## Want to Break Free

**by** Voleste

### Summary

Behind the scenes on Heaven's and Hell's side regarding the Apocalypse that was not and the Apocalypse that has yet to come. Celestials on the run; demons with ulterior motives and angels trying to follow the script or trying to bend it, but most of all, humans who won't do what they're told and make everything unnecessarily complicated.

And one Antichrist, who sadly is not the solution this time.
Chapter 1

Chapter Summary

“What in the world possesses you to come here?” the janitor hissed in a non-Crowley hiss.

“You call this hiding?” he said. “You lost your touch, Gabriel.”

Gabriel glanced over at the car, painted in a grey colour that reminded him of children’s puke when they tried a cigarette for the very first time in their short lives.

“Apparently, so have you.”

The Bible, although a source of inspiration for many who believed and for even more who didn’t, wasn’t always that accurate. No, accurate wasn’t the word. It was oddly specific in places where it shouldn’t need to be, and too lacking, too general in others. The focus of the book - or books, one ought to say - was all wrong. It was exactly the reason why Christian fundamentalists grasped for the holy book, saying that ‘othersexuals’* were disapproved of because of one single line in a mass of thousands of verses, and it was also why humans were scared of the Apocalypse.

The Apocalypse, and with it Judgement Day, and with it Paradise on Earth. Oh, how naive and innocent they could be with their minds so twisted that it had to be natural - no demon would be able to bend a mind in such a peculiar way - and yet they were so wrong. It was a translation error. It really should’ve read Apocalypses.

Most, if not all, angels and demons found this error convenient; it was one of the very few things they could agree on as a whole. Humans didn’t need to know anything.

*Anything not heterosexual, although it can be concluded that these Christian extremists barely grasp the idea of bisexual, let alone the twenty other forms compiled neatly together in Three Times Sex, appendix A. Although he would deny it at all costs, Crowley definitely had a hand in bringing this book to immense popularity.

It was past the twentieth century. A milestone for humanity no doubt, but neither demon or angel had found the switch from one millennium into another very eventful. The last millennium alone had counted three almost Apocalypses. The first time they weren’t even trying. The last time though had worn them out, and Crowley lay low for a while. There was only so many Apocalypses a man could endure, you know. Even if they hadn’t happened.

He had mourned his Bentley. It had been a good car. Of course, the Antichrist had been so thoughtful to return it to his rightful owner, but there still was that memory of it being reduced to a driving heap of garbage and scraps, helping him with its last dying breath. Like a dog.

He missed his Bentley.
It was in tip-top condition, naturally, but he wasn’t going to bring it across the world to the dangerous lands of America. He’d never bring his car across the pond. Not with those dusty deserts. Or Los Angeles. He almost shuddered at the thought.

That’s why he was driving this thing, a mass produced metal cardboard on wheels and a friendly but persistent female voice inside a modern music player saying; “Turn around. Turn around.” He couldn’t. Blessed one way streets. Not his invention, but he couldn’t deny its success rates. Finally some of the others downstairs began to learn.

They also had learnt of his demonic activities in England. Or rather, the lack thereof. Never climb the social ladder in Hell - or any social ladder; they’ll start to Expect Things. It seemed to be the start of a dark and stormy day.

So they had sent them to the States. A simple job, they said. Just fetch this little thing for us, they said. Oh, Hastur had been enjoying himself immensely when he told him the details of this simple job. “So you just got to focus,” the Duke of Hell said. “You won’t shut up about the big picture. Well, we’re gonna give you a picture, real big.” “Real big,” Ligur had echoed, lurking behind Hastur and grinning like an idiot.

It occurred to him that this little thing that they wanted him to fetch was not in a specific location. They didn’t know where it was. It would take him at least a full week before he had searched the entirety of the States.*

Including Sunday, which was the only good part about this job. He loved working on Sunday.

* The main problem about fetching the thing was how they weren’t sure it was in the USA at all. All they knew was that the person who it belonged to was spotted in the States, and that was over thirty years ago. Besides, this person had a tendency to travel around.

Every half an hour his fingers slowly started to itch towards the music player. And every time he resisted the temptation. The day was terrible enough without being disappointed at the American radio stations. Admittedly he had only seen it happen to tapes, but he didn’t want to take any chances.

And that’s when he felt it.

Not the thing he was supposed to fetch. No, something else entirely, something better, hidden in something so mundane that it would’ve been overlooked by anyone else. But not him. He was good in seeing big pictures, but even he had started out as any other demon, plucking at a single soul at a time. The devil was in the details. So he drove up the speed, ignored the persistent female voice who said to turn right, and turned left.

A janitor. Interesting choice. Clever. He stepped out the car - the back proudly proclaimed ‘Fiat Panda’ - and looked at his surroundings. A university. Maybe he ought to check out the library and see if there was anything worth- no, he firmly told himself. That angel was rubbing off on him.

The janitor never saw him coming. Crowley tapped on his shoulder and he turned around unnaturally fast, followed by a heavy silence in which they stared at each other for at least a full sixty seconds. (Crowley, as per usual, wore his sunglasses and had an advantage, but nevertheless those other eyes had no trouble finding his.) The other blinked. Crowley won.*
“What in the world possesses you to come here?” the janitor hissed in a non-Crowley hiss.

“You call this hiding?” he said. “You lost your touch, Gabriel.”

Gabriel glanced over at the car, painted in a grey colour that reminded him of children’s puke when they tried a cigarette for the very first time in their short lives.

“Apparently, so have you. What are you doing here?”

A half hearted shrug. “Orders.”

Gabriel had been twirling a keyring around his finger, but stopped at the answer. Unfortunately, it stopped moving at its highest point and flew right off his finger, where it made acquaintances with gravity and fell with an impressively loud clang on the ground. Neither of them paid it any mind.

“Since when is Hell the one trying to find me?” he said in a low voice.

Since never, you selfish little brat, Crowley thought. He didn’t dare saying it out loud. He valued his life, even if he was immortal for all eternity.

* Crowley was pretty skilled when it came to not blinking. He considered it one of his greatest talents. It made people squirm.

“Anyway, I am hiding. It’s called hiding in plain sight,” Gabriel continued. “It adds this layer of complicatedness, you know. They’ll never get it. Angels are so dense.”

“Not all of them,” Crowley said without thinking.

The Archangel let out a laugh. “You always had an unhealthy interest in Aziraphael, even as a serpent. You only ever visited the Eastern Gate.”

“Aziraphale,” Crowley said.

“No. Aziraphael.” Gabriel strangely resembled someone with a guilty look on his face, as if he had screwed up the biggest deal of the century.* Resembled, mind you, because he never looked guilty. Even if the man was capable of feeling guilty, he never showed it, and especially not to the likes of Crowley. “It’s actually Aziraphael.”

“What are you talking about?”

“Erm…” Gabriel started. “Do you remember that one fire? And how we didn’t have any records?”

Ah, yes. Good old time, Crowley thought. No records.

“And we got this random angel to sort it all out again? Names and all? Turns out the guy had dyslexia. That’s when we swapped him for the Metatron, but the damage was done and Aziraphale just… stuck.”

Oh. That actually explained what had happened to Deuteronomy and its incredible inaccuracy when it came to names. “Aziraphale never once corrected me.”

“Azira fails,” Gabriel muttered. Crowley didn’t jump to the angel’s defense, but made a mental note. Strike one.
The shorter man shook his head and look at the demon with interest, hidden behind the casualty of someone who asked how you were doing and expected you to say good, so both could get on with their lives and break off the conversation early.

“Why are you here, Crowley?”

“Fetching a thing.” He kept it vague on purpose. And it was a honest-to-God answer. He knew what the thing was, but he didn’t know what the thing did. Nobody told him anything these days.

“Enlighten me Gabriel, how come you’re holed up in Athens, Ohio? Is this some kind of self-destructive martyr deed that angels do?”

Athens* was not so bad as Los Angeles, or - oh Lord - Manchester, but there were far more desirable places to hide in.

“Keeping an eye on things.” Both could play this game of dancing around each other. All of their encounters followed the same pattern; one stumbled upon the other, neither wanted to admit what they were doing, a drink or two was shared and each went their separate way without having learnt anything about each other’s plans.

“Still counting miracles?”

Gabriel raised his eyebrows. “Miracles? No, nothing of the sort. They’re at it again, your side and mine. Didn’t succeed in England, or, Italy, or even that one time in Egypt, so now it’s America’s turn. Long live Hell on Earth.”

Any other demon would’ve taken offense to that. But not Crowley. Crowley just kind of stared at him. Another Apocalypse? He hadn’t been that naive to think they had averted Apocalypses forever, but there was another brewing so soon after the last one? That was just unfair.

“They’re not taking any shortcuts this time,” Gabriel sighed. “They’re going to do the seals. Your Antichrist could’ve prevented it. But no, instead he decides to bring back your car.”

“He was eleven at the time, Gabriel,” he said, his brow furrowing. “You can’t hold that against him.”

“And the Antichrist. Makes him a little different from the other kids, doesn’t it?”

He didn’t answer. The Archangel didn’t expect him to.

*Not to be confused with Athens, Greece or Athens, Ontario, or the other double dozen Athens in the United States alone. No matter your opinion on the USA, they weren’t renowned for their creativity of naming places. Whether that’s the fault of European ancestors or a lack of creative genius immigrants is a matter for debate.

He flashed the demon a grin and picked up the keyring near his feet. “I’ll be off. Good luck fetching
Crowley grabbed his shoulder. Not in a desperate manner, no, of course not. He knew how to keep his cool. “You’re not going to help?”

Gabriel tilted his head just a little and swept Crowley’s hand off his shoulder, brushing as it was a single piece of dust. “I don’t think so. Apocalypses are not my thing. Try my brothers.”

“You owe me,” he said pointedly, speaking in a slow manner he usually only reserved for kids who asked too many questions about him wearing sunglasses inside and how their parents said that was ‘really really rude, so you shouldn’t wear those mister.’

Gabriel narrowed his eyes at him. “I do not. I cleared my debt in 1892.”

He wasn’t going to give in that easily. Archangel or not, he was the Serpent, the first Tempter. And he had an exquisite memory when it came to people owing him. Conveniently his memory had a tendency to fail him when it was the other way round.

“I wasn’t talking about that one. The first debt. At least you’d owe Aziraphale,” he said, hoping that would sway the angel to his side.

“Hm. Maybe. But I’m not going to show my face just yet.”

“At least help fetching the thing.”

Reluctantly the Archangel had agreed, but only because Crowley had threatened him with ratting him out to one of his contacts and whatever he thought of humans, he liked being on Earth. He liked not being part of the ineffable plan. Even though he was slowly shuffling his way back in, it was better to be that one person who indirectly helped instead of standing at the frontlines.

The thing Crowley kept talking about turned out to be something incredibly familiar.

“The horn?” he had asked, completely thrown off guard. “I’m not going to give those guys Below my horn. That’s a sure way to start an Apocalypse at any given time. Why do you think I’ve hid it?”

“I can’t return empty handed!”

They held another staring contest and Crowley won, again. (Gabriel really ought to know better. There was no winning staring contests if the Serpent was your opponent.) “I’ll forge you a new one,” he finally said and lifted his hand. Crowley pushed it down.

“No. Snapping. Car.”

With disgust Gabriel had taken the byrider’s seat and turned on the music player. They both held in their breath. (A matter of speaking, of course. Neither of them needed to breath.)

A soft sigh could be heard when it was not Freddie Mercury’s voice who filled the car. Not that Diana Ross was much better.

“Ain’t no mountain hiiii - CROWLEY.”

For some reason it was even more disturbing when Hell spoke to him via Diana Ross.

“WE HAVE GREAT EXPECTATIONS, CROWL -”

A snap, and the voice of Diana Ross smoothly transitioning into a beat that he recognised as Dave
Brubeck's Take Five. And a curse.


“Aah. This is better,” the angel said, leaning back in his chair with his eyes closed. Crowley looked expectantly at him.

*There’s nothing wrong with Glenn Miller per se. But there’s a time and a place for Glenn Miller, and no matter what the time, a faded grey Fiat Panda in Ohio is never a good place.

“I’ve never been able to turn them off. That was my bloody superior, do you realise that?” Then, in a more curious tone: “How’d you do that?”

Gabriel cracked an eye open and turned, and put on his best grin, which had an alarming likeliness of that of the Cheshire Cat from Alice in Wonderland. “It’s a kind of magic.”

Strike two. “Where to?”

“Los Angeles.”

Strike three. It was definitely going to be a dark and stormy day.
Chapter 2

Chapter Summary

If Crowley made an unlikely pair with Aziraphale, then forming a duo with Gabriel was even stranger. And yet they had a lot in common. Keeping fancy and stylish apartments was one of them. Keeping a four meters long spreadsheet on the wall with every single casualty in the world for the past five years was not.

Crowley kept his on a Mac.

Chapter Notes

Thank you for the encouragement! I only finished the book a few days ago, hehe. My friend who lured me in the fandom in the first place I keep spamming while I'm writing and then the following happened;

"The driving time from Ohio (OH) to Los Angeles, California is: 34 hours, 8 minutes
OH DEAR I did not think it was that long"
"oh god is that 34 hours with gabriel"

It had been a few hours since he successfully lured the Archangel into his rented car. The man next to him was uncharacteristically silent, but Crowley didn’t mind; he liked him better when he kept his mouth shut. Vivaldi had turned into Beethoven and Tchaikovsky and Chopin and even Edvard Grieg. Occasionally the radio station would revert itself to the soul music it originally intended to broadcast, but with a single snap that was easily fixed.

The female voice sometimes piped up as well. “Turn left. Turn right. Only twenty nine hours to your destination.”

What? He knew the States were big, but he wasn’t planning to drive all night - longer! - to Los Angeles. He’d miss his sleep.

“Oi. Why’d you hide the thing in LA?” he said, driving up the speed even more.

Gabriel shifted to sat more upright. “The trumpet is not in Los Angeles.”

For a moment Crowley stared dumbly at him, almost hitting a truck in the second it took to regain his cool. “Then explain,” he began icily, “why we’re driving to the other side of the world for nothing, angel.”

It was meant as an insult, and they both knew it too. Gabriel was nowhere near a mere angel.

He shrugged. “I have a thing to take care of. Could’ve done it quick and easy by teleportation, but a certain someone insisted on taking the car. No snapping,” he air quoted.

If Crowley had been in snake form at the time he would’ve bit the Archangel. Thankfully* he was
not and he settled for a glare.

“You could’ve told me from the start,” he grumbled.

“Should’ve thought of asking what I was gonna do in LA, hotshot.”

* No matter how sweet the revenge, he would not shift for such a minor reason. He liked having arms and shoulders and limbs in general. It was easier to talk to humans this way, too. No matter how intimidating or delinquent he looked, at least people didn’t think they were going insane just because they were approached by a talking snake.

Crowley drove the dreadful car to the side of the road. “Where is it?”

“Hmmm…”

The Archangel seemed to take an awful long time to remember where he had left it.

“Don’t tell me you have ‘misplaced’ it, because I happen to know that’s a lie.”

Gabriel shook his head. “It’s not misplaced. It’s in Mecca.”

Crowley couldn’t believe his ears. Mecca? Mecca of all places? This had to be one of his usual ploys. But when he looked at the angel, he knew the man had been serious.


“WE DON’T APPRECIATE WHEN YOU CUT OFF THE CONVERSATION, CROWLEY.”

They both glanced at the music player. ‘Still that iffy about teleportation?’ Gabriel mouthed. He wasn’t entirely sure if the receiver on the other end of the line could hear it if he spoke and he didn’t want all of Hell to know he was currently traveling with Crowley, a dubious demon to say the least. Good Heavens, he didn’t want anyone to know.

Crowley wasn’t paying attention, but he had shrugged (sagged, more likely) and somehow Gabriel had interpreted that as ‘it can’t get much worse. Get me out of here.’ So he laid one hand on his shoulder and snapped with the other, leaving the grey Fiat behind, unoccupied.

Aretha Franklin was still talking.

“ANSWER US, CROWLEY.”

Nothing.

“DON’T IGNORE US, CROWLEY.”

Still nothing.

*Aretha Franklin’s Think was one of Gabriel’s favourite songs. Especially the ‘freedom’ part.
In an alley in LA, Crowley vomited.

“What’s wrong with you?” he spat, leaning against a dirty wall for support. His sunglasses had fallen off and yellow eyes glowed in the dark, much like a cat who had just been caught dumpster diving.

“You nodded yes!” Gabriel exclaimed, gesturing with his hands. “If I had known you had motion sickness…”

He did not have motion sickness. Any respectable being would have felt the need to empty his stomach after they were hurled from one side of the country to another. It felt like he had spent hours in a washing machine, with the temperatures set too high.


The angel was all smile. “Great! You’re coming with me.” He threw the sunglasses at Crowley, gave him three seconds to put them on and yanked him out of the alley, into the light and wild traffic of Los Angeles.

If Crowley made an unlikely pair with Aziraphale, then forming a duo with Gabriel was even stranger. And yet they had a lot in common. Keeping fancy and stylish apartments was one of them. Keeping a four meters long spreadsheet on the wall with every single casualty in the world for the past five years was not.

Crowley kept his on a Mac.

He whistled at the sight. “You do know computers exist?”

Gabriel shot him an surprisingly grumpy look. He held up his hands in defense, almost mocking. “I’ll won’t doubt your questionable abilities to keep everything organised.” He examined the paper spreadsheet. There were scribbles everywhere in a neat - and somewhat old fashioned - handwriting, photos, newspaper articles, printed internet pages, book page copies. All numbered and organised according to date. Criss-cross all over the white paper as he ran out of room, handwriting becoming smaller and smaller as the dates approached present time. “I thought you didn’t do Apocalypses.”

And then they said demons had mastered evil looks.

Gabriel started to take the paper off the wall; it had grown impressively large. “I like to keep myself informed,” he said.

“Sure,” Crowley said in return.

The angel folded and folded the paper until it was smaller and thinner than a post-it and stuck it with him. Then he walked to the fridge and pulled out a couple small, sealed bottles, which he put in the inside pockets of his jacket.

“Holy water,” he explained when he noticed Crowley looking. “Amongst other things.” Crowley barely kept himself from flinching.

“Done yet?”

Gabriel looked around the apartment. “Yeah, this is probably it. Are you ready?”

No. No, he was so not ready for that washing machine.

Two seconds later they were in Saudi Arabia. And it was night. And they landed on top of the
Kaaba, otherwise known as the Cube, and Crowley was fairly certain no one was allowed to be on top of the holy building. Not even Gabriel and that was saying something, considering his role in the Islam.

It was blessedly disrespectful. So he manifested his wings and let himself fall of the edge. He crashed promptly on the ground.

“What on Earth - ” he managed before the angel landed gracefully in front of him. “Less tall than it looks, huh?”

Why, yes, he had misjudged the height of the building. He sent a glare at the man, ignored the hand that was being held out to him and got up himself, walking away brusquely. Gabriel came after him.

“What has gotten your panties in a twist?”

Crowley glowered at him and gestured to the holy site. “You don’t do that.”

“It is dark!” Gabriel complained. “Okay, so I was a couple meters off.* Do you know how hard it is to teleport when it’s dark?”

He gestured to the left of him. Crowley tried not to look up in awe at the Great Mosque. No matter how long he stayed on Earth, certain human aspects would never stop marveling him. One of them was architecture. Proper architecture, not the crap they were building nowadays. The Archangel disappeared; he thought it’d be better to wait outside.

A few minutes later Gabriel returned with an insignificant and battered looking brown box. It looked too small to contain a trumpet or horn of any kind. Then again, things with Gabriel didn’t always make sense. The man wore a strange expression on his face, a mix between serene and resigned, but Crowley was not going to ask. He knew better.

* Teleportation was tricksy. The greater the distance, the harder it was to aim. Add that to the fact that angels aren’t supposed to master the crude art of teleportation… well, let’s just say that they had been lucky so far.

The two found their way out of the mosque, both silent and thoughts troubling their minds. In case of Gabriel, it was the thought of another potential Apocalypse. In case of Crowley, it was Think from Aretha Franklin stuck in his head. Freedom - freedom - freedom….

“Do you have a place where I can work quietly?” Gabriel held up the box.

A grin started to form on the demon’s face, friendly at first, but slowly morphing into something wicked. “Oh, yes. I know exactly the place.”

His companion frowned at him. “I don’t trust you when you start talking like that.”

“Hm,” Crowley contemplated. “I guess you shouldn’t.”

Meanwhile, two sulky figures sat on a bench in a park in London, glaring darkly and doomily at a
particularly brave duck who had left the safe waters and was now quacking at them. Their names were Hastur and Ligur - not the result of a friendly helpful nun naming babies - and they were pissed.

“Our little friend has grown bold,” Hastur, the taller of the two stated.

Ligur nodded. “Yeah. I dun like these feathered obnoxious weirdos.”

“Me neither,” he grunted.

The shorter demon pointed at the bird who was pecking at his feet. “Hate ‘em. The lot of them.”

“What?” Hastur looked puzzled. “I wasn’t talking about them ducks. Angels. And Crowley.” The name was uttered like a curse.

“Crowley,” Ligur drawled out the name.

“Dunno how he did it, but he cut us off.”*

Ligur moved a leg to the duck, who had now been giving him the bird equivalent of a cat nuzzling up against their human and kicked it. The duck took flight.

“I dun understand what we’re doing here,” Ligur said, shaking his head.

