building and prepare to destroy Magnus Hirschfeld’s life’s work. Aziraphale knew Hirschfeld himself to be abroad at the time, and sent up a silent thanks to someone for his
friend’s safety.

He had met Magnus some 28 years prior, while the German was in England. They had bonded over their shared grief for Oscar Wilde, and Aziraphale had received regular letters from the man ever since, updating him on the establishment of the Institut, Hirschfeld’s scholarly publications, and his campaign to repeal the German law which outlawed homosexuality. Things had been growing more difficult in Berlin for some time, though. Aziraphale remembered coming to Hirschfeld’s aid the previous decade after he had been beaten nearly to death for his research and activism. He could still feel the blood, slick on his hands, as he willed Magnus's veins and arteries to knit back together, his bones to heal, his heart to keep beating while the angel worked.

Aziraphale now watched as Nazi soldiers began to toss his friend’s work into the flames. He could hear the speech being given to the assembled crowd, and his mind automatically translated the vile German words, but he was not processing its full meaning. His world had narrowed to red and orange, to the dull brown of burning paper, to the smell of smoke. He watched the edges of book covers and pages curl in on themselves as they caught flame, saw the sparks fly across the square as the inferno grew and grew, fueled by the knowledge and bravery it consumed.

The angel willed himself to go unnoticed by the crowds and the soldiers and the Minister of Propaganda as he took a deep breath and approached the fire. He stood at the edge of the flames, next to the young man who was currently tossing the last of the Institut’s books onto the pyre. His hands followed them into the blaze, retrieving the volumes one by one until his fingers were raw and their prints nearly gone. He carefully piled the rescued books into a hastily miracled bag and left the square, resigning the remainder of the library’s thousands of volumes to their fate.

**London, 1941**

There was a brown leather bag sitting on Aziraphale’s desk, thrown unceremoniously on top of the existing mess of papers and books in various stages of careful restoration. The angel stared at it in the flickering light of a spare few candles. The shades of the bookshop were still drawn, the air raid sirens ringing somewhere in the distance. Aziraphale was alone, a glass of wine in one shaking hand, his face burning with a confusing mix of shame, love, and painful memories.

He left his glass on the desk as he stood, clutching a single candle, and made his way over to a particular box in the back room of the shop. He went to his knees in front of it, blowing away the fine layer of dust that had accumulated on its lid. He lifted aside the cloth protecting its contents and picked up a single book with trembling hands. As he turned it over, thumbing its charred edges, he remembered the shining pink skin he had been left with after rescuing it from the bonfire. He could have healed the burns, yes, but it hadn’t seemed right somehow. Instead, he had clumsily slathered his own fingers with the gel of an *Aloe vera* plant that had been rescued from Crowley, and wrapped them awkwardly in cotton bandages. The week he spent aimlessly wandering the shop without use of his hands felt like penance, a too-brief but appropriate mourning period for the books and the men he had left behind in Berlin.

He considered returning the box to Magnus, but received word of the German’s death before he had the opportunity. Over the following years, he heard nothing but terrible news concerning the rest of the staff and patients at the decimated Institut. So in London the books stayed, packed away with the ghosts of those who had written and read them.

When Aziraphale was offered the opportunity to infiltrate and betray Nazi agents in England, recruited by a woman he believed to belong to British intelligence, it felt like revenge. The angel glowed a little more brightly in his skin as he sat with the woman calling herself Rose
Montgomery. He had to hold himself together carefully to keep from sprouting wings and extra eyes, from transforming into a true avenging angel as he listened to her plans. His hands ached with phantom burns, with the echo of long-dried blood, with the desire to tear out the hearts of those who dared to round up and slaughter their fellow men.

Now, Rose was gone, the Nazis were gone, he was in love with Crowley, and still, something inside him felt hollow. He was alone in a war zone with another bag of books touched by flame, his friends were still dead, and the camps were still open somewhere out there on the Continent.

_A Cottage on the South Downs, 2020_

Crowley found Aziraphale later that night, still on the floor of his office with an empty glass beside him and a charred book in his hands. He was staring at the cover, but clearly seeing something else entirely. His unfocused eyes were shining with old grief and unshed tears.

"Hey," Crowley said gently, falling to his knees beside the angel and laying a carefully, deliberately steady hand over the shaking fingers clutching the book. "Aziraphale?"

"I didn't save them," Aziraphale said, still staring down at the book. "I should have tried harder."

Crowley gently pried the object out of the angel's hands to examine it, sucking in a breath when he realized what he was holding. After a long moment of silence, the demon spoke, gazing somewhere off into the distance. "The Nazis were one thing I never took credit for," he said quietly. "The Spanish Inquisition, the sack of Constantinople, bloody trench warfare… I let Hell think I had a hand in all of it, but not… them." He shifted his gaze over to Aziraphale. "I tried to stop them, you know."