Hastur, who had subconsciously crossed his legs and folded his hands a few minutes ago noticed how he was sitting and firmly uncrossed them. No one needed to see he’d been sitting like a priest. Or even worse, a vicar.**

“Crowley loves this place,” he said, giving Ligur a toothy grin. “That vehicle is here too. He’ll return. Within a week we shall have him.”

* Crowley had attempted to cut off his radio conversations more than once, and while he usually succeeded in turning the radio off, they still continued talking in silence. When Gabriel had snapped his fingers, the line was successfully cut dead for the first couple hours. Needless to say this had them Majorly Pissed Off.

** In the mind of Hastur every single vicar had effeminate tendencies, something he did not want to be associated with. Must be their love of wearing turtlenecks.

It was just after five pm. A man in an expensive looking suit walked down a street, giving the shops several glances as if he was searching for something. Just as his face lit up and started to march towards the shop he’d been looking for, someone on the other side of the door hastily placed a ‘closed’ sign in the window and locked the door tight, despite the protests of his potential customer.

The man inside sighed out of relief. Another day without selling anything. Any other person would’ve been devastated by this. This man however considered it an achievement. He was rather fond of his books. Parting with them was unimaginable.

That was why his blood drained out of his face when he heard an all too familiar sound behind him, a sound he learnt to identify as something crashing and toppling over a couple bookshelves, followed
by a muffled cry as his heaviest books fell as the Morning Star from the highest peak to the ground, on top of the something.

The something turned out to be not one, but two people. It was as he had feared; several bookshelves were askew and no longer containing the books he treasured. The crash had started a domino effect. His eyes went from the pile of books to the pile of limbs.

The taller one stopped wriggling.

“Hi, angel,” Crowley greeted him, somewhat sheepishly.

The other one freed himself from Crowley and looked at him while he sat on his knees, surrounded by books. A flash of recognition ran across his face and the unfamiliar looking man - although there was something about him, wasn’t there? there definitely was - turned his attention back to the demon.

It went very quiet.

“You directed me here?” the man said in a low voice with a nasty undertone. If his ears were not fooling him, there was something like fear too.

Crowley let out a nervous laugh. “Look, I just think you should start with a clean slate. It’s been a couple thousand years.”

“It’s not me holding the grudges - ”

The bookshop owner looked from Crowley to the unfamiliar familiar man to an open box, half obscured from his view by the Standing Fishes Bible. One of his favourites. The box wasn’t his. Out of curiosity he came closer and peered inside. The confusion on his face was immediately replaced by anger and disbelief.

“Crowley,” he addressed the demon as calmly as he possibly could. He couldn’t stop the slight waver in his voice. “Be a dear and throw this gentleman out.”

Crowley looked at him. “Uh. What?”

“Out with him. I tolerate neither traitors nor hypocrites in my store.”

“Aziraphale - ” the Archangel started. Aziraphale ignored him.

“What were you thinking, bringing him here? You can handle him, there’s the door. Escort him to the door please. Escort him out of London, preferably.”

Crowley just groaned. He hated his blessed life.
Chapter 3

Chapter Summary

“Is that all?” Aziraphale bristled. “He’s a deserter and top of that does the very thing I’ve received punishment for! Even worse, he got involved into working and even allying with a demon.”
“I don’t know,” Crowley said. “Isn’t that what you’ve been doing?”

It took him a lot of persuasion, but Crowley managed to keep his angel’s wrath at bay. For now. The two of them had eventually agreed to talk about their issues over a cup of tea. Gabriel had looked like he’d preferred a different kind of beverage, but had kept his mouth shut and was now sitting at a table with an old, battered mug* of steaming, hot Earl Grey.

Although he knew that the Archangel technically had way more power than the two of them combined, he also knew he wasn’t surprised the man was willing to play along. According to their previous meeting he still wasn’t in good terms with Heaven and if Gabriel went all out, Heaven would surely notice that.

When he asked Aziraphale what was going on between them, the angel refused to answer and instead focused his attention on the little box Gabriel had brought along. Maybe that was to be solved for another time.

“Is that yours?” he said rather irritably, unsure whether it was the real thing. He found it hard to believe that the Horn of Gabriel would be in his reach. The horn had been lost even longer than its owner. But it looked like a horn and if there was anyone who could suddenly appear in his bookshop like that… there weren’t many who fit the profile.

Oh, how he could not take his eyes off it. It may not have been a book, but the Horn was just as valuable and he definitely could appreciate craftsmanship. He had never seen it up close.

“Ah. May I?” Without waiting for an answer Gabriel opened the box, rummaged in it and revealed the trumpet, with a horn that seemed to be going on and on, of an impossible size - and then the horn shrunk back to a reasonable length. The instrument was still twice as large as the box had been. There were several flower etchings in the soft metal, circling around the horn of the instrument.

“That’s simply marvelous,” Aziraphale breathed, momentarily forgetting how cross he was with this particular angel. “It’s the actual trumpet, Crowley.”

Crowley looked at him with half lidded eyes. Yes, I know, he wanted to say. I had to go and fetch it. He chose not to say anything about that.

“It’s a flugelhorn**,” Gabriel corrected him, placing the musical instrument tenderly in front of him. Despite being old, it still shone as if it had just left the forges.

*Considering their history it was no surprise Aziraphale didn’t want to give the Archangel one of his better cups, let alone his fine china. He had wanted to humiliate the man and considering the
peeved look on Gabriel’s face, had succeeded quite nicely.

** A flugelhorn is a brass instrument strongly resembling a trumpet. Flügel is German and can be translated as either ‘wing’ or ‘flank.’ For more information it is advised to look it up on Wikipedia, Most Trustworthy Source on the internet since the Google. Confirmed by Bing and the Ask Toolbar.***

***Despite popular belief, toolbars are actually a heavenly invention. Like all heavenly inventions they meant well, but executed it poorly. Hell had cackled in glee when they discovered what Heaven had done and made a few edits to the uninstallation files.

Aziraphale’s hand trembled slightly, wanting to reach out to the horn. He could stop himself in time and instead focused on the Archangel, who had pulled his instrument closer to him.

“Explain,” Aziraphale said with his hands wrapped around a cup of tea. “Everything.” His voice had a biting tone.

Gabriel sighed and took a small sip from his tea, his face screwing up as he swallowed the hotter-than-it-should-be liquid.

“This piece of work,” he gestured towards the flugelhorn with almost an endearing look on his face. It was strange seeing him displaying any kind of affection or care, Crowley thought. “Should not come into the hands of either side. After the catastrophe with that kid -”

“Adam Young,” the demon said helpfully.

“- Adam? Seriously? ... Adam, Hell is apparently trying a different approach. With this they can call Judgement Day whenever they please. And our friend here was sent out to get it for them.”

He felt Aziraphale’s eyes looking at him accusingly. What, was he supposed to tell the angel everything he was up to?

“And that’s not all. They’re preparing for the Seals. I’ve been keeping track.”

The former Guardian of the East, the Principality narrowed his eyes at his superior (although, after having vanished for almost two millennia, would he still hold any official power over him?) and filled his cup with a single wave.

“A Righteous man shall shed blood in Hell?”

“That’s the one,” Gabriel nodded. “They’ve been preparing it for decades. I followed the bloodlines, you see. And somehow they managed it. Once they’ve set it in motion…” he mimicked a volcano erupting, complete with sound effects. Crowley thought he was doing a piss-poor job at it. “No stopping it. Lucifer will rise. But without this we can keep the casualties to a minimum.”

Aziraphale pursed his lips. “Well, that’s certainly nice and all, but it doesn’t explain why you’re here. I could’ve done without your company.”

“Do you think I wanted it?” Gabriel replied, raising his voice. “I’ve done my best avoiding you for the past thousand years and now -”

“Now you’re here. Why?” Aziraphale finished the sentence.
Gabriel gestured to Crowley, and Crowley felt two pairs of eyes fixating on him. He bought himself more time by filling his cup manually, but after the few seconds that had passed the two were still looking at him. Why was he the one who had to explain everything, anyway? Angels.

“They love irony,” Crowley said, drinking his tea. He knew there was history between the two angels, but neither of them had wanted to explain what exactly had happened. He hadn’t really pushed on the matter either; he knew better than to invoke the anger of someone who could send him back to Hell in no time and Aziraphale was exceptionally skilled at changed the subject in conversation. He had grown tired of it.

“They weren’t exactly happy when they learnt the Apocalypse was, once again, postponed. Not to mention I kind of melted one of my, er, superiors. So they sent the one demon responsible out for a tool that’ll definitely help them speeding up the End of Times. Especially since they’re doing it the long and boring way.”

“Huh,” Aziraphale said thoughtfully. “That doesn’t explain you.” That was directed to Gabriel. “You deserted Heaven because of this very thing. Why are you helping out now? You never did before.” There hung an unspoken question in the air. Can we trust him at all? It weighed down the silence, a silence thick enough you could hardly slice it with a bread knife.

Gabriel let out a sigh. “I owed him, okay?”

Aziraphale scoffed. “How could an Archangel be in debt to a demon? If you owe anyone anything, you owe me. An apology.” An apology he most likely wasn’t going to accept, and they all knew it.*

“It’s been so long. Maybe you should just get over it,” he retorted. Crowley groaned. That was definitely not a step in the right direction. Much to his surprise, the other angel didn’t say anything about it. Instead he turned in such a way that Gabriel was cut off from the discussion and fully focused on the demon instead. A soft smile lingered and Crowley wasn’t sure he liked that smile.

“What’s he doing here really?” Aziraphale asked, as if the man wasn’t in the room at all.

“He’s going to make a duplicate. Looks like the real thing, but it won’t have any effect.”

“It’s not as if it would work anyways,” Gabriel called from his side of the table. “I’m the one who’s supposed to wield it. I just don’t want Hell to be in possession of - “

Aziraphale ignored him.

* In all of Aziraphale’s extremely biased nature, he never would’ve thought to trust a demon over an angel. Impossible, he would’ve said, had the topic ever come up between him and Crowley. Not impossible, Crowley would’ve answered. Just infinitely improbable.

“Fine,” Aziraphale said in a flat and monotone voice after a long silence, in which a few staring contests were to be held. Gabriel won; Crowley didn’t participate. “He can stay until it’s finished.” With a sweep of his hand he cleaned the table from all its clutter, sans the instrument and the box. “Come with me to the backroom, dear.”

Crowley did as him was told; he’d seen a fire in the angel’s eyes that he had known all too well. He picked up one of the many wine bottles they kept in stock and opened it, smelled it, sipped at it and scrunched up his nose. Not a good year. Nevertheless he poured himself a glass, knowing he
wouldn’t survive the evening without getting drunk.

“How much of it is true?” the angel asked.

Crowley leant against a table, glancing at the books on the opposite of the room, as if he could read the answer in them. “I think he’s genuinely not screwing with us,” he said.

“He acts like he doesn’t give a damn, but I’ve seen this spreadsheet of him. He’s keeping an eye out for any signs of any Apocalypse. Even if he’s letting everything rot, he’s keeping himself informed.” Yeah, and you know who does that? Psychopathic murderers. That’s their adrenaline drug.

“That doesn’t say anything,” Aziraphale answered curtly.

“If we’re going to get rid of him anyway, we should persuade him in telling us what he knows,” Crowley said.

“Well, that’s your job.”

“Of course.” Crowley kept sipping at his glass, looking pensive.

“What’s on your mind?” the angel asked.

“You. What has the guy done to you? He’s hardly the easiest person to get along with, I get that. But you’re usually not this hostile.”

Aziraphale looked at him with a calculating expression. “Alright,” he sighed. “If you must know.” He took the bottle from the demon and poured a glass himself, letting the liquid twirl slightly before drinking. “After that little incident with...er, the sword - ”

“Little?” Crowley snorted.

“He was the one who came to me, chiding and scolding for not only losing the sword, but also becoming acquainted with a demon. They aren’t to be trusted, naturally. And you’re not just any demon. So he demoted me and sent me to Earth...”

“The guy was probably just doing his job,” Crowley pointed out.

“And some four thousand years later,” Aziraphale continued, “I hear he disappears and then you come proudly tell me you’ve tempted an angel. And not just any angel.”

The demon almost looked fond at the memory. Those were the times.* Gabriel had been as distrusting as Aziraphale had in the beginning, but as it turned out there was something to be gained for both sides.

“Is that all?” Crowley asked.

* Not many angels - regular or Fallen - were on Earth at the time and even Hell had quickly learnt of an Archangel’s absence. Some thought he had fallen in battle. Crowley himself had thought so too, until he stumbled quite literally upon him during a temper tantrum of the Vesuvius. When the Italian volcano erupted he had found an angel trying to prevent the destruction of Pompeii - less than two decades after the Messenger had disappeared - and it hadn’t been Aziraphale.
“Is that all?” Aziraphale bristled. “He’s a deserter and top of that does the very thing I’ve received punishment for! Even worse, he got involved into working and even allying with a demon.”

“I don’t know,” Crowley said. “Isn’t that what you’ve been doing?”

“It’s different,” the angel insisted.

“No, it’s not. Give him a chance to redeem himself, won’t you?”

“We’ll see about that.”

As it usually was the case with darkness, it took a long time for the sun to settle behind the horizon, but as soon as it did, darkness quickly took over, shading the sky from a light grey (it was London after all) to a warm orange to an almost black, starless night. Lanterns began to shine - assuming they actually worked - and the park lay abandoned, safe for the local wildlife hiding in bushes and ponds. Crickets began to chip, birds began to communicate and a single squirrel could be seen stealing a leftover sandwich from a wooden bench.

The atmospheric, strategically misplaced lanterns gave the whole scene an almost Disney-esque feel. One could almost see the heroine, the princess laying down in the grass, cute little critters around her. Instead there were two demons, clothed fully in black with scowls on their faces, still sitting in the park like they had done so a few hours ago. They couldn’t be more out of place.

Hastur and Ligur were not just any demons; they were Dukes of Hell and normally wouldn’t do mere fieldwork like this. After all, it wasn’t exactly comfortable to wait for someone who might not show up for days. But this…. this was personal. Even with his privileges, it had taken Ligur years to get another human-shaped body for travels on Earth after Crowley had unceremoniously melted him with holy water. It was because of this that the two demons had been spending the entire day in the park. Revenge. They weren’t allowed to actually kill the man or destroy his body, but intimidation nor torture was a problem. Hastur and Ligur happened to be pretty skilled when it came to the old fashioned, conservative demon talents.

Their patience ran thin however, when they had noticed neither Bentley nor owner of said car driving past today. According to their painstakingly well kept records, Crowley came by often in this park, feeding ducks. Now that Hastur thought about it, a lot of strange figures came by in the day feeding ducks. Men in trenchcoats, women in suits and pencil skirts. People with dogs without knowing how to handle them. Always carrying notes and whispering in hushed tones, all of them feeding the ducks. It was a miracle the ducks were still able to fly at all. (And maybe it was exactly that. A miracle.)

“I’m done waiting,” Ligur announced, lighting up a cigarette. They may be demons who weren’t really up to date with human invention and development, but they had caught on when it came to cigarettes. He had seen Crowley doing it many times, despite Hell being a non smoking zone and had been curious enough to try it out himself. He didn’t know he wasn’t supposed to chew on it, but none had either the knowledge or courage to correct him on this behaviour.

“It could take ages before he turns up,” he complained. “I dun like Earth.”

“Shut up,” Hastur said. Then, after a moment of thought: “Is a load of crap actually.”

“What is?” Ligur said, grumpily, not really interested in whatever the taller demon had to say.

“The whole blood thing. Those… err, Winchester humans. The one who’s supposed to carry the
master around is going to college. Some sort of school after school. Very unfitting for the master.”

“I dun see why He’s needing an existing’ human body at all. Can’t He make one?”

“Apparently not. And that other one, the one to break this seal stuff, he’s like this… dunno. Can’t see him making deals with demons. Bad plan, these seals. Should’ve waited for another Antichrist.”

Ligur grunted in agreement.
“Hail Satan,” Hastur said with less enthusiasm than he usually would’ve. Waiting in a park in October for the entire day would do that to you, and especially to demons.

“Yeah, yeah,” Crowley waved it away.

Aziraphale had twelve pairs of socks. And one orphan. This orphan sock was the beginning of what maybe could’ve been a heart wrenching, sob worthy story. It wasn’t a particularly nice looking sock; although comfortable, it had this soft grey colour that just wasn’t entire it. It also clashed horribly with whatever he usually wore - but as Aziraphale didn't particularly care whether the sock matched his pants, he didn't mind.

In February 1996, he still had thirteen pairs. In March 1996, he lost that single sock.

It was really his own fault. The States were the new Nineveh, the angel had proclaimed to Crowley. The new Sodom and Gomorrah. Personally, Crowley had thought that was quite harsh, considering that new superpowers weren’t always the big bad boys as Aziraphale always assumed. Besides, the Cold War had been over and it looked like the new millennium would start off well, for Heaven’s standards.

This had escalated into a discussion, which in turn escalated into an argument, and in the end they went. The angel had wanted to prove a point, and that’s how they had found themselves in the United States of America in a terrible year in spring.* (For our nitpicking population of Earth, it technically was winter. According to the calendar. Then again, the calendar wasn’t fixed in stone either.)

In the middle of this terrible weather they had, not quite literally, stumbled upon a group of high school students huddled under an incredibly expensive, polished, free from coffee rings, oak and mahogany table outside. There was nothing strange about this table being outside because the roof had blown off, which rendered the description ‘inside a building’ obsolete.

* On 6 March 1996, just to give an example, no less than six tornadoes roamed over central Alabama. Despite the angel and the demon having arrived in Alabama less than twenty four hours ago, there’s no evidence they had anything to do with it and are therefore innocent.

The teens looked freaked. Crowley had wanted to ignore them. Aziraphale approached them, muttered something as ‘oh, poor cold things’ and bent his knees to seek eye contact.

“Hello,” he said in a cheerful tone, unbefitting to the current situation. “What happened here? We can help.”

None of the teens replied. One of them just stared at him blankly and another turned his head in such a way it reminded him of John Travolta concentrating very hard on his ‘trying to be cool’ look in
“Hello,” Aziraphale tried again. When that didn’t work, he turned around and looked up at Crowley, who pretended he was in no way associated with the angel at all.

“Your sock, please,” Aziraphale said.

Crowley wasn’t sure he heard correctly. “What, angel?”

“Your sock, please,” Aziraphale said once more.

“I don’t have one,” said Crowley. “I don’t wear socks.” Aziraphale proceeded to take his own sock, then.

While he willed his shoelaces to tie themselves, Aziraphale fumbled around with the sock a little, applied some buttons and some wool and - lo and behold, he had produced a sock puppet.

“The fuck?” someone hissed, and it hadn’t been Crowley, but he shared the sentiment.

The angel pulled the sock over his hand. “Well, maybe you’d like to talk to… Mister Fizzles,” he continued in the same serious tone. The demon groaned. Leave it to Aziraphale to completely mess up the way how you’re supposed to handle sock puppets. And teenagers.

One of the teens, a big eared, big eyed but wary looking kid looked at the sock puppet. “Sir, I’m fifteen,” he said. “And that’s a sock puppet.”

“Well done,” Aziraphale said enthusiastically. “So, you want to talk?” He cocked the sock puppet’s head.

“Eh...no?” the teen replied. “This is a tornado and the roof blew off five minutes ago. What is there to talk about?”

Aziraphale looked disappointed. It did explain why the whole area was covered in misformed pieces of brick and wall, it did explain why all the supporting wooden beams had come down and snapped in two pieces at least, and it definitely did explain why the the wind was slowly becoming stronger and stronger. They must’ve been in the heart of a tornado.

“Hm. Well. I suppose you want to get out of here?” That had the boys’ attention. They nodded eagerly.

And it was done, exactly like that. He had rescued them like Lily Potter had rescued her son. There was one flimsy little difference; she died. He did not. This concluded the adventures of Crowley and Aziraphale together in America, after the angel swore to never step a foot in ‘the weird world’ again. The story however, was far from over, as Crowley thought he had seen the one teen that had spoken picking up the sock puppet the angel had fabricated from his sock. “Why’d you pick up that thing?” one of the other teens had said. “The fuck, Garth.”

Crowley remembered all of this as he was pacing around and rubbing his ankle. Cramps. He hated the sleeping leg syndrome. Although this form had quite some advantages over the snake one, this wasn’t one of them. Slowly he entered the room where both angels were working, talking in hushed tones. They stopped as soon as they noticed he came in, which was about immediately. Sneaking up on angels was hard nowadays.
The shape of the flugelhorn had been quickly made and Gabriel was now slowly etching the flowers in the horn. He had to admit that it had been pretty impressive to see him working with metal glowing hot with just a touch of his fingers, shaping the trumpet it no time with no tools but his hands.

“You do know they’re going to test it,” Crowley said.

The Archangel didn’t look up. “Du-uh. This is only half the work. Don’t touch that,” he warned as Crowley’s fingers had almost made contact with the trumpet. He hovered with his hand over the instrument for a couple seconds, but there was no explanation. Fine.

“Seems like you two are getting along,” he said.


“That doesn’t mean I’ve lost my mind,” Aziraphale said stiffly. “If we keep the horn out of Hell this way, delaying the Apocalypse… there’s something to be gained here.”

The Archangel turned the fake instrument around and grabbed it with both hands, performing some unspoken spells. “It does more than announcing Judgement day,” he explained. “It’s also a…. well, I wouldn’t call it a ward. Quite the opposite of a ward. Draws angels in. Now, we can’t let Hell have that. So I’m making a couple alterations.”