"So did I," Aziraphale replied bitterly. "But I was a fool, and I failed."

"No, angel," Crowley answered softly. "Look at what you have here." He gestured with the book still in his hand. "They tried to destroy these, and you saved them."

"With my own bare hands," Aziraphale said, looking down at his fingertips. "But the _people_ …"

"I know," Crowley breathed, looking troubled. "Come on, angel. Leave them be for now." He replaced the book gently in its box and closed the lid, tugging on Aziraphale's arm until he stood and followed Crowley out to the living room.

Two steaming mugs appeared in Crowley's hands, and he pulled the angel onto the sofa, offering him one of the mugs. They drank their tea in silence, leaning on one another, as they each remembered the ghosts of fires past, of human lives loved and lost over six long millennia.

The box sat untouched for weeks, as Aziraphale slowly unpacked everything around it, wondering whether to banish its ghosts once and for all or leave them be. Finally, one day it disappeared, and the local historical society found itself with an anonymous donation of extremely rare German books on human sexuality, just in time for Christmas.

Two years later, they opened an exhibition on Magnus Hirschfield and the Institut für Sexualwissenschaft, and Aziraphale and Crowley were in attendance. As they walked in, Aziraphale spied a familiar book, now carefully propped open on a foam support and protected inside a temperature-controlled case. He pressed long-healed fingertips to the glass that covered it and smiled softly, leaning closer into the demon at his side.
Chapter End Notes

Come say hi on Tumblr if you like. I promise things aren't always this traumatic over there XD
Aziraphale and Crowley first heard Auld Lang Syne alone. After the apocalypse, they hear it together.

Chapter Notes

I said I would do one more chapter, and of course I’m late again, but here it is! Happy belated New Year, everyone :)

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Edinburgh, 1831

The first time Aziraphale heard the ballad, he was in Scotland to perform a quick blessing, and his trip happened to coincide with the New Year. Rather than travel back to London, the angel decided to book a room at the local inn for the night.

He stayed in his room for a little while, going through the motions of settling in—although he didn’t need it, traveling without luggage tended to make humans a bit wary—until the clamor of the dining room below his feet broke through his concentration, and he decided to put aside his book. He made his way downstairs and leaned on the bar, one foot up on the rail, just like the humans around him. The gentleman on the other side raised an eyebrow at his dress, but didn’t comment as he sidled over to take Aziraphale’s order, and his coin.

“What’ll it be, sir?”

“Whisky, please,” the angel replied, knowing better than to order his habitual wine in a place like this. “And have I missed dinner?”

“Nay, sir, we’ll be serving it soon.”

“Excellent.” Aziraphale beamed at the barkeep as he produced the required coin from his pocket, and then retreated to a table in the corner of the barroom. He was aware of the sidelong glances he received from the regular clientele, but studiously ignored them as he sipped what turned out to be a rather good Scotch whisky.

A number of glasses and a fairly unimpressive meal later, Aziraphale was surprised to hear the battered old clock in the corner strike twelve. A cheer rose up from the assembled patrons, and Aziraphale watched as they all rose from their seats and their positions leaning on the bar, formed a circle around the room, and began to sing.

Should auld acquaintance be forgot, and never brought to mind? asked their song. Should auld acquaintance be forgot, and auld lang syne?
Although the passing of the years should be nearly meaningless to him as an immortal being, Aziraphale had always enjoyed the humans’ midwinter traditions, and with the aid of quite a bit of Scotch, he found himself swept up in the reflective mood of the occasion. He thought about the bookshop waiting for him in London, and the day that he had opened it, three decades ago now. He thought about the demon he had last seen on that day, the oldest acquaintance he had, the only other being he had known since the Beginning.

_We twa hae run about the braes, and pou’ld the gowans fine_, sang the humans around him. _But we’ve wander’d mony a weary fit, sin’ auld lang syne._

He wondered where Crowley was at that moment, and whether he, too, was celebrating another revolution of the earth around the sun. He glanced to his left without thinking, and something clenched uncomfortably in his chest at the sight of the empty chair across the table. It was silly, of course, but he couldn’t shake the feeling that Crowley ought to be here with him.

As the inn’s patrons finished their song and began to depart, trickling upstairs to their rooms or out the front door, Aziraphale drained his final glass of whisky in one long sip. The burn of it on his tongue reminded him uncomfortably of a sweet, smoky taste he had experienced on a demon’s lips once, in another tavern centuries before, and 1,200 miles to the south and east.

Aziraphale retreated to his own room, and in the safe solitude of its darkness, he tasted the echo of the liquor on his own lips, and he imagined that it belonged to someone else’s.