“Why are you helping anyway?” the angel sighed.

Gabriel shrugged, but they all knew he was not going to get away with it so easily. Not with Aziraphale, who could probably get information out of anyone. Crowley was a very persistent demon - good at it, too - but he was nothing compared to the angel. The angel didn’t really advertise this particular talent, which caught people in a flurry of surprise, resulting in them spilling all their secrets.

“Told you. I’m just keeping my possessions out of the greedy hands of Lucifer.”

Aziraphale made a noise that could be interpreted as either a snort or a cough, sounds both falling in the category ‘and the truth now, please.’

“That’s not all,” the demon told Aziraphale after a moment of silence. “I threatened to sell him out.” The glare Gabriel sent him was impressive. It was on the level of a Gollum glare when he tried to look directly in the sun and discovering his precious was in the hands of young Hobbitses.

Aziraphale’s face lost some of his concrete-like expression and raised his eyebrows. “Is that so?”

“Why do you think Crowley brought me here?” the Archangel snapped. “London is practically radiating with angelic energy. You stained all over the place.”

“So it won’t raise suspicion when you’re using your Grace,” Aziraphale said.

“Ten points for tartan boy.”

“And you don’t want them to know where you are.”

“Heavens no!” Gabriel exclaimed. “I’d get hauled away and thrown back in the big scheme of things in no time. Screw the ineffable Plan. I like Earth.”
“Clearly not enough,” Crowley dared to say. “What do you do, if not your job?”

“I am….sort of doing my job,” Gabriel huffed. “I’m the Archangel of Judgement.”

That earnt him a Look* from the other celestial beings at the table.

“There’s a difference between being the Archangel of Judgement and the Archangel of Last Judgement. Besides, you’re not supposed to carry out judgement yourself,” Aziraphale stated flatly. The demon just groaned and laid his head on the table.

“What?”

Crowley lifted his head and eyed him warily. “And here I was, hoping the rumours weren’t true.”

“What rumours?” Aziraphale joined in. Neither of them explained.

* A Look, not to be confused with a simple look was an expression that could have a couple meanings. It could either mean ‘Sex at your place, I’ll be gone before dawn’, ‘I need a favour but I’m totally not begging’ or ‘Can you believe this idiot? He’s gone mad.’ As surprising as it may be, we can safely cross the first meaning off the list, as sex is simply a too human phenomenon. However, Gabriel might’ve been a different story.

The room fell silent once again and they watched how Gabriel was finishing the final touches, including the one, large scratch underneath a valve. His fingers traced the flowery decorations and it dawned on Crowley that the etchings in the trumpet weren’t just there to look pretty. If you followed the main stems of the flower and copied it over in a linear, non curving fashion, it turned out to be a sigil Crowley had seen once before and quite easily recognised. That indeed was a dangerous tool, would Hell ever learn of it. Hang on. Lucifer had been an angel himself. One of the best.

“Say,” the demon began, only now noticing the deliberate small mistakes Gabriel left in the etchings, “Wouldn’t he know this sigil by heart? He’s your kind, after all.”

Gabriel gave him a long look. “If we’re going to be technical, he’s more of your kind. I’d rather not get grouped in with that loser. And to answer your question; probably. But he’ll need to perform the sigil in combination with this.”

Oh. Oh.

Wherever the big old man was now, he was one paranoid bastard. Which was probably a good thing.

Gabriel’s old, battered mug was swapped for a slightly nicer looking wineglass. Both Crowley and Gabriel called it process. Aziraphale called it being polite and ‘the sooner he’s finished, the better.’ That, and wine had a tendency to shave off the sharp edges of things*, which made everything a whole lot more pleasant. It certainly explained why Crowley and Aziraphale had gotten drunk together on several occasions.

* Jesus of Nazareth knew this too. If he hadn’t changed the remaining water into wine, the whole wedding would’ve turned into something so unpleasant even the biggest optimist would’ve had a
hard time smiling. This knowledge has since then been passed on to including but not limited to rich but divided families, world leaders and pirates.

The Archangel clapped his hands, conjured up a towel and wrapped the fake trumpet in the soft material.

“Have fun,” he said dryly, handing it over to Crowley. He got up, wiped his hands off and put his own instrument back in the box. “Well, this reunion was nice and all, but I’ll be off.”

Before either of them could say anything, he disappeared.

It was past midnight by then. Not that a single demon cared about the time per se; time wasn’t as much an issue as it was for, say, a human. Humans were always watching the clock, trying to cram as many activities as possible in a day and still managed to use their time inefficiently. Death was always breathing in their neck, as some self declared poetic, so called philosophers* used to say. Demons didn’t have this problem. Demons had other problems to take care of, but time? No, time wasn’t one of them. In theory.

“There he is,” Hastur said, and both demons straightened their backs, watching the lone figure coming closer. After some inspection it turned out that it was indeed, Crowley, and he was alone. And for some reason he had a fluffy, purple towel in his hands. The artistic humans would call it ‘lavender.’ He’d call it ugly.

* Humans had a tendency to over philosophise everything. They write about death and dark snow and frozen suns and call it deep. Getting in touch with your inner soul. Calling something a heartfelt poem even - no, especially - if it doesn’t rhyme and follows no rules at all. This habit is known as the teenager phase.

“Hi,” Crowley said, fiddling with the instrument in the towel. He kept it covered; there was a reason why he wasn’t allowed to touch the real one, Gabriel had said, and it would leave him with a hand smoking, burnt more than scones leaving in the oven for two days unattended. Even if the fake one wouldn’t burn his hand off, it would not be exactly pleasant. After all, it was an almost exact replica.

“Hail Satan,” Hastur said with less enthusiasm than he usually would’ve. Waiting in a park in October for the entire day would do that to you, and especially to demons.

“Yeah, yeah,” Crowley waved it away. He partly unwrapped the towel, showing the demons just a glimpse. It had looked amazing in the terrible light of Aziraphale’s bookshop, but now it simply looked magnificent. The moonlight hit the brass in all the right places, making it shining more brightly than the soul of a newborn child. Or Crowley’s favourite pen.

Any question Hastur had wanted to ask was forgotten as soon as he recognised the object. He had wanted to taunt him, interrogate him how he was able to cut off their conversation, possibly torture him in some specific pleasant ways, but all that came out of his mouth was: “Good job.”

Ligur, standing behind Hastur nodded in approval.
“Huh. Maybe we ought to transfer you to the Americas. Got much more success there.”

Crowley grinned uneasily. “Erm, I was lucky to have found it. The chance of me having a good career in the USA is as big as the chance for a whale to drop out of the sky. Different people, you know. There are plenty of us who are... infinitely more capable.” He offered the towel.

Hastur seemed to understand what the towel was for and picked it up, very carefully.

“Ain’t you a beauty,” he muttered. Then he turned to Crowley. “Standby until further orders, Crowley.”

Crowley nodded, trying not to look too relieved. “Yes.”

He was glad demons usually didn’t bother to ask how he obtained it. They didn’t care about the process; they cared about results only. It had been one of the reasons why it had been such a hassle to explain that they should spread their efforts broad and wide. It didn’t yield visible results, so they hadn’t been particularly impressed with him in the last few decades. The fact that he helped* stopping an apocalypse didn’t earn him any extra points either.

“Don’t disappear on us again, Crowley,” Hastur added. “We’ll contact you soon.”

With that both demons disappeared, leaving Crowley behind. It had been quite the eventful day; he had spent days in the States without finding anything, and then it almost felt as if he had been thrown in a roller coaster. Usually his encounters with Gabriel went like that, but this roller coaster had been a fast one.

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* Helped, helped... he had pro actively tried to raise the Antichrist in favour of Hell, when it turned out they had been paying attention to the wrong child and by the time the actual Antichrist was eleven, he was armed with only a tire iron and a deathwish, from which he was miraculously saved by none other than a group of children. I rest my case.

Despite having acquired a taste for it, he had no desire to sleep just yet. Maybe a little drive through the city would distract his mind. So Crowley made his way to the spot where he had parked his Bentley. It was about a twenty minute walk; somehow he managed to do it in forty.

When he arrived there - it must’ve been past two am, judging to the amount of passerby’s - or the state they were in - he saw a squirrel.

A squirrel, on the roof of his Bentley, chewing contently on some kind of garbage put on top of his car. The nerve.

“Shoo,” he said, letting the squirrel fall off. He watched how it hurriedly disappeared into a nearby tree. A tree that promptly lit up in orange and yellow hues, and Crowley’s mind needed a moment to understand what was going on. The tree was on fire. And it hadn’t been his doing. He looked at it for a moment longer.

“A good time to get out of here,” he muttered to himself and he stepped in the car, drove away, trying not to think about the implications of a tree randomly turning itself into ashes and coal.
Chapter 5

Chapter Summary

The angel was distracted by this shiny new toy of Crowley’s. “What’s that?”
“That,” Crowley said proudly, “is a portable computer. It has Windows XP. Granted, Packard Bell is hardly my first choice, but after my Macintosh Powerbook turned out to be not waterproof -” he stopped when the angel was staring at him blankly.
“What does it do?”
“Anything. It’s a computer.”

It was a Thursday, only two days after the whole episode with the trumpet had wrapped itself up and he was having lunch, although he was having a hard time enjoying it. It couldn’t be blamed on the excellent food; it was his dining partner driving him crazy.

“Have you heard anything?” Aziraphale asked, not for the first time that week, a little too casually when the demon stopped giving stealthy glances at his fake winning lottery ticket for a second and wondered who’d fall for it.

“I don’t know where he is or what he’s doing,” he said. “I know the Winchester family is an important name. They call themselves hunters. Well, the youngest ran away. It’s only the elder one and their father in this hunting business.”

“I know that,” Aziraphale said rather irritably. The demon suppressed a sigh. Then why was he asking, for whoever’s sake. “But what are hunters exactly?”

Crowley stopped mid-chew. “They hunt. No moose or anything like that. They hunt… anything not human. Well, that’s not true. They go after those who make themselves known, usually through murder the police can’t explain. Solving the unsolvable, that kind of thing.”

The angel folded his hands together in thought. “Witches.”

“Not just witches. There’s ghosts and spirits and, err, banshees…”

“Witches deal with spirits. So, witches.”

“It’s not just witches.” Crowley said, miraculously keeping his calmth. “Anyway, if they’re actively looking for supernatural omens, whether good or bad…they’ll run into demons sooner or later.”

Aziraphale carefully separated a tiny square of his grilled cheese from the rest, wrapped the spilling, half melting cheese around his fork and frowned. “I don’t see why they would have contact with demons at all. They seem like decent people.”

“Ah, but there are many demons around nowadays,” Crowley replied. “People come to us willingly, now. It’s a good era for business. And how many of your kind wander the Earth?”

“Plenty,” Aziraphale said, unsure of this claim and therefore unwilling to give an exact number.

“I’m not talking about your regular angels. They’re… fodder. They can’t do a thing. And you, you Principalities, you’re only with what, seven? Twelve? Forty, maybe?” he said, grasping at his not
quite bottomless pit of symbolic heavenly knowledge. “Oh. Seven times seven, maybe. We got that amount tripled. At least.”

“You spawn like rabbits,” the angel said, taking an awful long time to eat his food.

“I’m flattered,” Crowley muttered and produced a rather sleek, off-white rectangle which could be opened not unlike a book when you were lying on your bed on your side and upon opening almost blinded you with strange light and moving letters and an extremely loud ‘ping!’ announcing its presence to the whole area.

Crowley hit something on a lower half of the book, which contained keys with letters on it. A picture appeared; a blue sky, green grass and hills. Very unlike a demon’s best interests, one would say.

The angel was distracted by this shiny new toy of Crowley’s. “What’s that?”

“That,” Crowley said proudly, “is a portable computer. It has Windows XP. Granted, Packard Bell is hardly my first choice, but after my Macintosh Powerbook turned out to be not waterproof -” he stopped when the angel was staring at him blankly.

“What does it do?”

“Anything. It’s a computer.”

Aziraphale wasn’t following, judging from the simply perplexed expression on his face. With a sigh he moved the notebook in such a way they both could watch the screen where he just directed the cursor to go to Internet Explorer. Sure, he shouldn’t have been able to have internet in a public space like this, but being a demon had quite a few perks. This was one of them.

“Here, follow that arrow and watch what it can do…”

Once again, it was night in Mecca. Mecca was a beautiful place; which was something the humans had acknowledged too, which made it difficult to sneak around and do illegal things. It was just so crowded. Even the Vatican City didn’t generate that much traffic, or the various beautiful, famous temples in southern Asia, or the holy sites in Africa. No, it was Mecca.

One would think that it would be quite easy to steal something out of Mecca; with a city so well known like that, one could easily get lost in a crowd, such as in Paris, London or Singapore. Sadly, that was not the case.

Because no matter what he did or didn’t do, our handsome little thief had a tendency to stand out in crowds. So it was night and he had agreed to meet up with someone who would steal it for him. He had promised the thief a ridiculous sum of money - it would probably be above the salary check of many famous football players - and the thief had been all too willing. It had been easy to convince the man. You just had to look closely and see what they really desired. The fact that this man needed the money so bad because his wife was heavily pregnant and didn’t have a nursery yet, well, that was a funny non-coincidence.*

The man had brought the box to him and he paid the man the promised amount. The box had felt heavy when he opened it - the father-to-be had already disappeared into the night - and it was too dark to look inside. He reached inside it with his hand and discovered he could stick his whole arm inside the box. He felt nothing. Frowning he pulled out and held the box on his side. He heard nothing rattle, no weight shifting. It was very likely it was empty.
“Do you really think I would’ve stowed it back here?” a voice said. He spun around.

*Non-coincidences are not that hard to find, if you know what to look for. If there’s a long term problem and a completely unrelated party offers you a sudden solution, it’s always a non-coincidence. The hard part is trying to determine whether the unrelated party is planning to backstab you or using you because they want to feel good by giving something to thy neighbour.*

“Ah,” the man said, voice not completely devoid of surprise. He put the box on the ground and put his hands in the pockets of his jacket, just a little too stuttering to be a completely natural habit. This gesture had been practised.

“So it has been here,” he said again. “This box - ” he kicked it lightly with his feet, “ - it’s tampered with. I have happened to hold it before. You were not as smart as you thought to be.”

“And why is it that in my absence, Heaven’s people have turned into little sneaky thieves?”

He raised his hands in the air, half in mockery, half in defense. “I didn’t steal anything. Yet. Besides, I think you hardly hold any ground to accuse me of doing anything. They said you passed away. It is you, isn’t it? Absentee Archangel?”

The other, shorter man cracked a fake smile. “One and only. And who might you be? Memory’s a little hazy.”

“I bet,” he said, lowering his hands again, mirroring the smile, even though his was slightly more genuine. He inclined his head, not with much respect. “Balthazar*, sir.”

Gabriel raised his eyebrows. That was a familiar name; just not in the way one would expect. “That always been your name?”

“Of course. I have never felt the need to change who I am,” he grinned widely, knowing fully well he was pissing off an Archangel faster than Rimsky-Korsakov’s Flight of the Bumblebee. And while that wasn’t the smartest thing to do, this was someone who had been gone for ages. Gabriel grabbed the box, grabbed his arm quite tight and brought them to a quieter spot. This angel was a little more accustomed to the fine art of teleporting, but still was nauseous for a moment of two. He looked around.

“Gardens,” he noted, perhaps a little abundantly. “Such a nice place to have a little chat. So, what have you been up to?”

“You think I’m going to answer that?” Gabriel countered. “I wonder why Heaven is so interested in my possessions.”

* Balthazar is the name of one of the Three Kings / Wise Men in the story of the Birth of Christ, the others being Caspar and Melchior. Why this particular angel is sharing a name with one of them is a mystery. There’s a rumour demons like to tell that the three wise men in the story have all been angels who wanted to up the good pr a little back in the days. This however implies there are angels called Melchior and Caspar, which is not the case. There is a demon named Melchior, but let’s not think about the implications.
“They’re planning for the Apocalypse,” Balthazar offered.

“They’re always planning for an Apocalypse,” Gabriel said bitterly.

Balthazar would’ve tipped his hat to that, had he been wearing one. There was just the tiniest bit of disappointment on his face, too, which indicated that he had either been in a vessel for too long or not long enough to control his emotions. He gripped something invisible.

“Let that sword go,” Gabriel said; amusement in his eyes gone. “It cannot kill me and I don’t want to explain why I stabbed a Principality to death.”

“Err, I’m not a Principality,” the angel said in response. He didn’t lower his guard.

“Oh, come on now,” Gabriel said, looking at him closely. “They don’t let anyone down who isn’t supposed to be on Earth.”

“Like you?”

The edge of his mouth twisted. “Don’t do anything stupid. You know what, go tell the Host they won’t get the Horn. Ever. Or me,” he added as an afterthought. “Start the party without me. Leave me out.”

A snort. “You don’t want the party to happen.”

They stood there for a few minutes, judging the other. Neither of them knew the other particularly well; Balthazar knew of the Archangels, naturally, but Gabriel had never been his superior. Gabriel on the other hand found he had a hard time recognising angels he had only seen in glimpses, in completely different forms on Earth. He was familiar, yes, and they might’ve talked a few times, but they weren’t exactly close. (Gabriel wasn’t close with anyone at the moment, not even Crowley or the pagan deity he wriggled his way in, but that aside.)

“I’ve not come here to seek you out,” Balthazar finally said. “Most think you’re gone, and really, Heaven’s buzzing with rumours and doubt already. I’m not about to throw fuel on the fire.”

It piqued Gabriels interest, but not enough to ask about it. He’d find out himself. Too many knew he was hiding out on Earth* and that was dangerous enough. For some reason they always wanted something, whether that was advice, his loyalty or even his life. He just wanted to be left alone and slowly watching the world go to shit.

* With Balthazar knowing about him - surely he could’ve lied, but he already knew the angel wasn’t going to buy that lie - the count was up to six. Six beings in the universe who knew who he was and where he had been in the last two thousand years. Balthazar, Aziraphale, Crowley, the Antichrist, the actual Loki, and the most dangerous of them all, some redhead young woman named Pepper.

“Why were you in Mecca?” Gabriel asked, not being able to contain his curiosity any longer.

The angel gave him a wry smile. “It is where I would’ve put it. They’re not very good at out-of-the-box thinking, are they? And yet, it’s a logical place. Too easy for anyone who bothers to read the Holy books.”
“You’ve been following me.”

“I had my suspicions. Where’s the horn?”

Gabriel raised a hand, as in warning. “Gone. You won’t find it.”

Balthazar suppressed a sigh. “I guess it can’t be helped. Can I tempt you for a little exchange of information? No?” he continued. “At least tell me you have it.”

“It’s not in the hands of Hell, if that’s what you’re asking,” the Archangel said. He was growing impatient.

The lesser angel nodded. “I’ll buy that answer. Not sure they will. I don’t mean to threaten you, but I think your days of peace here are over. The first seal will break soon. In… well, let’s say, within five years.” He sounded a bit too cheerful. Whether that was real or not, it was disturbing. He gave the Archangel a long look. “Want to know the people you have to look out for? They’re called the Winchesters.” With that, he vanished without a goodbye.

“I know that,” Gabriel said to empty air. “Of course I know that.”

A low humming, rumbling sound made its way through the dark and freezing halls. It was off key, multiple tones making up a chord not following the usual rules. When not taking the location in mind, one would think it was the local men’s choir practising for their next Christmas Concert. This didn’t mean there were no choirs in Hell, but the local men’s choir wouldn’t qualify. Hell liked its daily torture, but there were some things that bordered on masochistic. Not even they would go that far.

Having the local men’s choir crossed out on the list, there were a number of other possibilities, and all of them but one were impossible.

No, this was Hastur, a Duke of Hell, being Extremely Frustrated.

“It’s fake.” he said almost inaudibly.

None of the demons around him dared to utter a word.

“It’s fake,” he repeated on a louder tone.

It was somewhere in February and Crowley was, again, having lunch. Despite various attempts he was eating on his own today while he was fiddling with a radio, trying to warp the broadcast of radio stations into something else entirely. It was just different to sit in expensive restaurants at a table for one. They took either pity on you or thought you were the Rich Bastard type who was just showing off by ordering the most luxurious foods on the menu. If you were with another person, you were just spoiling the other. Which was supposed to be a good thing in the minds of humans.

How he loved human minds.

He wasn’t in the mood of being stared at, or waitresses flirting with him since his behaviour and appearance apparently screamed ‘I’m so available right now’ so he was in his too clean apartment, eating a pizza at noon.
The radio he found in the trash. Beforehand it had seemed fun to play with it and get everyone all worked up about their BBC broadcast not working during crucial times, but he had become quickly agitated about the fact he couldn’t get it to work himself. Normally Crowley had no trouble with technology, but this little thing broke the chain. And his spirits, as he willed it to work and it just sputtered static sounds in protest.

He sighed at it.

The static sounds started to warp in a voice oddly resembling a Dalek.* Crowley groaned, half tempted to throw the radio through the window. It had been silent for months. Three months, two weeks and five days. He had enjoyed it.

THE SWORD IS FAKE, CROWLEY.

Oh, condemn everything to purgatory. Bless this Earth.

“I’m sorry to hear that, lord. I didn’t know.” He hoped it sounded convincing enough.

FIND OUT WHAT HAPPENED.

“Yes. Yes, of course.”

WE DEPEND ON YOU, CROWLEY.

“I’m honoured, lord. I am.”

The radio turned static.

* You can only spend so many days in England without learning about Daleks.

The conversation was over, just like that. And he knew what he was supposed to do. Just like that. And Crowley didn’t like it.
Chapter 6

Chapter Summary

Despite the numerous changes the world had witnessed in the last ten years there were still a few places in the world where lives were lived in relative peace. The rush that had come with the new millennia had not caught everyone in its cold grip. As surprising as it may be, Lower Tadfield was one of them. It was almost a slice of Heaven; it was serene, quiet, flowers and trees blossomed and animals were seen darting in the grass, and the sunset was the most beautiful in all of England.

It creeped Aziraphale out.

“You're a cute dog! Is he yours? Can I pet him, mister?”

A child, around eight or nine years old with a brightly coloured coat and an equally bright coloured scarf and an almost too red blush on her cheeks squatted down in front of the Jack Russell who was all too eager for a little attention. He yipped at her, wagged his tail excitedly and tried to bury his nose in the space between her hands, as if that was where she had hidden any potential tennis balls.

The child giggled, then looked up at the owner of the small dog.

“He’s a bit of a rascal,” the owner said with a hint of a smile on his face, “but he’s friendly alright. He won’t bite your arm off.”

The girl had retreated her arm in shock when her brain took a moment to register what he actually had said, but then stuck it out again and started to pet behind the dog’s ears. “What’s his name?” she asked, perking up in the same way as a dog would when you gave him a treat.

The man became quiet, as if this has been an extremely difficult question and was about to say something stupid as ‘Dog’ or ‘Jack’ or even -

“I think he looks like a Mister Tumnus,” the girl said confidently.

“Lucy! Come here!” a woman cried out. The child bit on her lip and looked down at her not so white legging. It was dirty and stained when she had in all her enthusiasm knelt down in front of the little dog. The man seemed to notice this and waved vaguely in her direction. Her eyes widened as the grassy and muddy spots dissolved into nothing. Giving the man a huge grin, she got up and ran to her mom.

“Still clean?” he heard the mother say, fussing over the clothes of her bright eyed child. He sighed as the Jack Russell was looking for his attention again. He miracled a shiny, new tennis ball in existence and threw it away, in the opposite direction of the girl and her mother. The dog went after it.

“Such a domestic sight.”

The smile quickly left his face and was replaced with a glare. The dog came back, panting, dropping the ball in front of the newcomer and looking up at him expectantly.

“Go away,” Gabriel said.
“Don’t be like that,” the demon said in response. He kicked the ball, not wanting to pick it up when it had just left the drooling, wet mouth of a dog. The dog wagged its tail in a sad fashion and nudged the ball with his nose towards the taller man.

“I helped you. Go away.”

“Yeah, well, there were a couple, err, complications…” Crowley started.

Gabriel picked up the ball and threw it away. “I really don’t care. Go back to London, go snog that angel of yours and pray for redemption before the world is blasted apart in a couple million pieces.”

He straightened his back and wrapped his scarf even more tightly around his neck, even though he didn’t exactly need the extra warmth. He watched the dog come back, said dog blissfully unaware of dooming doomsday hanging over their heads.

“You knew they were going to find out about the trumpet?”

He clacked with his tongue. “Obviously. Have you dumbed down in a the last few decades? Maybe you should get it checked out up there, mate. The end of the world is still on the agenda. We just pushed back the date. Would’ve been nice if that had lasted more than a couple months, but I guess I shouldn’t complain.”

Crowley wasn’t going to let himself send back that easily. He knew it was going to be difficult to convince the Archangel to help them out once again, but there was so much at stake here. There must be something the man would miss, would Earth blow up. He had convinced Aziraphale back then. Why not Gabriel?

“The youngest one is currently in college. The elder one, and the father, I hear they’re hunting demons.”

Gabriel gave him a puzzled look. ‘Who?’

“The Winchesters. You know. The bloodlines… with every step they take they’re closer to getting the elder one in Hell. There are all kinds of plans for it, you know. Corrupting the youngest - that had been Azazel’s idea…” He shut up abruptly. He was fairly sure he wasn’t supposed to give out information like that, and especially not to the rogue who singlehandedly created his own side in this rivalry war. Not Heaven, not Hell… not Earth. Just his own.

The Archangel shrugged. “Told you. It’ll happen.” They were both silent and watched as Gabriel’s dog jumped around them, hoping they would throw the ball once again. They didn’t. Then: “What are their names?”

Crowley straightened his jacket. “I can’t say.”

“What, no freebies?”

The demon refused to say anything else, lighting a cigarette instead. Gabriel groaned, loudly and obnoxious, almost tempted to pray for the world to be a little more accommodating to him. Why was everything and everyone working against him? It was simply unfair how it worked. Just because he didn’t want to meddle in the fight, didn’t mean he wanted to be left ignorant. Those were the stupidest kind of people. He wasn’t merely putting his head in the sand.

“Fine. What are you doing here in the first place? I happen to like it here. Clearly, you don’t.” He took a step aside when the smoke started to hit him in the face. He indulged in a lot of human activities and pleasures, but smoking* had not been one of them.
We can safely assume smoking is a favourite activity of (fallen) angels, noting at least three fallen celestial beings have been spotted with a cigarette in their hand and even Aziraphale smokes in secret when he thinks no one is watching.

“Work.” The demon wasn’t feeling particularly talkative, not where just about anyone could hear them talk.

“Okay. Okay, okay. Let’s hear you out,” Gabriel grumbled. “I’m not saying I’ll help. You tell me the story, then I decide. Deal?”

Crowley simply looked at him and threw the cigarette on the ground. The Archangel yanked him by the collar of his shirt and snapped, changing the scene from park to apartment, which would leave the impression that not they had moved, but the scenery. However, that might be a bit too much effort for a lazy Sunday afternoon. Gabriel made his way to the couch, flopped on it ungracefully and crossed his legs. In his lap, a bowl with grapes appeared. He threw a loose grape on the ground. The dog came yipping out of what looked like the kitchen. Unlike before, it wasn’t wearing a tag.

Crowley frowned. “Dog’s not real.”

“Of course it isn’t,” came the response.

The demon let out a snicker. “You were so lonely you miracled a dog into existence? That’s adorable.”

“Shut it, or I’ll stuff this entire bowl in your mouth,” Gabriel threatened. “After I dip them in holy water.” He held up a bunch of grapes, dangling from a dangerous thin and weak looking twig and caught the lowest hanging ones with his tongue. One of them fell off and rolled off the angel, off the couch. The Jack Russell immediately scooped it up and sat there, waiting for more accidents to happen.

“Why’s the Serpent asking for guidance from little ol’ me?” he said, tossing another grape bunch to the demon, who was secretly thankful for the snack.

“A favour,” Crowley began. “Only a small one. You see, they want me working on the crossroads. Since they kind of found out that the horn was fake and, well, you know how it goes. They wanted to wipe out all of humanity. Without it they only can kill off twenty percent of the population, or so. Fifty if we’re lucky.” He didn’t sound like he felt lucky.

“I don’t see the connection with Hell putting you on the market sales branch,” Gabriel said.

“I was just getting there.” Crowley plucked a single grape, studying it before declaring it was safe to eat, only to find out these weren’t seedless grapes. His face turned sour. “They figure that if they can’t have all of the humans, they want as many as possible. And for that the Apocalypse needs to come as quickly as possible.” A sigh. “With the first seal breaking, this Apocalypse can’t be stopped. The Antichrist cannot pull another trick like that. He found a loophole and exploited it, but there’s no loophole now.”

Gabriel sank further in the cushions of his too comfortable couch.

“So they want me to make a deal with Dean Winchester. Get him down there pronto.”
The Archangel let out a triumphant 'ha!' and sat more upright, placing the bowl aside. “Dean Winchester, huh.”

“Anyway,” Crowley said on a louder tone, trying to ignore the fact that yes, he had given the man his freebie and possibly everything he needed to know from Crowley at this point, “I don’t want to work the crossroads. With me stuck making deals we can’t do anything.”

“It’s nice to hear you have self-confidence, but you’re not going to make any difference. Whether you’re there to stop Ragnarok or not,” Gabriel commented.

“I found a demon who’s willing to do the work for me,” Crowley said. “Ambitious guy. So I can hop off and find another solution if the seals break. I just need to make them believe that man is me.”

“When the seals break,” Gabriel corrected. And there’s no solution. Well, there’s one,” he said, getting up, stretching his legs. “But it’s impossible. Since you need the Four Horsemen. Which means it’s a shitty-ass solution because the Four Horsemen don’t show up unless you kick them out of their prison and announce the end of times. But if you want to stay delusioned like that, sure. I’ll help with your little trick. Shouldn’t be hard. Not for free, though. Tell me the name of that other guy. His brother,” he clarified after Crowley remained silent.

“Sam,” Crowley then said.

“Dean is the elder one, right? Dean and Sam. Jeez, their parents were feeling uninspired or what? Although it could be worse. At least it’s not Adam.”

Crowley put the rest of his grapes back in the bowl. “We’ll meet with you in two days. I might have more information for you.” He was about to turn around and leave, but something was nagging at him. “What are you going to do? It’s not like you want to be a part of this mess. You’re going to pay them a visit?”

Gabriel grinned widely at him. “No, nothing of the sorts. I’ll let them come to me.”

Despite the numerous changes the world had witnessed in the last ten years* there were still a few places in the world where lives were lived in relative peace. The rush that had come with the new millennia had not caught everyone in its cold grip. As surprising as it may be, Lower Tadfield was one of them. It was almost a slice of Heaven; it was serene, quiet, flowers and trees blossomed and animals were seen darting in the grass, and the sunset was the most beautiful in all of England.

It creeped Aziraphale out.

* It was 2004, and the last Apocalypse had been more than ten years ago. The meddling of Adam Young did not only change the world in drastic ways, it also sped up the development of technology and science, and strangely enough, awareness for nature and the environment.

It was unnatural, he thought and he avoided it like the plague. As a matter of saying at least, as he couldn’t be affected by any diseases such as the plague. That, and the plague wasn’t around anymore. It was a rare phenomenon these days. The English language was a bit outdated; even he could agree with that.
So when he needed a little something from a someone who happened to live in Lower Tadfield, he didn’t actually go to the small town, but chose the safety of the phone.

“Hello,” the voice of a young adult male drifted into the device, and he rubbed his nose, trying to figure out how he was going to bring this news. Or, this offer, better said. Or, this favour, even better said. It wasn’t like they had ever kept in touch with the Antichrist. Surely he had saved the world back then, but that didn’t mean he was going to stick around. It was a dangerous boy and he’d rather keep himself out of his antics.

“Good afternoon,” Aziraphale greeted as he walked around the kitchen, looking slightly disappointed at the lack of mugs in the cabinet. The angel didn’t have a shortage of mugs, as he had once purchased a set of eight in the seventies with delightful little flowers painted on a checkered background, but it just so happened that all of them were filled with either stale tea or stale hot chocolate, the hot part being a matter of debate. One of the stale teas was growing its own moldy garden.

An absent minded wave would fix all of this, but Aziraphale was too focused on his task and turned away from the kitchen, peering outside where rain was streaming down and wind sent it in all directions except the right one. Several umbrella’s without owners passed the store.

“See, I’m not sure if you remember me, but there’s this minor mishap, just a small trouble really, and it’s currently centering in the Americas - ”

A cough on the receiver’s end stopped his rambling effectively.

“You are asking if I can do anything about the looming end of times?” Adam asked.

“Well, I wouldn’t put it like that, but essentially…”

“And what am I supposed to do about it?” he said in a gentle manner. It wasn’t a rhetorical question; he was genuinely curious what the angel was asking of him.

The angel squirmed uncomfortably. “Seeing as you restored the world and locked up the Morning Star, which was quite remarkable I might say…”

A sigh could be heard. “I was able to stop it all because it was about me. The world was supposed to end with me. This time, it’s not. I can hardly stop something if I don’t know what exactly it is they’re using.”

“I suppose I know a thing or two, but…”

“You know what? Keep me posted,” Adam said. There was a noise, something the angel identified as the click-clacking of a BIC pen and the hasty scribble of pen on yesterday’s newspaper. “It sounds interesting.”

Aziraphale would’ve protested that ‘interesting’ hardly scratches the surface of what this Apocalypse would be, but he knew better than to argue with the Antichrist. An Antichrist who had surprised him even on his eleventh, but he didn’t want to take any chances.

He let out a weak laugh. “Interesting indeed.”

“Trust me sweetheart, anything is better than whatever task they can think of giving me now.” Two figures stood near an empty crossroads in the middle of grain fields and meadows with cows mooing
at the strangers, both surprisingly fashionable in their black suits, fitting them as well as a wolf a
sheepskin when he was up to something sneaky. The one in the sunglasses looked silently at his
more talkative companion, who clearly felt like he had won the lottery.

“If you keep addressing me like that, it’s no wonder they have let you sit in Hell for years,” Crowley
casually said, brushing a speck of dust off his trousers. He glanced at his watch, even though it
wasn’t actually working and declared it was late.

“I thought angels were known for their punctuality,” the other demon said. He had sounded quite
cheerful until now, but Crowley thought some nervousness was seeping in. Which was quite
understandable, seeing as this demon was not one of the original Fallen, had never met any (former)
celestial being in his existence on Earth aside from Crowley. And Crowley didn’t meet the standards.
He didn’t score all that high on the fear factor.*

Crowley would say that this was a deliberate choice to create a false sense of security.

“Not this one,” Crowley said. ‘I’m pretty sure he didn’t take the time zone difference into account.”

* These were the unbiased results of a survey taken by three hundred men and women of different
ages and nationalities. Now, if plants had been able to take this survey Crowley probably would’ve
gotten an honourable place in the top ten of most terrifying demons.

But there was rustling and sand being lifted up as someone landed behind them on the too dry road.
Crickets stopped chirping in the meadows next to them, as if they were holding their breath for a
moment. Crowley placed a hand on the other demon in a jovial manner and clapped his shoulder. “I
got myself a nice replacement, don’t you think?”

The new arrivier walked around them and gave them a long, studying look. “I had expected worse.
What’s your name?”

If the demon was metaphorically about to wet himself because an extremely powerful angel was
awfully close and about to touch him - of course he was nervous, wouldn’t anyone be? - he didn’t
show it. Not entirely, although there were a few subtle signs one could spot, if one was observant
enough. But this demon clenched his teeth, simply said “Fergus,” with so much disdain that it almost
seemed like the man channeled all his nervousness and fear into the hatred of his given name.

“Spooky,” Gabriel grinned. “People will surely tremble in fear. Crowley would be a better name,
even if it isn’t that much more intimidating... now, come here.”

Fergus scowled, but did as he was told. It was a strange way to get promoted in the hierarchy of
Hell. By deceiving all of them.

Crowley let go of him as the Archangel touched him, lightly on the forehead. Fergus was ready for
anything; excruciating pain, getting torn out of the body… and there was nothing. No pain. Just a
light, fluttering pressure in his head. It felt as if he was slightly drunk. He blinked, trying to regain
control of his senses.

“That was it?” he asked sceptically.

those would taint the soul. And it would hurt like a bitch. But wait. You lost yours.”
“That’s a comforting thought,” Fergus - no - Crowley said snibby. Gabriel looked at the both of them. Lord, this was going to be confusing.
Chapter 7

Chapter Summary

“When are you from? How is the future?”

“2008,” Castiel said, frowning ever so slightly. “And your future... it’s not good.”

“What’s happening?” he asked warily.

Castiel looked back at the house and stayed silent for a while. “I am uncertain whether to share such delicate information with you.”

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

It wasn’t a coincidence he had found himself in Lawrence, Kansas that day, although he would’ve liked it to be one. He was enjoying the seventies, got into jazz and television (in colour!) and the people. Oh, the people. They were marvelous. Really outdone themselves with their festivals and their shouts for equality and peace, even though he knew that both of those likely remained a dream to chase after.

He felt rather free. There was Vietnam, and there was the Cold War, but all of that... human problems. There was no Apocalypse, no grand plan from any of the religions or deities in the world (and there were many). It seemed like everyone was simply enjoying this time and age and he could hardly complain.

That was, until he felt a major ripple washing over him; souls and energies who were not supposed to be here. As if they were puzzle pieces thrown back in the wrong box. There were only few beings who could pull a trick like that. Gabriel really should’ve ignored it, but curiosity got the better of him. So under the disguise of a lanky woman in her early fifties, he visited Lawrence.

It wasn’t hard to spot the one responsible for the disturbance in time. Unmistakingly an angel; a high rank, but not quite so high that he recognised the aura immediately. It had been a while, after all.

He smiled at the angel, who was dressed as the classical Hollywood loner detective, complete with a beige trenchcoat and a bewildered yet sharp look. Hollywood would’ve loved him, he mused.

“Nice day, isn’t it? April does what it wants, but it granted us lovely weather today,” he said, swiping a lock of hair out of his eyes, staring disgruntledly at it when it successfully resisted his will.

“It is almost May,” the angel pointed out. “And months don’t have a conscience or brainwaves to act upon.” Gabriel had to admit; this angel had a pokerface. Some of the angels he met on his travels didn’t react quite so calm when there was suddenly someone standing next to them. Especially if their invisibility device was switched on.

The angel took in his features and visibly relaxed. “You have not been sent?”

He almost wanted to laugh. “I have not been sent. I’m stationed here. So riddle me this, why is a Seraph fiddling with time? 1973 is a fine year, don’t get me wrong, but...”
Although he looked confused for a second, the angel’s reply was swift. “Why should I let a Principality know of my mission?”

Gabriel put on a guilty smile. “My apologies. I forgot my place. But if I can assist...”

“I’m fine,” he said immediately. “What’s your name?”

“Rahatiel*,” Gabriel said after digging into knowledge he hadn’t touched in centuries.

“Rahatiel,” the angel repeated. “My name is Castiel. And as a Seraph I ask you to stand back. Do not interfere.”

Castiel. Now that was a familiar name. Gabriel nodded before realising there was a chance this angel didn’t know about any human customs, judging from the way he was speaking and putting so much strain on the vessel’s vocal cords. “I will not. I’ll get out of your hair.” But he stayed, invisible to humans as well as angels now, and watched the person Castiel was currently staring at with a moody expression (not on his face, but there were others means to read someone’s feelings). The person seemed rather lost, in pretty much the same way Alice from Alice in Wonderland would’ve felt lost when she entered Wonderland for the first time, but unlike Alice he wasn’t gazing around in wonder and astonishment, which meant he probably wasn’t enjoying the whole time travel experience. Humans were impossible to please.

*Rahatiel means ‘to run.’ Only after the words had left his mouth, he realised he had thrown a great ironic joke at himself and stumbled completely into his own trap. It left him in a sour mood for the rest of the week.

He got bored fast and instead focused on the more interesting player on the board; Castiel. Bending time wasn’t a common practise - not even amongst Archangels and Gabriel couldn’t detect when the angel was from. Not exactly; past the old millennium, but not too far in. 2010, possibly. What was happening in that time that the angels traveled back? And on his own, too. Gabriel could find a few possible solutions to this problem and he didn’t like any of them.

The rest of the day he stalked around the angel, who didn’t really did anything except following the man around, who for some reason was looking at cars.

He left for a while, not sure what he was supposed to make of it. When the night fell he found the angel, who was now standing in front of a house. Gabriel knew he was listening in to the conversation happening inside. It didn’t make sense to him. He made himself known.

“Hello again,” Castiel said.

“Hello,” he replied, still in his female disguise. “I’m not interfering. I just have a question.”

Castiel said nothing, which meant he could go on.

“When are you from? How is the future?”

“2008,” Castiel said, frowning ever so slightly. “And your future... it’s not good.”

“What’s happening?” he asked warily.
Castiel looked back at the house and stayed silent for a while. “I am uncertain whether to share such delicate information with you.”

“I need to know,” Gabriel pressed on.

“You won’t like it. It’s the Apocalypse,” he said softly. “It’s finally begun. The seals are breaking. I’m afraid we cannot stop it. We are losing, Rahatiel. It’s only a matter of months before Lucifer walks free.”

Gabriel promptly disappeared. The angel didn’t come after him.

The Bentley had been good to him lately. No Freddie Mercury or Brian May tormenting him through the speakers. He almost started to miss Another One Bites The Dust. Almost, as he wouldn’t particularly mind it if the Haydn tape stayed Haydn just a little while longer. However, when Crowley switched the music device on, it wasn’t the piano tune Haydn always started with, but the Clash. He could live with the Clash, he supposed, and drove away.

He had only just left the center of the city when someone was calling him. On the phone. No one called him the phone. No one in his circle of acquaintances either knew how to use the phone or didn’t bother as they had more direct ways to start up the conversation. So for a couple of seconds he just stared at the buzzing phone on the byriders seat, then grabbed and placed it against his ear.

“London calling,” he said.

It was silent on the other end of the line. Then: “Really, that’s the stupidest joke I’ve ever heard, including Beelzebubs idiotic jests. I can hear your music. Not a bad taste, by the way.”

Crowley sighed and placed his phone between his shoulder and his ear, had a terrible time balancing it and it fell on the ground, between his feet. In the seconds it took to grab it and regain control of the steering wheel he was already on the other side of the road, barely missing a pedestrian.

He threw the phone back on the seat next to him after putting it on speaker mode. “What is it, Fergus?”

“Don’t call me that,” the demon on the receiving end scowled.

“What am I supposed to call you? I know you’re going to be my stuntman, but I ain’t calling you Crowley,” Crowley said. “Surely the other demons didn’t know you as Fergus. Did they?”

A grumble. “Just call me anything. James Bond for all I care.”