**New York City, 1929**

The first time Crowley heard it, he was sitting alone at the kitchen table in his Manhattan flat, staring into a bottle of Canadian whisky. He had been in New York for most of the decade that was now coming to an end, drifting aimlessly through the city’s streets and speakeasies, feeding off its sleeplessness and sin. He was growing bored, and he missed London. New York was full of life and youthful vitality, teeming with the very best and worst humanity had to offer. It was new and brash, and so American. London overflowed with history: the remnants of empires come and gone, the relentless march of human progress, and—perhaps most salient—his own personal history with a certain angel, one-time Guardian of the Eastern Gate.

The sounds of the city’s revelers drifted up from the streets below his flat, and the bells of a distant church rang out, once, twice, and again until they finally hit twelve. Crowley raised his bottle toward the only other presence in his flat, the wooden radio chattering away in a corner of the kitchen. As he did so, a song began to play through its speakers.

_Should auld acquaintance be forgot, and never brought to mind?_ it asked him, and he glowered in response. That was precisely the reason he had come here, to this city that had risen from nothing in a rare blink of his serpentine eyes, and it had already proven impossible.

_We two have paddled in the stream, from morning sun till dine_

_But seas between us broad have roared since auld lang syne,_ sang the voice on the radio, and Crowley swallowed down the remainder of his whisky in one long gulp. There was a very literal sea currently separating him from Aziraphale, the turn of the year already long past on the other side of it, and Crowley wondered what the angel was doing at that moment. The rest of London would be sleeping, but he knew Aziraphale saw no need to let the small hours go to waste. He could picture the solitary light in the bookshop window, a beacon calling him home through the darkness. He could picture Aziraphale’s steady hands turning the yellowing pages of some ancient
book in the flickering light of his outdated gas lamps, his soft fingers cradling a glass of red wine or a cup of tea.

As the song on the radio drew to a close, Crowley stood and twisted the dial until it faded off. He determined as he stumbled down the hall and collapsed into bed that he would soon cross the sea that separated them and return to London, to Aziraphale. American prohibition would soon be stretched to the breaking point anyway, and Crowley had no desire to see it to the end.

_A Bungalow Called Shangri-La, 2019_

When the clock struck midnight on the last day of the year in which the world didn’t end, the strange company assembled in Madame Tracy’s living room collectively let out a quiet cheer. Adam and the rest of the Them—whose parents hadn’t thought to question their invitation to this unfamiliar bungalow with their childrens’ long-lost aunts, uncles, and godfathers—had been asleep in a pile on the sofa for the last two hours. Shadwell was snoring softly in his armchair, and Newt had been stuck in a cycle of nearly dropping his wine glass and then catching it and startling himself awake for the past twenty minutes.

Crowley and Aziraphale, who had brought their own considerable supply of wine, were bickering in low voices over whether or not penguins could fly, while Anathema and Madame Tracy giggled helplessly on the sidelines.

“Ooh, ooh,” Anathema cried out excitedly after their midnight toast, rushing toward the sofa and pulling Newt up by one arm. “We have to do the… Auld Lang Syne.” The Scottish title sounded too thick on her inebriated American tongue, and she stumbled through it a tad too quickly.

“Oh, yes!” Madame Tracy agreed. Newt mumbled something unintelligible, swaying in Anathema’s grip. Crowley groaned, and Aziraphale looked slightly sick behind his carefully neutral expression. Shadwell let out a loud snore.

Anathema had already grabbed Crowley’s hand with the one that wasn’t holding onto Newt, and was herding them into a misshapen circle. Madame Tracy took hold of Newt’s other hand and one of Aziraphale’s, and both women stared pointedly at the empty space between the angel and the demon.

Finally, Aziraphale made an uncomfortable motion that resembled a shrug, and took Crowley’s other hand in his own. Anathema and Madame Tracy started singing, slurred and off-key: “Should auld acquaintance be forgot…?” Newt grunted out something that might have been an attempt at the song, while Crowley and Aziraphale simply looked at one another, both faintly pink.

Aziraphale remembered seeing this circle formed for the first time, at the inn in Edinburgh, and what he had done after, with thoughts of Crowley swirling in his mind. He felt the warm weight of the demon’s hand under his own palm, and he wondered if Crowley would still taste as he remembered from so many centuries ago. His face burned with the memory, and his fingers felt cold and empty once the song ended and Crowley let him go.

_Soon, _Aziraphale decided as they walked up the drive together toward the Bentley. In a world made new by the sleeping child inside, a thousand years on from the start of their original Arrangement, he and Crowley would form a new one—a more honest one—and one day soon, Aziraphale would once again learn the demon’s taste.
Chapter End Notes

I am attempting to Twitter once again if you would like to join me, or as always, you can find me on Tumblr. :)

End Notes

Come play with me on Tumblr @apocryphalia!

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