“Right. What’s your reason of calling, Double-O Seven?”

“Nothing special. Just some technical details.”

A thought occurred. “Say, you do have experience on the crossroads, don’t you?”

“Of course!” Fergus said indignantly. “I was one of the best. Made some great deals last year. Alas, I was about to lay a finger on this one man. I had no idea he was part of his special pet project. So he got rid of me by putting me in one of Hell’s finest branches.”

“You got demoted to writing politician speeches?” Crowley asked horrified.

“Worse. Instruction manuals. So you see, this ain’t so bad. I’m back to where I’m actually good at.
The problem here is Azazel.”

“...Azazel? What’s up with him?”

“The guy keeps bothering me, that’s what! I can’t exactly do my job and keep an eye on the Winchesters without him practically breathing in my neck. He knows something is fishy.”

Crowley frowned. He wasn’t that fond of Azazel and wasn’t really willing to deal with him. Hastur and Ligur had been bad enough, but not even a million of Hasturs and Ligurs could make up for one Azazel. It was frightening. He would almost rather deal with Lucifer Himself. “I’ll see what I can do about it,” he replied tightly. He reached for the phone and ended the call.

It was not until late 2005, just before Halloween, when Azazel was again mentioned in a conversation. He was visiting a museum, and with him was Aziraphale, who was paying more attention to a painting of Vincent van Gogh* than to Crowley’s alarming state of agitation.

“Just look at it, Crowley. The brilliant use of perception and what we really see and what the human mind fills in, it’s amazing. It’s… indescribable.”

Crowley looked at it and quite honestly was fed up with how the angel kept getting distracted, putting the paintings in favour of his important news. So he started to torment him. “Oh, yes. The use of cyan and azure against the contrasting yellow making it stand out, and the waves in the sky symbolising - ”

“Indescribable,” Aziraphale said on a condescending tone.

* The Starry Night is a famous painting indeed and is part of the permanent collection of a museum in New York City. The conclusion** is that Aziraphale was either looking at a replica or a poster and, according to his genuine enthusiasm, couldn’t tell it apart from the real painting. (It was probably his first time seeing the piece at all, even though it was fake.)

** This conclusion was drawn by Crowley, who might or might not have been a tiny bit biased.

“This is not why I wanted to meet with you, angel.”

“What Hell’s doing is none of my business,” Aziraphale said prickly. “Whatever is happening in the United States doesn’t concern me. Why demons are injecting demon blood in human children is beyond me and tragic of course… yet, not something I want to burn my hands on.”

Crowley simply looked at him and nonchalantly put his hands in his pockets. “But that’s not true. I know you’ve been in contact with Adam Young.”

Aziraphale’s facial expression was an interesting one. “How’d you find out about that?” he asked.

“I called him too - oh, crap,” he suddenly said, cutting himself off.

Aziraphale didn’t even have time to respond with a ‘what?’ as it became pretty clear what was going on. The little speakers, subtly hung in corners and stationed on the ground to further illustrate the paintings on the walls, were humming. A low buzz, as if there were bees in the room next to them,
each one of them all too eager. One of the speakers sputtered out electrical sparks. Crowley casted a
worried glance.

“That’s… probably my superior,” he said, putting on the calmest voice he had in store at the
moment, which wasn’t all that calm. “They still haven’t figured out how private communication lines
are supposed to work. Funny, huh?”

“I fail to see what’s so funny about this,” the angel said.

Crowley just groaned and looked at the speaker nearest to him, who was now smoking; dark grey
fumes smelling like petrol. And even though humans were slow on the uptake, they too had noticed.
The smoke became thicker. This was unusual, even for him.

The demon took a breath. “It’s Azazel,” he informed Aziraphale. The angel’s brow furrowed.

“Can’t we just, err, discreetly walk away?” Aziraphale suggested. He had never been present
whenever Crowley communicated with his superiors, and quite frankly he wasn’t up for the
experience either. Where the demon loved and praised the phrase ‘there’s a first time for everything,’
Aziraphale loathed it and could rarely be persuaded to try new things. Whether that was something
big as new concepts as ‘e-mail’ or ‘magnet trains’ or something mundane as choosing another trash
can to throw your fish-and-chips remains in didn’t matter.

“You might,” Crowley said miserably. The smoke was expanding rapidly, causing people to run
away; one elbowed against the wall and the fire alarm went off. Within thirty seconds, they were
alone, and it was quiet, save for the wie-hoo wie-hoo sounds echoing through the entire second floor.
The smoke dissolved itself and a man grinned at him. It wasn’t a friendly grin. No, it was rather
wicked.

The demon stood there comfortably, having the posture of someone who had gotten the hang of how
human bodies functioned. Crowley didn’t dare looking over his shoulder, but he knew Aziraphale
had disappeared. He silenced the alarm as casually as he possibly could with one of his highest
superiors right in front of him.

“Fancy seeing you here,” the demon said, one of his mouth corners twitching upwards. “I thought
I’d put you on crossroad duty. Instead I find you pretending to be an art appreciator on this gloomy
little island.”

Crowley opened his mouth to say something.

“No, I am talking,” Azazel said almost serenely, studying the nearest painting on the wall for a
couple seconds. “Although I would love to hear your lies and excuses about why you’re
collaborating with Heaven spawn, why you got yourself a stand-in and why you’re effectively being
in my way, we have no time for that. I’m willing you to give a last chance. Which you’d want to
take, no doubt. Being evaporated and …rearranged must not be pleasant.”

“Of course sir,” Crowley said, feeling less calm than he appeared to be. Standing next to someone
you had pissed off and could easily do about anything Crowley could imagine as punishment would
do that to you.

“I need the Winchesters on the playing board, but they’re under an angel’s protection. My people
can’t get to them. Get the angel out of my way,” Azazel said. He gave him an insinuating look. “You
know which one I’m talking about.”

“With all due respect - ”
“If that fails, I might just kill off his girlfriend to get him into gear,” the demon interrupted him. “It will just spark the right amount of hatred and anger to set it all in motion. It’s a bit messy, but it’ll do the job. Or better yet. I’ll leave the honour to you. Your choice. You got three days. And you’ll report to me from now on.” His eyes almost glittered, Crowley thought, like a lioness carefully planning an attack on her unsuspecting prey. Being Azazel’s prey was unsettling.

“I’m very honoured,” Crowley said. He hoped that was what Azazel wanted to hear. “But, how am I...” he gestured vaguely in the air. Getting an angel to listen to him seemed to be an impossible task. Especially this one.

Azazel shrugged and smiled at him. “Use your wit?”

Jericho wasn’t impressive. There were a couple farms and a couple streets with houses scattered around, nearly all of them sporting dusty cars - mainly trucks - on their land. Only a couple shops and stores had survived the upcoming hype that was called online shopping and migration to bigger cities, leaving the settlement in a ghost town like state. Less than a hundred people lived here.

Considering the name, it was probably doomed to be a ghost town. New families didn’t settle in. The old ones were thinning out and dying.

Yet it still had the need for a sheriff and several deputies. It also had a nice, modern bridge. Built over a muddy river. And someone just fell in it.

The Winchesters hadn’t been hard to spot. They were young, for instance, and asked all kinds of questions, pretending to be federal marshals, the most believable job they could possibly think of with their age. It was similar to an episode of CSI, but worse.*

An angel appeared in front of him.

“Good afternoon, deputy,” Balthazar said in a mocking way. “Strange. Haven’t seen you for centuries and now I keep running into you. This is the fifth time within two years.” He spread out his hands. “Although I don’t understand why you would choose to settle down here. Nostalgia, perhaps? Reminiscing. Jericho, Sodom, Gomorrah...turned to dust. Yes, I can definitely see the resemblance.”

“Get out of my sight.” Gabriel sounded tired. He also didn’t mean it and patted the grass next to him. The angel moved to the spot, but didn’t sit down.

* Arguably so. At least they weren’t wearing sunglasses at night.

“What do you want from me?” Gabriel said.

Balthazar grinned slightly. “You’re overestimating your own importance. Heaven’s plans don’t involve you anymore. Besides, I only ever needed your possessions. Not you. Champagne?” He was already holding two slender glasses in his hand, almost spilling some of the alcohol on the ground.

The Archangel stared at him, lips thin. “I don’t see a cause for celebration.”

“Pity.”
They both watched the humans on the bridge in uncomfortable silence, the shorter one covered in mud and dirt, the other one laughing. They drove away, and the angels watched them go.

“Hmm, it sure is a strange sight to realise the fate of the world is in the hands of those two. They’re just so mundane,” Balthazar commented.

Gabriel shot him a disbelieving look. “Mundane? Have you seen the life they’re leading? They’re not particularly bright, but I can assure you that whatever they’re doing is not mundane, or ordinary. One, they’re basically vigilantes. The bad kind. Well, it’s up for debate. Two; most humans don’t know what’s… out there. They get a normal job, get a family, grow old and die without ever knowing our dear Lord’s previous attempts of his prize chickens.”

“I don’t know,” the other angel said. “The youngest is living a pretty normal life at the moment.”

“Trust me on this. That won’t last long,” Gabriel muttered. “I’d like that glass now.”

Balthazar silently handed him the champagne.

There was movement behind them. Balthazar manifested his blade in less than a second and spun around, but Gabriel hadn’t even bothered to blink. He glanced up at the other angel and uncrossed his legs, but didn’t get up. The two figures on the bridge were gone and the descending sun casted long shadows over the land. He had recognised the silhouette, even though he already knew who was behind him.

“He’s no threat, Balthazar,” he said.

“It’s a demon,” the angel exclaimed.

“And he’s not here about to kill us. Not in the least place because he’s no match for me. Hello, Crowley.”

“You’ve got company,” Crowley said, staring at Balthazar, or better said, his sword, which was pointing at his throat. It was an uncomfortable position to be in, he decided.

“You’re my angel stalker,” Crowley said, staring at Balthazar, or better said, his sword, which was pointing at his throat. It was an uncomfortable position to be in, he decided.

“That’s my angel stalker,” Gabriel said. “He keeps showing up.” Balthazar sent the demon a dashing smile, still with his weapon in hand. It wasn’t a custom made body, Crowley could tell. No, this angel was possessing a poor sod.

“I have a message,” he said. He walked with a bow around the two angels so he could face them, keeping his distance from them, and more importantly, the stabbing device he definitely didn’t want to be friends with.

“Whose message?”

“Azazel’s,” Crowley said after a pause. “Lift the protection sigils on the Winchesters, or there’ll be consequences. It’ll make the ride to Doomsday a bit bumpier. For all of us. So, if you’d be so kind…” he drawled off.

The Archangel scoffed. “That’s not my doing.”

Crowley blinked at him. “It’s not?”

“No! No, I’m just the spectator here. I’m watching. It’s not like I can’t do much else about it,” he said with resentment.

“The wards are mine,” Balthazar commented. He had lowered his sword. “And I cannot release
“That’s a shame,” the demon said. He sounded genuinely disappointed. The conversation had come abruptly to an end, as they all knew neither side was going to budge. They never did. It was simply ineffable.

Crowley sat down in the grass. Balthazar finished his champagne. The uneasy silence was getting on Gabriel’s nerves. The whole situation was getting on his nerves. It was grating at him.

They sat like that for five more minutes. Then he had enough.

“You’re puppets,” he said a little too loud. Balthazar managed to look shocked at the outburst. “Both of you. And whoever is pulling your strings, they’re puppets too. You’re all just being played in the big chess match of the universe. And you both know it, too.”

“Yeah? It’s not like you contribute,” Balthazar said mildly. “You cut your strings, but you’re lost without them.”

Something dangerous flickered in the eyes of Gabriel. “Don’t talk about matters you know nothing about,” he snarled.

Crowley whistled low at the foolish yet courageous display of the other angel. He had to admit; angels had attitude. Balthazar refilled his glass, and that of Gabriel, and after some consideration handed a third over to the demon, who gladly accepted. The sun had disappeared and seeing as it was a cloudless night, it cooled down quickly. It was more pleasant, almost, except for Crowley, who shivered. Gabriel’s shoulders were tense.

“I don’t know everything,” Balthazar said with a surprisingly gentle voice. “But I do know we all have our lessons to learn. Whether we’re puppets or not, we’re never really free. We never stop making mistakes and we never stop learning from them. You have got to admit that, Gabriel.”

The Archangel said nothing.

Chapter End Notes

1) Gabriel being a deputy in Jericho is a reference to the actor having played a deputy in the serie Jericho. The two Jericho’s in the series are different (Supernatural being Jericho, California and Jericho being Jericho, Kansas) but seeing as one is fictional and the other is a former settlement and is listed as a ghost town... couldn't resist.
2) I goofed up in the timeline in a previous chapter, but I fixed that. :D For some reason I thought the Supernatural pilot was set in 2004, but it was late 2005.
Chapter 8

Chapter Summary

He fell silent, flushed a little and wrapped his hands tightly around his tea cup. Crowley had an unmistakably curious expression on his face. The angel hated that expression.

“Young that that is relevant to your interests, of course,” Aziraphale said.

“Oh, I think it’s very relevant to my interests,” Crowley said.

Just after Christmas, Aziraphale received a box. It was an amazing looking box; it was completely covered in thick, stiff, silver paper, accented with red. Right on top of the box there was an envelope taped to it with his address in very elaborate cursive letters. But it was hurriedly written and rain and sticky fingers had smudged the address, which was why it arrived after Christmas.

He had opened the door at nine am, tired and surprised to see his neighbour standing there with the festive looking box, saying that it was addressed to ‘Aziraphael’ which was surely a mistake on the sender’s end. So he accepted it and took it inside, where it was now sitting on the kitchen counter next to his scrambled eggs.

The little note inside the envelope was dirty, wrinkled, and there was an ink stain in a corner. It just read ‘I trust you to take great care of it.’ No name. The handwriting was unfamiliar. Aziraphale couldn’t help himself; it sparked his curiosity. So he opened the box.

It was a tattered Bible, too small and light. He placed the book aside and discovered the box was still as heavy as it had been when his neighbour pushed it into his arms.

Was this some kind of a joke? Something hidden in there? He resisted the urge to peer through the curtains to see if someone was watching and waiting in glee to fall for the trap.

Instead he took the box with him to a room way in the back, where it was private.

He shook it, Nothing. He held the box upside down. Nothing. He shook it again. Instead of the expected loud, clanging noise of things breaking or the rustle of pages of books, he heard something else entirely. Very faintly he heard music coming from inside; it sounded like a harp and it sounded suspiciously like a badly tuned version of Long Live the Queen.

Aziraphale wrinkled his nose. He had never seen a box behave like that. It was infused with something and he was determined to crack the puzzle.

So he reached inside. He didn’t feel a bottom. To his dismay his entire arm disappeared into the box. Some kind of magic trick. But that was it. Just a trick. And magic tricks all boiled down to the same thing, in the end. This was just a rabbit in the hat. He had practised that one many, many times. Overjoyed at the possibility he figured it out, he placed the box firmly on the table and pulled its contents out of the box by retrieving it from his pocket.

It was smaller than he had last seen it - he could fit it on just one hand - and he almost dropped it in surprise. After the initial shock of holding such an ancient, delicate and valuable instrument, he softly placed it on the table. There it grew to a normal, wieldable size.
Aziraphale was torn. If Heaven knew…

But they wouldn’t know, he decided. Obviously there was a reason for the Archangel to send him the Horn. In a way, he felt proud he had been trustworthy enough for one of the highest ranking angels in existence. In another way, he wasn’t sure if he should be proud, since Gabriel wasn’t the greatest example when it came to celestial beings in general. Maybe this meant he was trying to amend things, he mused, and make things right, which was a good thing. However Aziraphale reasoned, reporting the Horn to Heaven was not an option. Telling Crowley about it was also not an option. After everything, they still were standing on different sides. Besides, the demon probably had his secrets, too.

His phone rang.

Which was odd, considering it was broken. Nevertheless he picked up. “Yes, good morning,” he said, immediately following up with: “What do you want? I’m busy.”

His cheeks and neck turned red faster than a shopaholic’s credit card. “My apologies, my lady. I didn’t realise - No, I hadn’t forgotten our appointment… no, I don’t forget things. It won’t happen again. Yes.”

He scraped his throat and hung up, giving the instrument a glance. He was going to have serious trouble hiding it from Crowley, he was sure. But it wasn’t impossible. If only Crowley knew that, too.

“How long do you think it’s gonna take?” Ligur said, disgruntledly standing in the rain after his umbrella had decided to go solo.

“How long what?” his companion, Hastur asked, in a possibly even more annoyed manner.

“Until our side wins,” Ligur said.

Hastur thought about this. “Well, I’m sure it would take less long if Crowley wasn’t fooling around. Who does he think he is? Who does he think we are? Stupid?”

“What,” corrected Ligur.

Hastur frowned. “What?”

“Yeah, is what. What does he think we are? Stupid? Should be what.”

The other demon stared tightlipped at him, then shrugged and then came to the awful realisation that he was getting comfortable in this human form. Clearly he had been upstairs for too long. “Well, he’s not our concern anymore. He’s been responding to Azazel personally. I say, good thing we got rid of him.”

“That is probably mutual,” Ligur grunted. “I won’t forget the bastard killed me.”

Someone passed by, glancing at them weirdly, as if they had caught part of the conversation. They immediately shut up and moved closer towards the edge of the parking lot, where it was largely empty, except for a blue old hippie van and, in great contrast, a classic Rolls Royce.

Not that they knew or even cared about these brands; they called it the nice-looking car and the we-ought-to-set-it-on-fire car.
Their opinion differed about which car fit which description, though.

“Have you ever met his replacement?” Hastur asked.

“Whose, Crowley’s? Dunno.”

“Me neither. But I did hear Azazel wasn’t too happy when he found out. Blew complete holes in Hell.”

“Holes? What kinda holes?” Ligur said sceptically.

“Just holes,” Hastur replied. “You know, holes. Entire bits of Hell are gone. Will take a while before it’s restored to normal, I bet. It’s a bit of chaos. Well, more chaos. Unorganised chaos.”

“Huh,” Ligur said.

Behind them, a bird fell out of a tree.

The art gallery they had visited a couple months ago was finally opening its doors after a thorough investigation on safety and sulfur and the speaker system. Naturally the angel wanted to be there; it was going to a ‘splendid celebration of culture and arts’ as he would say. It didn’t appeal to Crowley, who wasn’t much of a fan of art galleries* in the first place, but also didn’t want to step a foot inside the building after the whole incident with Azazel.

* Don’t get me wrong; he can definitely appreciate art. However, he preferred to see the artist at work during the process, not staring at the finished thing on a bland, white background and a bored young woman via a speaker telling the dullest facts about the painting, such as when it was made. Who cares?

So instead of visiting the gallery - something Aziraphale would’ve been sulking about, had he been more immature - they were sitting in a lunchroom right across the museum. Aziraphale stared in deep thought at the gallery, as if his eyes could see through at least six solid walls and a mass of people to look at a single painting. Crowley had no doubt that he could.

He stirred his Irish coffee, caught some of the cream floating atop and licked the spoon. They often met in lunchrooms, restaurants and the like. It was easy and an obvious first choice for a meeting. There weren’t many public places where they could talk freely, and he’d rather not be holed up in the bookshop all the time. The store was stuffy and smelt weird, as if a dead mouse was rotting away in the kitchen. He had suggested burning incense to cover up the smell, or better yet, open a window - how alien that concept might be - but Aziraphale had firmly put his foot on the ground. His store, his rules, as he had proclaimed. And he certainly had no idea what the demon was talking about. He didn’t smell anything.

“Happy new years, angel,” he said with the spoon still in his mouth, grinning slightly.

“It is the twelfth,” Aziraphale pointed out.

“In some places,” Crowley said.
Aziraphale gave him a stern look and drank a little of his own beverage of choice, which was chamomile tea, properly made and properly held. Which did not necessarily mean ‘pinky up’ and whatever else the non-English people might’ve been saying. That was downright silly, and while the English had some questionable habits, at least half of them weren’t actually true.* “It’s not been a happy new years so far,” he continued.

Crowley’s forehead wrinkled. “How so?”

“The weather is terribe, for starters.”

* No, the English do not extend their finger to aid balance. It doesn’t look classy. ** They also don’t dunk their biscuits into their tea, which was why Aziraphale was frowning at Crowley who was doing exactly that with his Irish coffee and contemplated turning the biscuit into small crumbs to teach him a lesson.

** As usual, there is some truth in rumours and stereotypes. It was known that in ancient Rome, a cultured person ate with three fingers, while commoners used all five. The pinky up while holding your fine china was a misinterpretation of this etiquette rule in the eleventh century.

The demon sighed. They were based in England, after all. It wasn’t exactly known for its sunny and mild weather. Now, if they were currently sitting around on Sicily with a tequila, he might’ve reconsidered Aziraphale’s complaint, but they were not, and he doubted Sicily would still be pleasantly warm in the first weeks of January.

Aziraphale’s rant continued. “And it’s been terrible in the USA, one catastrophe after the next, and I have spotted at least six demons on the way from my bookshop to this quaint little coffee shop, at least four churches have been forced to shut down this week because of expenses and to top it all of, I have something sitting on my bookshelf that’s searched for by Heaven and Hell both...”

He fell silent, flushed a little and wrapped his hands tightly around his tea cup. Crowley had an unmistakably curious expression on his face. The angel hated that expression.

“Not that that is relevant to your interests, of course,” Aziraphale said.

“Oh, I think it’s very relevant to my interests,” Crowley said.

“It’s nothing important,” Aziraphale insisted, and while they both knew that was a thinly veiled lie, Crowley thought it would be best to drop the subject for now. He did, however plan a future visit to Aziraphale book shop, in the hopes to catch him off guard and get to tell him what the mysterious thing was. He did have his suspicions, but Aziraphale thought he had broken off contact with the Archangel, and he liked to keep it that way. Things were just more simple if Aziraphale didn’t get himself involved.

“That poor child,” Aziraphale sighed. “Was it really necessary to kill her?”

Crowley finished his Irish coffee in one go. “As if I had any say in that. Look, I warned them and told them what was going to happen. I can’t help it that your angels were too late and that mine are a little impatient and have a thing for the theatrics. Don’t hold me responsible for the mess that’s Jessica Moore.”

“And I keep telling you, it all could’ve been avoided.”
“No,” Crowley said. “This has been planned years in advance. Sam Winchester and that girl wouldn’t even have met, if not for us. You angels better step up your game, because you’re losing this, and fast.”

“At least she’s in a better place,” Aziraphale sighed.

Crowley looked like he wanted to laugh, but didn’t.

“Have you heard anything from Adam Young?” he asks instead, refilling his cup. He leant back, noticed most of the other patrons in the little lunchroom had left. And there were two men, huddled in a corner, dressed in black and staring at their drinks as if it was poison. Crowley took them in and turned around, noticing another man in another corner, enjoying something that might’ve been a white wine (at one in the afternoon, which was remarkable) and seemingly watching the passerby’s. Crowley had recognised all three of them. And Aziraphale and Crowley sat right in between.

“You know what? Don’t answer that question,” he said.

Aziraphale was noticeably confused. “Why, I don’t see the harm. He actually asked if I could pass you a message. Actually, he has a message for both of us.”

He shook his head. “Save it.” He pulled out his phone, clapped it open and began typing a message. He clicked on send. The angel kept watching him with that perplexed expression and didn’t even move. He groaned. “Oh for - whoever’s sake - ” He shoved his phone on the table and turned it around, gesturing for him to read it. ‘We are being watched by both friends of you and me.’

Aziraphale said nothing, returned the phone and proceeded to throw his cup off the table. On purpose. While the waiter hurriedly came to his table, he crouched down.

“I’m terribly sorry sir, let me get this.” The angel picked up the cup, which was, miraculously, still in one piece. As he rose he turned around, taking in the other beings in the lunchroom.

“Well, the weather’s cleared up. Let’s get some fresh air, shall we?” he said. He pushed some banknotes in the hand of the waiter and walked outside. Crowley hastily followed him.

“Good job,” he hissed once they turned a corner. “Because that wasn’t suspicious at all. Now they know we know.”

Aziraphale waved it away. “They already knew we were there. So many possessed souls in London alone…we’ve probably been shadowed from the start.”

That was not the point he had wanted to make, but Crowley didn’t say anything and walked straight to his Bentley, parked close by. Aziraphale came after him. “So? What did he have to say? Adam,” he clarified with an impatient undertone in his voice when Aziraphale didn’t reply quick enough.

Aziraphale frowned. “He wants to meet up.” That was odd, considering Adam Young had not once asked for them to ‘meet up’ since the Apocalypse that didn’t happen. But that was then. This time, Hell seemed to have a plan B, and a plan C and D, and Heaven was not far behind.

Crowley stared at him, calculatively so. With a sigh he opened the door. “Get in. We have to get to Lower Tadfield before they realise where we’re going and follow us.”

Meanwhile, the two demons stared at the angel in the other corner, and the angel stared back, almost lazily, wondering who would move first. They failed to notice there were other demons outside, watching them. They also failed to notice they were starting to take bets on whoever would move
first. On top of that, they failed to notice that in the middle of the group of demons, there was an old man, far past his retirement, who was unfazed by the intimidating glares of the demons and thoroughly questioned them about their nipples.

Hell was unpleasant in a way a mosquito flying around your head was unpleasant; impossible to get rid of and therefore a permanent thorn in your side. And it sucked away all kinds of happiness, like a mosquito sucked blood. No, that wasn’t entirely accurate. It sucked away everything that made humans humans, and it left only that what made demons, demons.

While it was effective, it wasn’t efficient.

Fergus had his very own ideas about how to run Hell and had been quite vocal about it, too. Vocal enough to be noticed by the big bosses. On top of that, he was doing his job incredibly well. So he had been summoned for a meeting with the highest chief in command; Lilith. Queen of the Crossroads. In the end, she was the one who held the contracts. He was merely an errand boy. Most considered meeting Lilith an honour.

He considered it an honour as well, but nevertheless had hoped he wouldn’t have to go through the hassle. He had never met Lilith. Rumours went around hell, saying she was worse than Alastair and Lucifer combined, the great general of torture and the demon-loathing angel together. It was said that despite being formally imprisoned, she was strong and finicky and not someone to have on your bad side.

So yes, Fergus thought it was completely rational to be nervous. Doors opened and for the first time in his short-lived time as a demon*, he entered the place Lilith was trapped in.

* Fergus’ soul had been destined to go to Hell from the start, even before he had sold it to a crossroads demon. Being the son of a witch and an easily corruptible soul, he had almost broken the time record of the transition from human to demon with his measly twelve years. Those who he didn’t beat were Alastair with his masochistic tendencies (seven months) who practically embraced the art of torture, and Lilith, twisted by Lucifer himself (three minutes).

The place looked surprisingly normal. It reminded him of a cathedral, ironically enough, without windows or benches. It was too empty for something so big, and the person leaning against the wall seemed small. Lilith, he found, looked surprisingly human, but when he dug further and saw past her appearance, he saw what Lucifer actually did to her.

Lilith was then in front of him, her lips curling into something between genuine and smug. “Magic? From a coven, are you?” she asked.

“That’s not entirely incorrect, love,” Fergus said, returning the smile.

“Lilith reached out, about to touch him, but then let her arm drop back and studied him. “You’re cheeky. I can appreciate that.” She hummed to herself. “I heard you were calling yourself Crowley, recently.”

She didn’t ask him a question, and so he stayed silent, knowing what happened to those who encountered Lilith and her intolerance for those who interrupted her.
“It’s a good name. I think, that you and I are going to be great friends,” she said. Her smile grew wider and she gestured; the empty room filled itself with a table, a set of chairs, food, wine, candles. If Fergus had to use one word to describe this scene, he would have to settle for *romantic*. “Stay for supper. After all, we have a lot to discuss. Don’t you think?”

Despite the chill brushing past his arms, he had to agree.
Chapter 9

Chapter Summary

Adam came out.

He had grown even more into the classical face he had been given; his nose regal and straight, his face clean shaven and the blonde curls framing it all. His clothes were, in comparison to all those years ago, far from battered, frayed or grubby, which would've made Michelangelo proud. On the other hand, he still looked like the almost too casual boy from the little town in England, something Michelangelo probably wouldn’t have cared for.

The journey to Lower Tadfield had been pleasant enough, for the first five minutes. After that it all became a little… odd.

Odd was truly the only way to describe their trip while they listened to what turned out to be the Rolling Stones.* Aziraphale had looked at him (oddly) and questioned the music. When Crowley mentioned the name of the band, Aziraphale let out an ‘oh, hip hop,’ which then derived into an argument that no, not everything written after 1970 was considered hip hop. It was however an improvement on Aziraphale calling modern music be-bop.

* Crowley had just switched his tapes yesterday, after his treasured Edvard Grieg’s In The Hall Of The Mountain King recording was ruthlessly turned into Bicycle Race, one of their most disappointing songs.

They met several hikers. Aziraphale had wanted to pick them up, but Crowley wouldn’t have any of it. He simply didn’t trust those people with strange English accents, accompanied with backpacks bigger than themselves, and the greatest offender, their muddy shoes. No one was stepping into his car with muddy shoes.

And for a while it was relatively normal, safe from the fact that the clouds seemed to travel with them and the rain slowly but surely turned into wet snow, which in turn turned into sticky snow. The good kind. It was a gradual change, comparable to but completely unlike mixing a blue paint and a yellow paint and then a red paint until it became, for some unexplainable reason, a yucky, diarrhea brown. The snow was piling itself up on the trees, the grass and covered everything in the world, except the road and the paths surrounding it. It was, in fact, snowing, but the road stayed clean.

Crocuses and snowdrops peeked through the white substance. The sun was shining, but not irritatingly so. There was no wind, and it was cold, but not too cold. It was idyllic, the angel had said. And a tad strange, he had added.

They had no idea where Adam lived, but as soon as they entered Lower Tadfield, a dog greeted them, yipping, waving its tail. One of his ears was stuck inside out, but as Lower Tadfield was pretty close to perfect, it probably was meant to be that way. Crowley sucked in his breath as soon as he
saw the little dog. He elbowed Aziraphale.

“You remember the dog?” he said.

“Dog?” Aziraphale echoed, brain mainly occupied by the curious fact that a literal truckload of demons, who had been following them from London to the small town, had suddenly vanished, as if they weren’t allowed to enter Lower Tadfield. (And they probably weren’t.)

“Yes, dog,” Crowley said. “Our gift for the Anti-Christ. The biggest hell-hound we had in stock. For his eleventh birthday.”

Aziraphale looked thoughtfully at the dog. “When you say hell-hound, I picture something more intimidating. And, err… bigger.”

Crowley muttered something, sighed and got out of the Bentley. The dog became overjoyed and went over to him, where he proceeded to try and bury his nose into the back of Crowley’s left knee. Crowley petted him. “Hey, you recognise me, don’t you? Bring me to your owner. Come on!” he told the dog.

The dog stood very still, as if he was waiting for his Master’s approval, but then dashed past Crowley, ran around the car and then took off. Crowley stepped in and followed it.

It turned out that Adam Young lived in a quaint looking house; not too far from the center of the town, and yet not too close, and not too far from his parents, and yet not too close. There were no cars parked on the driveway, but it had a vast collection of bicycles, one of which was a children’s bike with a cute little basket, decorated with faded flowers. They were probably white and pink once, but were now the same colour of diarrhea brown as the paint mix. In the front yard, there was a massive snowman with a sad looking top hat and a flamboyant orange coloured scarf.

Crowley parked his car in front of the house. Adam came out.

He had grown even more into the classical face he had been given; his nose regal and straight, his face clean shaven and the blonde curls framing it all. His clothes were, in comparison to all those years ago, far from battered, frayed or grubby, which would’ve made Michelangelo proud. On the other hand, he still looked like the almost too casual boy from the little town in England, something Michelangelo probably wouldn’t have cared for.

A young woman, roughly around his age, joined him and squinted at the both of them. Her face, unlike Adam’s, was splattered with freckles, as was the rest of her bare skin. Crowley snickered inwardly and barely kept himself from making a ‘freckles are angel kisses’ joke.

“Ain’t you the tire iron guy?” she called. Crowley’s glee disappeared.

Adam simply smiled at them. “Let’s go inside. Coffee, anyone?”

“I’d rather have tea,” Aziraphale said.

“Sorry. I’m all out of tea,” Adam said cheerfully. Pepper got inside first, followed by Crowley. The hell-hound looked questioningly at his Master, but let Aziraphale grudgingly go through after an approving nod. He couldn’t help but bark intimidatingly, though. Or at least, tried.

They sat all around the kitchen table, provided with coffee* and self made apple pie.

“Thanks for coming,” Adam said. “I’d rather not have this conversation by phone.”
They did, more or less, agree.

“Please do explain why you won’t do it,” Crowley said sullenly, after Adam made it perfectly clear he was not going to help stop the Apocalypse.

Pepper scoffed. “He doesn’t owe you anything. Why should he be the one cleaning up your mess?”

“It’s not our mess per se,” he protested.

“Point still stands,” she said, munching on her pie. Adam did bake great pies.

“My dear Pippin - ” Aziraphale began before he was being cut off by a threatening fork close enough to poke his eyes out. Dog growled at him.

*Aziraphale had turned the substance into tea when he thought no one was looking. Lower Tadfield was full of miracles; one extra surely wasn’t going to be noticed.*

“As I recall, the Earth was resetted on that eventful day,” Adam said. He beckoned for Dog to come over and leave the angel alone. Dog, unlike Adam or Pepper, hadn’t aged at all.

“A factory restore. I chose not to let the world end then, but I did not lock everything dangerous in the medicine cabinet. It’s not like I know in how many ways* you can actually start the Apocalypse,” he concluded.

“Seven,” said Aziraphale, while Crowley muttered “Three times six.”

*Technically, there is only one way to start the Apocalypse. The wrong way.*

Adam ignored them and pulled over a piece of pie, only to give it to Dog. Dog was in ecstasy.

“So, how are they doing it this time?” he asked, leaning back in his chair, as if he had just asked if it was cold outside.


“You are full of crap, angel,” Crowley cut him off. “Do I have to remind you of the fact that it was your side who brought Michael and Lucifer’s line of descendants into one single family?”

“What seals?” Pepper asked.

Then a new voice interrupted. “Are you planning a rescue mission without me?” The new voice said almost accusingly. Pepper sighed in irritation. “No. Were you listening in on us?”

The three men - or rather, the demon and angel - turned towards the newcomer, who could only be described as a younger replica of Pippin Galadriel Moonchild, except not, because that was the whitest and girliest dress Crowley had ever seen a twenty year old wear.

That, and she was a Greenpeace activist, but that aside. Pepper’s younger sister shook her head and
“There are a few, err, fixed points,” Crowley said after they made sure that Pepper’s younger sister was truly gone. “The kind that you can try to avoid, but will probably happen anyway when you’re not looking. So the Righteous Man will undoubtedly shed blood in Hell, which in turn will break the Seals - and there are a lot of them, mind you. And not all of them have to break. Just a fixed amount. That in turn will free Lucifer from the prison you put him in, and with him the Horsemen will surely rise -”

“Again?” Pepper asked.

“Again,” Crowley confirmed. “So to sum it all up, we’re in a bad situation.”

Adam nodded and shrugged and looked thoughtful, as if he was processing the information and could only come up with one conclusion. “The only thing you can do is keeping the Righteous Man out of Hell, I reckon.”

The two celestials looked at each other. It was not as if that thought had never crossed their minds. And it wasn’t impossible. Just highly implausible for them to succeed.

“Well,” Crowley said once they stood outside, “that was anticlimactic.”

Just outside Lower Tadfield demons cursed and blessed under their breath, not understanding why they weren’t allowed in.

Just outside London Balthazar uttered a well meant curse (or a slightly disrespectful prayer) upon receiving his new orders and not quite agreeing with them.

Just outside the United Kingdom (America, to be precise) a Winchester brother whispered Bloody Mary three times in a mirror.

Also in America, in South Dakota there was a bright soul in the disguise of a gruff looking man, with a dirty hat and an even more dirty beard. Next to him was an equally bright soul, in the disguise of a dentist, claiming he had killed the Tooth Fairy. Their names were Robert and Garth, and they were an unlikely couple, and quite possibly the only thing that they would have in common was that they were both male, both were between the age of twenty and sixty years old and both of them were hunters.

Or, better said, one was teaching the other how to be a hunter after a remarkable event on Tuesday where the retired dentist had found a Tooth Fairy in his office, pulling out teeth from his client. After killing it with his own dentist equipment, hunters had found him and pointed him and all his questions to Robert Singer in South Dakota, clearly not feeling up to the task to explain certain evils of the world themselves.

And that was how Garth Fitzgerald (IV) came into contact with Robert Singer (‘idjits’); owner of the Singer Salvard Yard, worn out devils traps, very old and rare books Aziraphale was jealous of, and a remarkable collection of different phones and landlines.
Their true identity unbeknownst to both, Aziraphale and Robert Singer did actually have contact with each other in the past. They too had not much in common, but books was one of the things that tied them together, and it was hard not to appreciate someone who spoke English, Latin, Japanese and even a few words of French.

Aziraphale knew Robert as ‘Bob’ when he was haggling with him about the price of Three Times Sex* and Robert knew Aziraphale as ‘Malak,’ giving him the distinct impression that Malak was in fact Muslim and he started to wonder why the man had more than fifty different Bibles in his possession.

* The original, Latin edition, which was a book about demons and how to ‘interact’ with them. This book was then translated into English by someone who didn’t speak Latin, which resulted in the self help psychology book about sexuality and gender currently only available as online PDF on Amazon Dot Com.

Aziraphale was trying to contact Robert Singer and no less than two of his phones were ringing, but alas, he didn’t pick up any of them, for he was outside telling his protege to ‘stop missing the target, do you need glasses son?’ So he tried again, the next morning. And again. And again, until he realised he probably had a better chance if he sent the good man an e-mail. Despite popular beliefs, Aziraphale wasn’t a complete disaster when it came to electronics and he had figured out how computers worked. His e-mails just tended to be a bit on the formal side. And it took him long to write them, because he kept getting distracted by Solitaire instead.

One particularly good game of Solitaire (he was about to win!) was outright ruined when an another angel arrived in his shop. The power went out. Aziraphale hurried over to his visitor.

“Stop!” he shrieked. “You’re about to shatter the windows - ”

Anything he wanted to add died on his lips, because he was looking in the face of Tony Blair. Aziraphale didn’t keep up with human politics, but even he knew who that was. He stared and blinked and then stared some more, and then thought it would probably be a good idea to help the prime minister on his feet.

“My apologies for the inconvenience,” the man said, wobbling a little. Still unstable on two feet, the angel noted.

Aziraphale put a hand on his cheek and looked. “Castiel?”

“Yes,” the other confirmed. The power went back on.

“Do you know you’re possessing a prime minister?” Aziraphale asked.

“This vessel is temporary,” Castiel said. He looked pale and it seemed like he was about to throw up, so Aziraphale gently guided him to a chair.

“Is this your first time in an human vessel?” he asked. He pulled up another chair and started patting Castiel’s knee comfortably.

“Depends on what you’re asking,” Castiel answered, his voice hoarse. “But it’s been a while. Never had to possess someone before.”
And that was very true; both of them had been stationed on Earth in the past. Aziraphale had been demoted and Castiel had started out as a Principality, and although Castiel was nowhere near England, they still managed to stay in contact. Until Castiel got promoted and was called back to Heaven, had to give up his custom-made human body, and then Heaven decided not to make custom bodies anymore. Aziraphale thought of himself as lucky.

“Take it easy,” Aziraphale said. “Why are you here?” he asked no less than five seconds later. Patience was a virtue, but sometimes it simply couldn’t wait.

Castiel took a long time to speak and turned possibly even paler, and that’s when Aziraphale realised something. “You’re here without their consent!” he exclaimed. “What were you thinking? You know they’re quite iffy about going out without permission, especially after the whole… incident… you’ll seriously injure yourself. Please do go back.”

Castiel pulled at his sleeve to gain his attention; the older angel shut up. He really wasn’t looking good; what on Earth could’ve happened? “I’m fine,” the angel breathed. “I just need to find - ”

He coughed up blood. “I need to know. Is he alive?”

Aziraphale couldn’t quite keep up with the random stream of thoughts. “I’m sorry. Who?”

“Balthazar told me. Is he here? Gabriel?”

The Principality stiffened, but nevertheless continued to support Castiel, who was leaning heavily on him, even as he sat. “He’s alive,” he said after a pause. “But - ”

“Good.” Castiel even managed to smile. “Tell him we need him.” The human body fell limp in Aziraphale’s arms and he knew that Castiel had returned to Heaven. Much to his horror the prime minister began to wake up from what surely must’ve been a terrible sleep. He placed a hand on his forehead, sending the minister in the same deep sleep. Then Aziraphale got rid of him by transporting him to the nearest public shelter, which happened to be a church. Naturally.

(Later, when people found Tony Blair in the church, seemingly in prayer, they weren’t sure what they should do. So they ignored him. Tony Blair himself couldn’t recall how he got there in the first place.)

After he had dropped off the prime minister Aziraphale begrudgingly wondered how he could get into contact with Gabriel. But then again, what was the point? He didn’t know what Castiel needed the Archangel for, and it was not like he would be able to convince the most stubborn angel in the universe anyway. Besides, they weren’t exactly on good terms.

So instead of bothering with Gabriel, he made himself a nice cup of chocolate, planning to spend the rest of the day with a good Jane Austen novel.

Crowley didn’t like most demons. They missed the finesse he so loved; they missed subtlety. All they cared about was making great entrances and getting the job done as quickly as possible, no matter how bloody it would become. He had been disgusted of the way how they got rid of Jessica Moore, and while it was a welcome change from the usual hack-and-slash method, it didn’t make it any less messy. Being burnt alive was something they all had experienced at one point. He for one wouldn’t want to inflict it to someone else.

No, he preferred the frog method. Cooking it alive by gradually heating up the water. The frog wouldn’t notice. It was slower, but more satisfying, really.
And now he was letting a demon topside who he loathed. Meg, a proclaimed daughter of Azazel (he didn't want to know how that was even remotely possible) and a demon who took a lot after her father. The worst of it all? A Lucifer loyalist.*

Lilith had refused her request. So Azazel had forced him to get her out of Hell, whatever it took. Which was apparently a whole strip of Ibuprofen, three cigarettes and a pair of earbuds.

She kept chattering.

“Do me a favour,” Crowley said. “And shut your mouth for a while.”

Reluctantly she did so. They were currently taking the backdoor. Most didn’t know there was a backdoor, and maybe rightfully so. Heaven and Hell weren’t that far apart as everyone thought. They were joined together, just at the edges. Made it quite easy to infiltrate.

Crowley had never felt the need to infiltrate Heaven (even though he knew how to find the backdoor, and the path that led to a small part of unguarded Heaven). Not in the least place because he would be kicked back to Hell in at least a seven hundred ways, none of them particularly pleasant. He would be as noticeable as a screwdriver in a dresser full of cutlery.

*All demons could technically be called Lucifer loyalists, but that usually meant you thought the Apocalypse was a-okay. Crowley didn’t think the Apocalypse was a-okay.

He led her through Heaven, hurriedly. They were in luck, though, and no one had either noticed them or wasn’t bothered enough to do something about the trespassers. Crowley let out a breath when they were standing safe on Earth, in a place that he could only describe as Hawaii, because it looked exactly like the posters in the travel magazine he had found on his doormat last week.

“Thanks,” Meg said, although she had no body yet and was forced to communicate via brainwaves. Nevertheless he could understand her well. “You’re a good asset for father’s plans. I’m sure you’ll get a commendation.”

“You’re welcome,” Crowley said unenthusiastically. He left; he had his own business to attend to.
“That better not be the asshole who destroyed our roof the last time he stopped by for a little chat!” Pepper came stomping through the field.

“Your mutant boyfriend had fixed it just fine!” Gabriel shouted back.

“It’s the principle of the thing!”

The fourth month of 2006 was surprisingly disappointing. While March hadn’t been that bad, April was wet, grey and miserable, like an old cat being forced to take a bath and hating it. And mind you, this wasn’t England we were talking about, but the United States.

There was already enough reason to take up drinking. On top of all the depressing things* that were happening in the world on a regular basis, the Righteous Man got himself electrocuted. It resulted in a heart attack; not just for Dean Winchester. Hell had been furious. Heaven wasn’t delighted either.

* Orphaned socks, burnt toast, telemarketers calling during supper, newspaper leaving inky stains on your hands… the list is endless.

However, Hell reasoned, the boys would do anything for each other. That much was clear. So if they could manage Sam to strike a deal with a demon for his brother’s life, which meant that Dean would have to be convinced to making a deal of his own… it could work. Heaven thought it unlikely and simply said they would resurrect the Righteous Man so he could take his righteous place in Hell. It wasn’t exactly where his soul belonged, but there were Seals to be broken. Heaven and Hell could at least agree on that, although for entirely different reasons. The concerns of Heaven and Hell were unbeknownst to the Winchesters and they were just spending the day in a hospital. Dean was still alive. Seeing as he was loudly complaining about daytime television (one of his favourite shows was on television, but it was a guilty pleasure), there was reason to believe he was still very much alive.

There was however, nothing the doctors could do for him and without intervention the hunter would die.

Sam Winchester found the solution in the form of a faith healer. Seemingly unrelated to everything that was hanging above their heads.

It all was a little too coincidental. Because Gabriel was already there. And he was not alone.

Actual faith healers were a rare breed. They usually were frauds or believed they were the real deal, but actually didn’t do a thing. It was called the placebo effect. But humans who healed by prayer, by faith… that required divine intervention and then it didn’t matter so much where that came from. Some demons loved to latch on to faith healers and tricked them into believing they were doing the right thing, while they were raking up souls for hell. It was a lucrative business.
This faith healer was unheard of in Heaven’s records, which prompted Gabriel to go and investigate. The same happened on Crowley’s side, which was why he too had shown up. Naturally there was a chair empty to the left of Gabriel, who was seated right at the end, in the corner, as close to the entrance of the tent as possible. He claimed it. The Archangel was humming ‘Jesus Is the Sticker on the Bumper of My Soul’ by Marvin O. Bagman. It was, despite everything else, a catchy tune.

“You’re one persistent fleabag, aren’t you?” Gabriel greeted him, tone not nearly as venomous as one would expect from an angel addressing a demon.

Crowley grinned slightly. “I’m not calling in any favours this time. No, I suppose I’m doing a double check. This faith healer, one of yours?”

“Nah. I thought he came from your side.”

“Evidently not.” The two shared a glance.

The Winchester brothers chose that moment to shuffle inside, giving Gabriel plenty of time to gape at them while they watched how the two found their seat, all the way in the front. Not that Gabriel was gaping, of course. It didn’t befit an Archangel to gape like a six year old upon seeing ‘the real’ Cinderella in Disneyland. So he did, in fact, not gape. Just metaphorically speaking.

“What a bunch of - ” He seemed to be searching for words that accurately described the sorry sight that was the Righteous Man and the Vessel of Lucifer, Psychic on Tuesdays.

“I know. They’re not exactly posterboys for the human species,” Crowley said cheerfully. “Which gives us more time.”

“Well - ”

“It’s true.”

Gabriel just rolled his eyes. The service had started and the people around them glanced stealthily and accusingly at them, as if they had personally offended the Lord. (They both had offended their own Lord on several occasions, but that aside.)

Dean Winchester was called to come to the stage. Crowley looked pointedly at him, but the Archangel feigned innocence.

“What? It is by far the easiest* solution I can come up with.”

Crowley shook his head, but didn’t stop it either and the service went on. They half expected nothing would happen. Many phony faith healers loved the theatrics and would go as far as hiring actors playing the part of the person being miraculously healed. Gabriel once saw someone putting up a show that lasted eleven minutes and twelve seconds, gasping and moaning and coughing all the way through. The people had loved it.

* He could’ve healed Dean himself. Even Crowley probably could’ve done so. (Although doing that would be committing a major virtue, something Hell would not be happy about. Even if it was about setting the Ineffable Plan back on track.) The reason why they didn’t was because they were curious about what the faith healer was going to do.
Dean Winchester would not be one of those people. He was the complete opposite of a devout, church-going, god-fearing humble human being. So when his body went limp, they knew it wasn’t an act. While Dean sank through his knees, the demon grabbed his arm.

“What?”

“Good grief, do you even use your eyes?” Crowley hissed. “That’s a reaper.”

Gabriel looked. He was right; there was a reaper standing behind the two on the stage, touching Dean lightly just before he came by his senses. He frowned. That wasn’t good. He reached out to the faith healer - whose name was Roy Le Grange, he learnt. He also learnt that the man had been suffering from terminal cancer and that he should’ve died months ago. He genuinely believed he was on a mission of the Lord.

“Something’s fishy,” he said. “A reaper. No wonder we didn’t recognise him.”

“What did you find out?”

“He’s innocent, that’s what. And that’s all I needed to know. I’m out of here.”

“You can’t just have a reaper on the loose,” Crowley said. It was futile, for the Archangel had already left.

A few days later he had come back to Nebraska. The Winchesters were still roaming around. But no reaper. He hadn’t wanted to come back; not really. But there had been a prayer from someone so unexpected that he had to come and check it out for himself. Dean Winchester, the man who would probably deny the existence of angels even if he had been surrounded by them, had prayed.

Dean had mentioned a woman; Layla Rourke. When Gabriel had found her, he hadn’t been the first to arrive. Somehow he had expected to see the demon again. Actually, he doubted he had left at all.

“Why are you here?” Crowley said, watching Layla shop for groceries, accompanied by her mother. “The reaper is taken care of. The Winchesters did it.”

“And the woman?”

Crowley shook his head. “The reaper has been set free before he could get to her. They’ve not been healing, you know. They’ve been trading lives instead. It was his wife who did it.”

“Yeah, I heard about that,” Gabriel muttered.

“Are you going to do anything about it? It’s a fine day for miracles.”

He raised an eyebrow. “Do you know how surreal it is when a demon is trying to convince an angel of doing good? I can’t just shake miracles out of my sleeve.”

“You can,” Crowley corrected.

“Yeah. I can. But I’m not going to. That’s just how it’s planned. She’ll die and go to Heaven. That’s it.”

“You’ve never been a stickler to the rules.”

“I’m not going to heal Layla. That’s it. If you want to do it, well, whatever. Go knock yourself out.
Add a nice trip to the Bahamas while you’re at it.”

They stared at each other.

“I won’t,” Crowley eventually said.

“Good.”

They didn’t see each other until February 2007. That meeting ended on a much better note than the last one did and involved a broom, three scented candles, a book and Crowley’s and Gabriels capability to conjure alcohol out of nothingness. And as delightful as that story was, they both thought it was rather embarrassing. Which was why the exact details were forgotten and all we had left from this eventful day was the fact that the entire ceiling had been decorated in ornate, curly pencil drawings.

He had gotten a desk next to the window. Sucking up to Lilith clearly had its advantages. He had caught the other crossroads demons looking at him, partly envious. Partly fearful. Fergus was having a great time. He was quickly climbing the ranks within the sales branch and was even put in charge of a bunch of other demons who just started out. It did also mean he was responsible* for their actions, so he let them practise on those, ahem, poor lost souls on the torture racks first.

* One single badly phrased deal could become a disaster. Someone had once dealt for DEATH himself. When ten years passed by, DEATH simply killed the Hellhounds over and over again, until Hell ran out of dogs. DEATH is of course for no one to command, but he had thought the whole ordeal had been particularly amusing and was willing to play his part. Heaven praised the man’s actions and took his soul for themselves.

He received a phone call. He was one of the few demons who actually knew how to handle technology. Most, if not all fallen angels were hopeless and even most of the newer stock hadn’t quite figured them out. But not Fergus; Fergus had embraced the convenient use of a mobile phone.

He also knew who was calling. “What?” he said.

“Look, you need to check something for me.” The voice on the other end of the line sounded genuinely panicked. Fergus didn’t particularly care. Fergus found it hard to care about anything these days.

“Like what?” He idly played with a coffee mug and refilled it. But seeing as it was Hell, it would taste like a cheap imitation of licorice put in the blender with a tad of olive, and he didn’t drink it.

“Azazel,” Crowley said agitatedly. He could practically hear him fidgeting.

“Yeah?”

“Wait, you don’t know what’s going on?”

“I don’t keep up with Hell’s chattering,” Fergus said, watching the demon next to him stole his mug,
took a sip and promptly emptied his stomach over a whole load of signed papers. He allowed himself a private little grin.

“Azazel let himself die! The body he has - had,” Crowley corrected himself, “is now less useful than Tolstoy’s War and Peace for a three year old. I can’t find him and hell I’m going back - ”

Fergus flinched as a demon flew through the room. It was more like diving, if the demon had dived of his own accord, but upon seeing his expression it probably hadn’t been a voluntary dive. A second followed and promptly crashed into the former.

A literal burning stack of papers was thrown on Fergus’ desk. Several papers flew off in several directions, mocking gravity, setting several things on fire. Fergus extinguished his sleeve. His IKEA pencil collection started to smoke.

“I think I found him,” Fergus said. He gently put down the phone on his desk and smiled, somehow still managing to be his calm and collected self. “What can I do for you today?” He placed his fingertips together in a slow and elaborate gesture.

“Fix it,” the demon said almost passionately. Right now Azazel was nothing more than a big chunk of rage rolled in layers of ash, lava, candle wax and other things you didn’t want to burn your hands on. Like a sushi.

Fergus eyed the paper stash. It had already burnt through a quarter of the pile.

“I’m not a tailor,” he exclaimed. “Not for this kind of business, anyway. They don’t make custom bodies anymore!”

Azazel brought his face - it still did sort of resemble one, if only for the familiar bump that could only belong to a nose - close to that of Fergus, far too close for comfort. “Are you suggesting I take up a vessel instead?”

His smile twitched a little. Fallen angels truly were of a different stock. This encounter with Azazel brought the amount of relationships with fallen angels up to four and only three of them turned out to be batshit crazy. Crowley was just an entire new species all by himself.

“I suggest you take it up with Lilith instead,” he dared. “I only work the crossroads, after all.”

In some other place than Hell, someone crashed into an invisible barrier. The body collided with the forcefield several hundreds of meters above the ground, slid off and fell, where it crashed in a field full of sunflowers. It had been a pleasant August summer night and several wishes were made when the angel plummeted within seconds towards ground zero. None of them came true, except for the wish of a young boy, who wished for a BBC nature documentary collection on videotape.

This young boy was in the disguise of a man, who coincidentally also happened to be the Antichrist. This same man went out for a stroll.

Naturally it was a perfect night out for a stroll. A soft breeze tugged slightly at the denim jacket he’d draped around his shoulders, but it wasn’t cold. It was just the right kind of refreshment after a couple cold beers and an enthusiastic dance battle with Pepper on the worst guilty pleasure songs known to man. The rest didn’t quite feel like dancing, but the smile on Brian’s face had not gone by unnoticed when they heard the tunes of the Macarena.

Adam walked right into the field of sunflowers, creating a path as he did so. He stood still, bent over
slightly and put his hands in his pockets. He gave the person on the ground a friendly smile.

“We still appreciate it if you call in advance,” he said to the body. He nudged it.

The body stirred and rolled around. The person inspected his current state (really, there was more earth on him than on the field at this point) and heaved himself up with a sigh. The black and brown earth on his face disappeared as he snapped his fingers.

“I noticed,” Gabriel said, pursing his lips.

“You were quite the sight,” Adam said, stepping back a little. “If I hadn’t known it was you, I probably would’ve found it beautiful. Makes you wonder if falling stars are really just angels forgetting how to fly.” There wasn’t any malice in his voice, or snark.

Gabriel knocked on the barrier. It didn’t make any sound. Not anything human senses could pick up, anyway. To his disappointment Adam was just out of reach. Begrudgingly he had to admit it was clever. “Care to let me in?”

Adam simply watched him for a few seconds.

Gabriel continued to knock on it and spread his fingers wide. The petals of a nearby sunflower got all torn in half and fell scattered on the ground. One breached the barrier; it dissolved.

“It’s not me you’re keeping out.”

“Not specifically.”

He touched the barrier again and looked incredulous at Adam who was still standing there, smiling as ever. That little shit. “Why on Earth would you think they’d bother you?”

“Since they’ve already tried. Dear Gabriel, I believe you are a bit out of the loop.”

He scoffed. “Apparently. You’ve begun to talk like Azira - ”

“He does rub off on you,” Adam said.

Gabriel wanted to say something, but Adam held up a hand to silence him and pulled him inside the barrier with his other hand. Outside the barrier, it started to rain and rumble and it didn’t take long before flashes of lightning made impact, hitting a lone tree not far from them.

It didn’t last long, and in tomorrow’s newspaper it would read that the summer thunderstorm was unexpected, but completely plausible. It had been unbearably hot* in the rest of England.

* On a scale from cold to hot, it was Spain-getting-a-tan-on-the-beach warm. Despite popular belief in otherworldly places, England’s weather didn’t always default back to rain, fog or snow. This phenomenon is also known as the three days of summer.

“Heaven is mad,” Gabriel said to no one in particular but himself.

“Oh yes,” Adam agreed. “John Winchester slipped through their fingers and ended up in Hell after all. This big demon got a leash on him. We all know he’s a good bargaining chip. Now, what was his name… ” He looked thoughtful. “Like that cat from the Smurfs.”
“Azrael?” Gabriel suggested.

“Something like that, I’m sure.”

He sighed. “Pity.”

“Pity? You’re rooting for Heaven?”

“Don’t be ridiculous,” Gabriel snapped. “No, it’s because - ”

“Adam Young!” a woman’s voice yelled. They turned around, Gabriel somewhat perplex.

“That better not be the asshole who destroyed our roof the last time he stopped by for a little chat!” Pepper came stomping through the field.

“Your mutant boyfriend had fixed it just fine!” Gabriel shouted back.

“It’s the principle of the thing!”

She had reached the two men by now and promptly stepped on Gabriel’s foot, hard. “By the way, he’s not my boyfriend.”

“You’re living together.”

“We’re good friends! Would you make a problem about it if I wasn’t a girl?!”

“I am not making a problem about it, freckle.”

“Wanna see more freckles?”

“What?”

Pepper punched him in the face.

Blearily he opened an eye, and another. Good. He still had both of his eyes. That stung. Goodness it stung. He brought a hand to his face and gingerly touched the sore area around his eye. The skin was already starting to swell.

That woman knew how to use her fists, even if she shouldn’t have been able to. Her hand should’ve been broken from the sheer force of tightly packed grace, reformed in the miniscule shape of an human. Really, it would’ve been like slamming into a brick wall.

But when he sat up and saw both Adam and Pepper looking at him from the opposite sofa, he realised it had been because of Adam’s presence that the usual didn’t happen. That was the thing with Adam; the usual usually did not happen whenever he was around.

He sent them an accusing look. Pepper didn’t seem to be very sorry.

“Why are you here?” Pepper said.

“Why did you drag me back to your house?” Gabriel retorted.

“Apparently Adam is nicer than me.”

“Only because I feel it would rude to leave the conversation hanging. And curiosity, of course. Why
did you come here?"

The Archangel sighed and started to gesture, but dropped his arm halfway.

“Lift those wards, will you?” After a couple seconds he moved his arm again and drew a sword, which he placed on the low, stained coffee table before him. It didn’t look very sharp and had a strange shimmer to it. A bit like plastic. Gabriel spun it around until the blade pointed at him; the hilt at Pepper.

She picked it up. Immediately it changed; the plastic sheen disappeared, the edge looked thin and dangerously sharp and blue flames licked at it. If Pepper was any other person, she would’ve dropped it. Instead she admired the decorative crossguard; it was swirling around.

“We’ve seen this before. What is it?”

“It’s a Guardian’s sword,” Gabriel replied. “There are four of them. This one belonged to - ” He stopped himself. They stared at him.

“Keep it safe for me, will you? I’d rather have you wield it than any of the winged harpies they’ve unleashed on Earth.”

“Yeah, fine,” Pepper said, her voice betraying her surprise.

Adam let Gabriel out of the house, but Pepper stayed behind, studying the sword. She discovered she could control the flames; their colour had gone from blue to a strange hybrid of blue and yellow that simply could not be called green, because it was flaky and more of a marble artwork than a consistent mix. She discovered she could extinguish it and set it back on fire again, although controlling the height of the flames was hard.

What she didn’t discover was that the swirling pattern on the crossguard was in fact, a serpent.

Robert Singer decided he needed a drink. Not because he already had the reputation of being the town drunk, but because of all the crap (his words) that had happened in the last two weeks. Sure, he finally got Garth (Fitzgerald IV) groomed well enough to send him on hunts - even flying solo now - but not twenty four hours later he had two Winchesters and a demon in his house, the latter bloody and tied up. A blonde; named Meg. He assumed it had been the name of the possessed girl. Demons usually didn’t name themselves Meg.

Of course the girl had died and he needed to stash her somewhere, which brought the body count in his scrapyard up to sixteen. It was a graveyard more than anything else.

Then John Winchester calls for summoning supplies while Dean is dying, again (and damned, he felt like he was a second father to those boys) and drops dead himself, causing his two sons to run back to Robert.

All in all it had been stressful and he was happy the two finally ran off to deal with some unfinished business. That was, until he remembered his appointment with Malak. He downed his glass and filled it again. A knock on the door made him jump up and with a gun at the ready he opened it slowly.

There stood the least threatening looking man of all of South Dakota, not even glancing at the gun. He was clad in tweed and tartan, for one.
“So you’re Malak?”

The man smiled and nodded. “It’s good to finally connect a name to a face. A pleasure to meet you, Robert. May I call you as such?”

He grunted in reply and stepped back, watching as Malak got in, walked into the devil’s trap and made it out unscathed. The salt on the table was carefully scooped up and put back in its holder and silver cutlery was moved aside. So far he had passed all tests.

“Now, Robert, I think it’s time to come clean,” Malak began when they were both seated. “I know you’re a hunter. There is something like that in England as well. Perhaps you’ve heard of it? The Witchfinder Army?”

Robert narrowed his eyes. “Yes. I’ve heard of them.”

Malak - although now he wasn't sure if the man's actual name was Malak - gave him a broad smile. “Splendid. I think you’ll find we have a lot in common.”
“Hey, hey, Sammy,” he nudged the taller guy. Crowley turned his head to get a better look. “Remember when we were kids? We’d get these Hamburger MEALS™ from Burger Lord. They were the best.”

“The MEALS™ were also the biggest health hazards since home-brewed alcohol,” Sam said in a condescending tone. “People died because of that stuff.”

“Come on, I know you loved the macrobiotic rice MEALS™, so don’t be a hypocrite.”

There had been times that Crowley wished he was ignorant of the Big Plan, or whatever it was the higher ups had cooked up. He’d do his thing, and they’d do their thing, and all was right, or as right as it could be for demons. But now? He had no idea what was going on and he hated it. There was the plan to get the Winchester in Hell, of course, and various parties tried to make it happen. What he didn’t understand was why demons latched onto him for information. They didn’t tell him anything. On top of that, Hell was keeping a tight leash on any demon who had gotten themselves exorcised and for some reason closed the door.

Now, Crowley didn’t necessarily mind that. He was on the good side of the door, after all. But he didn’t understand why. On top of that, Fergus wasn’t keeping him as informed as he should have - it had been a part of the deal - and the only other demons who weren’t currently possessing anyone* were not particularly friends with him.

It was a real shame. He’d rather deal with Azazel, especially now he knew Ligur had been waiting for revenge for years. He was still smoking out of his body where the holy water had hit him the most. You could only tell it up close, which was why Crowley never noticed before.

“So,” Hastur began. Of course they had to pick St James’ Park. Nothing was sacred anymore.

* It’s easier to possess humans than to craft an entire new body. The only downside to this is that the human being possessed can sometimes listen in to conversations and memories they’re not supposed to remember. It’s exactly what happened to Meg when she was exorcised and the girl was still alive, giving her the opportunity to spill all of Hell’s secret plans.**

** Not that they told Meg anything important.

“It’s your time to shine, Crowley,” Hastur said. “A little redemption.” He laughed at his own joke.

“That’s great,” Crowley said with a dull voice.

Ligur pushed a lavender towel in his hands; it was slightly more tattered than the last time he had
seen it. There were blood spatters on it, olive oil, and something he didn’t immediately recognise. The towel smelled like roses. Carefully he folded the towel open and lifted up one of the ends. He stared at the contents.

“You’re kidding me.”

“No,” Ligur grinned widely.

“What am I supposed to do with it?”

“Keeping it safe, of course.” Hastur licked his lips. “London is far away from the Winchesters.” Grudgingly he admitted they had a point. But still, he’d rather not have it in his possession. “Why hide it here? Why not hide it in Hell?” he tried.

“Too dangerous,” Hastur said.

Crowley stole a glance at the ducks instead. They were blissfully unaware of the fact that a couple demons were transferring a weapon from one place to another in a fluffy towel that was capable of killing everything, except for five things in all of creation. Crowley wasn’t sure if he was one of them. He didn’t really want to find out.

He gave the towel a disappointed look. “Do I need to sign for this as well?” he said, feeling rather gloomy.

“Nah,” Hastur said. “As long as you don’t misplace it.”

They all knew what he meant with that, too.

“Err... I guess I’ll do this, then,” he said, tucking it in the towel. The other demons said nothing, but sported nasty grins.

Crowley gave them something that could pass for a charming smile and quickly turned around, walking as fast as he possibly could without running to his Bentley. It was three in the morning.

The following day he ignored the closed sign on the bookshop and stepped in. “Morning, angel.”

Aziraphale huffed. “Morning? You must have slept in. It’s four in the afternoon. Time for tea, perhaps?”

“I was thinking less tea,” Crowley said, “and more wine.”

The angel gave him a look. “Oh, fine,” he sighed. “Wine will do.”

It didn’t take long before they found themselves sipping at the wine. Crowley watched the amount of mugs in the sink and wrinkled his nose. “If you want greenery to cheer up the place, I recommend getting an actual plant.”

Aziraphale ignored the comment and looked thoughtful. “It’s come to my attention that you try to get yourself drunk if you’re stressed out.”

“Keep your thoughts to yourself,” Crowley snapped. “I’m not stressed out.” The fact that he was refilling his glass for the third time and it had been only ten minutes after they had opened the wine didn’t help much.
“No, of course you’re not,” Aziraphale mused. “Restless, maybe.”

The demon let out a groan and finally took a seat, planting his elbows firmly on the table. He pulled the bottle to him, picked it up to refill his glass once again but then decided against it. He didn’t want to suffer with a hangover later, nor did he want to go through the unpleasant experience of sobering up.

“Do you ever want out, angel?”

“What?” The question took Aziraphale by surprise.

“I said, do you ever want out?”

“Dear boy, I don’t like what you’re insinuating. I do get out - ” Aziraphale said somewhat testily.

Crowley looked up, confused and frowning. “No, that’s not… it’s all so bloody messy, don’t you think? It’s happening miles and miles away and yet - I can’t keep track of what’s going on. My orders stopped making sense.” His instructions for the Antichrist didn’t make much sense either - it really was more complicated than it could’ve been. But at least he could see the logic behind it back then. Now he ran errands for all kinds of demons and it was hard to keep up with who was doing what and why. After some thinking, he filled his glass yet again. He spilled some wine on the table.

The angel leant back a little, eyeing up the bottle and eventually taking it to refill his own glass. His expression softened. “I’m afraid I have to agree.”

A second bottle was opened after the first one ran dry and both were slightly too drunk to remember that they could simply refill it with a single thought.

“Do you know I have Gabriel’s trumpet on my bookshelf?” Aziraphale said conversationally.

“That’s nothing,” Crowley said. “I’ve got the Colt in my safe.”

“The revolver that can kill about anything?”

“That’s the one,” Crowley nodded.

“Bit spooky, isn’t it?”

“Not spooky. Merely concerning. Considering it can actually kill me. As in, cease to exist. You get the idea. Worse than holy water, actually. They were able to rebuild Ligur from the ground up, after all. Don’t ask me how.”

They looked at one another.

“I probably shouldn’t have told you that,” Crowley said.

“I quite agree,” Aziraphale said. “I shouldn’t have said anything either.”

“Probably not.” They sat in silence for a while.

“They don’t trust me anymore,” Aziraphale said mournfully.

“How so?”

“They don’t tell me anything.”
“Like that’s anything new,” Crowley began. “Say -” But his phone buzzed in his pocket. There were only two people who got his real number and one of them was sitting opposite of him. He got up drunkenly, staggered a bit and grinned wryly. “Gotta dash.”

Aziraphale wasn’t that quick on the uptake after a couple bottles of wine. “Huh?” he managed.

“Got to go. Arrivederci, angel.”

By the time Aziraphale finally managed to order his thoughts the demon had already left.

He’d been promoted and while that had been one of his goals, he felt bored. Instead of trying to tempt humans to make the most ingenious deals for a measly ten years of their life and their souls condemned to Hell, he was now handpicking the demons to send up to the ground and doing the administrative work that came with it. Finances, accounts, records… whoever invented records could burn in a special place. Fergus hated doing records.

In the past few years it had been young girls in their mid twenties being sent up to the crossroads, them being popular under both women and men. And in one case, someone far past retirement who stole hearts of young and old alike, with her wrinkly dimples, her soft hands and her tender smile. And of course her eyes, flashing red, which was not untypical for a crossroads demon.

Fergus, with the help of Lilith, had become too important to aid to ordinary human requests. And despite loving his new power, he missed it. No matter how petty the deals were; talent, fame, revenge, murder - or, his personal favourite, sacrifice. Making a deal to save someone else’s life. There was something bittersweet about that, and Fergus loved it. Like his coffee.

The coffee on his desk right now was lukewarm, too sweetened and yet too bland, summing up his feelings on the current situation quite well.

He had halfheartedly been assigning people to the summoning places. Out of silent protest he was reading and obnoxiously sniggering at Garfield’s general grumpiness. It was only three comics later that he realised a certain ‘Dean Winchester’ had called upon a crossroads; Fergus, being too absorbed in laughing at the misery of flat squashed spiders who had the misfortune of meeting Garfield’s newspaper had sent one of those beginners* above.

* Beginners can be recognised by a couple things; they are cocky, they pick the emotionally weakest - widowers and students with a financial debt are popular - and they don’t know how to negotiate.

He cursed himself to Heaven and back for the missed opportunity. After hearing all the stories about the family, he had wanted to see it for himself. When he saw a demon coming back in a crumpled heap, limbs in all the wrong places, he got himself another cup of coffee. Maybe it had been better this way, after all. He stood up, carefully straightened out his suit and walked over to the puddle of demon. He bent over slightly, hands behind his back.

“Tsk, tsk. Got yourself exorcised.”

The puddle glared back.

“What was the Winchester like?”
The puddle changed form and started to take the shape of something - ironically enough - living. It probably wouldn’t pass for an human, though. “I wasn’t assigned to the Winchester.”

Fergus stared at it, hard. “Who was it?”

The demon made an attempt at shrugging its nonexistent shoulders.

“Who was it?” he yelled. No one answered. “For the love of God, are you all morons?!?”

Someone reached out to him. “What?” he spat, turning around, before looking into eyes belonging to Lilith. They reminded him of marble; pretty, but cold. “Such a ruckus, Crowley,” she purred. “What is the matter? Don’t have your subordinates under control?”

“I’m handling it just fine, love,” he distractedly said, trying to remember who he had sent up and why they weren’t back already. He untangled himself from Lilith’s long fingers and marched out of the room, making his way Up. (Or, better said, Ground Level. Fergus wasn’t about to commit suicide.) Tracking down the faint traces of Dean Winchester’s summoning led him to an abandoned, dusty crossroads, located in what seemed to be Mississippi. It probably was, even though he had never been in Mississippi before. A road sign told him. Road signs rarely lied. Yarrow was planted along the sides of the roads. Fergus sniffed at it. They were definitely here. Five minutes after he called Crowley’s number, the demon made his way through a field. It gave him the impression that he had walked all the way from England to the States. There wasn’t sand or dust clinging to his suit, nor was he slouching or slumping in any way, but it was his posture; somehow it wasn’t as energetic or lithely as usual.

“What is it?” Crowley asked, in a voice so dull you had a hard time slicing through chicken filet.

“Winchesters were here a couple hours ago, that’s what.”

“So?” Crowley looked clearly confused, even with sunglasses on.

“Weren’t you supposed to find them?”

“Oh, yes… probably.” He had forgotten. He spun around, ready to walk away, and promptly stood still and stared at Fergus. “How did you get up here? I thought they closed Hell.”

“I took the highway,” the much younger demon grinned. “Got a VIP pass right here.”

Crowley watched a bird plucking at a feather. The offending feather disappeared. “Why?”

“Why?” Fergus echoed. He spread his arms in the universal way of ‘look at me’ and looked triumphant. “I’m Lilith’s trusted right hand. Got some privileges that come with the title.”

Crowley made an odd noise. The last time he had personally talked to Lilith, she was applauding him for his excellent work during the Spanish Inquisition. There had never been a term in human language that could appropriately describe her, but ‘batshit crazy’ came close. “Yeah, uh, have fun with that.”

Fergus gave him a strange look, but let him walk away. Fallen angels; they really were from another planet.

In the next few months Crowley spent tracking down the Winchesters, upon Azazel’s request. It wasn’t necessarily hard to track them down once he had known what to look for; they were
witchfinders after all, and witchfinders only went after a couple things. He didn’t have an extensive network like he had in England, but he still had some contacts and it would have to do. Ironically enough, in January 2007 they found him.

Of course, there had been no decent restaurant in the small town at all and he confined himself to the local pub. The beer was watery, burgers were made out of horse meat, plastic cheese and yesterday’s bread and they acted like their nose bled when he asked if they perhaps had a Merlot. In the end, he had gotten a Bourbon. Just as he downed his first glass in one go, he heard them.

“Man, this burger is awesome!” the older Winchester said way too loud; Crowley, sitting at the bar, looked at the two tall men in the corner. Like him, they were wearing suits. Unlike him, they looked as stylish as a burlap sack drenched in mud.

“Hey, hey, Sammy,” he nudged the taller guy. Crowley turned his head to get a better look. “Remember when we were kids? We’d get these Hamburgers MEALS™ from Burger Lord. They were the best.”

“The MEALS™ were also the biggest health hazards since home-brewed alcohol,” Sam said in a condescending tone. “People died because of that stuff.”

“Come on, I know you loved the macrobiotic rice MEALS™, so don’t be a hypocrite.”

“Didn’t know that word was even in your vocabulary.”

“Just eat your rabbit food. Bitch.”

“Jerk.”

Crowley refilled his drink when the bartender looked the other way. Hearing the brothers quibble like that, it was hard to imagine they would eventually bring on the end of the world. And they seemed a lot more hardheaded than Adam.

“I can’t believe you still have faith. Hell, we just proved God isn’t real. It was a spirit.” That was Dean Winchester again. The demon turned towards them just slightly. Well. This was going to be interesting.

“Just leave it be, Dean. I just think there has to be more than this. If there are demons, why can’t there be angels, too?”

“That’s not how it works in our life and you know it. And if they do hang around, they sure suck at their job.”

They caught Crowley staring.

“What’s it with you, Shades?” one of the Winchesters called.

Crowley shrugged and sauntered out of the building.

About a month later in Springfield Ohio, a professor fell out of a window, just behind the slow but vividly walk of an unexpecting janitor who had just closed the university doors for the night. Later that night, the janitor enjoyed a particularly amusing National World Weekly, even though the Elvis content was a bit too overwhelming for his tastes. It wasn’t as interesting to read about Elvis being sighted in someone’s backyard tending to plum trees when it had been the same story for at least six
An angel interrupted.

“Nice apartment you have here,” he commented lazily.

“Balthazar,” the janitor grumbled, otherwise known as Gabriel, the Archangel, who liked to think of himself as someone who always cleaned up other people’s messes, even though he caused bigger ones.

“You shouldn’t be drawing so much attention on yourself.”

Gabriel stared at him. “It was just one guy! Don’t tell me he didn’t deserve it.”

“I don’t care about your Earthly shenanigans. It's such a bother.”

Gabriels eyebrows raised slightly at this particular choice of words.

“Get lost, then.”

“You are drawing attention, though,” Balthazar said. The Archangel stayed silent. “Just a warning. Don’t say I ever do anything for you.”

“Just get lost.”

Balthazar obeyed.

They had a strange relationship, Balthazar and Gabriel. One completely off the grid and semi-friendly with at least one demon, another dancing, tiptoeing on the edge, still in Heaven but doubting, hiding information from his superior. Both were dangerous, for each other and for themselves. And maybe that was the beauty of it. It was the beauty of having nothing to lose - and yet so much. It was like roulette in the biggest casino of the universe where the ball rarely rolled in your favour, except it did, because they had the power to make it so.

They were players not for Heaven, nor for Hell, but for themselves, because they had realised it had been the best option on the table.

And that, was quite alright.
Gabriel jerked his head to the two taller-than-average guys in plaid and unimaginatively coloured shirts. The demon looked at them. Apparently, they seemed in some kind of argument about a young blonde, who found it all too amusing. Scarily enough, she reminded him of War. But War had buggered off, hadn’t she?

“So you are drugging people now?”

“Just the Winchesters.”

Really, with the amount of times he was required to travel to the USA, it would make much more sense to settle down there instead. He refused, however, because of a couple simple reasons. One of them being that he had become a creature of habit, like the driving through London with 80 miles an hour, feeding ducks at St. James or the contemplation if a reasonable time had passed before he could ask the angel for a lunch at the Ritz.

So now he had sat through an extremely uncomfortable day full of too tight plane seats, cold coffee and dull meals, despite having a business class ticket. His day had not been good, and sitting here at some kind of college student bar with people shouting about didn’t do wonders for his mood either. He picked up a shot glass with a suspiciously bright purple substance in it.

“So, how did you call these again?”

“Purple nurples,” Gabriel grinned.

Crowley groaned, swished the liquid around and smelled at it.

“I wouldn’t actually drink it,” Gabriel commented, lazily. “You’d start to hallucinate.”

He put the glass back on the table. “As if human sedatives would have such an effect on me.”

“I brewed it myself.”

Cautiously, Crowley knocked it over. The purple nurple happily ate away at the table.

“What is this stuff?”

Gabriel jerked his head to the two taller-than-average guys in plaid and unimaginatively coloured shirts. The demon looked at them. Apparently, they seemed in some kind of argument about a young blonde, who found it all too amusing. Scarily enough, she reminded him of War. But War had buggered off, hadn’t she?

“So you are drugging people now?”

“Just the Winchesters.”

“What for?” Crowley asked incredulously.
“To test them, of course.”

“Again, what for?”

They watched the two brothers getting fed up with each other. “I’m teaching them a lesson,” he murmured.

Crowley was getting fed up with Gabriel, now. “What lesson?”

“It’s none of your business,” the Archangel waved his questions away. “Why are you here, anyway?”

“Oh, yeah - ” Crowley started. He had forgotten already. One tended to forget within the company of Gabriel and his absolutely crazy plans. “I’ve been asked to pass you a message from Aziraphale.”

“And he sends his lap dog to do it? I’m touched.”

Crowley just stared at him. In all of his six thousand years on earth, he had never been called a lap dog. He wasn’t sure how to react.

“He’s sort of bound to stay close to the place,” he said, feigning indifference. “Especially now since you trusted him with the trumpet.”

That didn’t have quite the dramatic effect he had hoped for, but he still enjoyed seeing Gabriel looking shocked and then trying to brush it off. “How’d you know about that?” he hissed.

Crowley only smirked.

“Right. I forgot you two are BFF’s.”

“It’s a little more complicated than that.”

“Calling it complicated isn’t going to change my opinion on the matter.”

“Which is?” Crowley asked, squinting at him.

It was now Gabriel’s turn to grin deviously. Or devilishly; either worked, really.

“Heaven needs you, apparently,” said Crowley, who had quite enough of Gabriel’s games.

“Says who?”

“Angel of Thursday. I can’t remember his name.”

“Castiel,” the angel confirmed, suddenly very serious. He had never really forgotten about Castiel in 1973, but he just got painfully reminded the Apocalypse was close. Only a year, give or take a couple months. But nothing was happening out of the ordinary. (Aside from Hell, who was doing something funny to their demons with Earth-access.) There was no righteous man in hell - oh, Crowley would have disagreed, but while there were many righteous men, there was only one Righteous man, the only one who mattered - and that man was enjoying his alcohol at a table in the corner, right before his eyes.

Gabriel stared at him, and then nudged Crowley.

“Do you see anything?”
Crowley followed his stare. “His soul doesn’t belong to Hell, as far as I can see. I can’t seem to properly reach* him, though.”

“Must be because of his holy status.”

“That’s not it,” Crowley muttered. “You of all people should know.”

* Old demons like him only had to rely on their senses to see what people desired - it was far beyond the capabilities of a human-turned-demon. But now he got warded off, and he had a sneaky suspicion Meg had something to do with it. After all, she swung by last week for a chat, and told him she had possessed Sam Winchester for a couple days for ‘funsies.’

“Anyway, I’m not going back to Heaven.”

“Yeah, that’s what I told him,” Crowley said. “He wouldn’t listen and said...what was it? That you would eventually come to your senses.”

“Who?”

“Aziraphale.”

“Like he’s one to talk.”

Crowley shrugged.

“Seriously. Didn’t he flip off the Metatron?”

“That’s not how it happened, Gabriel - ”

But the two Winchesters made their way to the exit, and as they were leaving, Gabriel was too. He threw some dollars on the counter and put a hand in a way of saying goodbye. “Gotta go.”

Crowley stayed a little while longer. Not for the people, and certainly not for the terrible alcohol. He was just dreading the fact he’d have to report bad news.

Aziraphale, aside from his angelic occupation, was a part-time rare book dealer. Not that books weren’t unangelic, since they can very well be angelic or holy, but the kind of religious tomes Aziraphale collected were very much not angelic, such as the Unrighteous Bible. It had been a while since the Apocalypse was averted - or merely postponed - and ever since that day he had not stopped looking to complete another collection. It was a collection only consisting of two books, which made sceptici glance at each other and declare that a pair of two books could hardly be called a collection. It wasn’t even a trilogy.

However, in this case, it was the collection of the books of Agnes Nutter, and the fact there was only one single copy left of both in the whole world. The Nife and Accurate Prophecies of Agnes Nutter, Witch had already been in his possession, and he had thought The Further Nife and Accurate Prophecies of Agnes Nutter had burnt to a crisp in a hot bonfire in August, a ceremony only attended by a witch and a witchfinder (although that was just a hobby).

However, when he contacted said witch, whose name was Anathema, and who Crowley had run
over all those years ago, she said she hadn’t had the heart to burn the only book in existence. So she had bundled it up and sold it to an antiquarian book trader in London, who in turn had lost this book in the train from London Euston to Manchester Piccadilly, when the forgetful man had to switch trains.

It was lost to the ether, or so he thought.

Until he saw it, thoughtlessly used to support a table where one of the legs were just too short, and he would’ve grabbed it if not for the fact there was hot tea balancing on top of said table. And of course, both table and book - and the rest of the furniture inside the house - were owned by Robert Singer, who knew the gleam in Aziraphale’s eyes all too well. Something of value had been spotted.

Of course, when Aziraphale expressed interest in this ‘filthy old thing,’ he was forced to tell him the story about the first book from Agnes Nutter, Witch. Aziraphale simply left out details of the story, such as the almost end of the world.

The subject then landed on his role in that story and how he had been working out how to find the persons mentioned in the book of prophecies and they were back to why Aziraphale had come to visit in the first place.

“A network of hunters?” Robert Singer had squinted at him, but the angel could see he had gotten intrigued.

“Evil doesn’t simply loom in the States alone,” Aziraphale had said, and the hunter had had no other choice but to agree. And so an uneasy alliance between the Witchfinders and Robert and his associates was born. Of course, Robert Singer didn’t know the Witchfinder’s Army consisted solely of Sergeant Shadwell and Private Pulsifer. The latter was retired and the former was well in his eighties. They’d cross that bridge when they got to it, Aziraphale thought. Or they’d just swim straight through the river instead.

The next time Crowley saw Gabriel, he saw the angel letting air out of the tires of an old (reasonably old), good-looking, black vehicle. It hadn’t been as gorgeous as his own Bentley, but nevertheless did he feel offended on the owner’s behalf. Alas, he had no time nor the patience to quibble with Gabriel about the consequences if he did that kind of thing to a car. He was still ‘testing’ and ‘learning the Winchesters’ a lesson, although the demon failed to see what kind of lesson that was supposed to be. Somehow he suspected Gabriel didn’t know, either.

“I’ll show you why,” Gabriel said, and Crowley wasn’t sure what kind of question was answered with that.

Gabriel however knew exactly what he was doing. Dean and Samuel clashed as Michael and Lucifer clashed - although for different reasons, the outcome would be the same. Eventually, they’d destroy each other and that was exactly what Hell and Heaven both wanted. It didn’t matter in what way Dean went to Hell; whether it was out of devotion for his brother or out of hatred. From his point of view, it really could swing either way.

Sam was more level headed and probably more inclined to listen to what he had to say, but Dean… Dean was more easily tempted. And since it was about Dean, he couldn’t just march up and tell him everything. Dean didn’t have faith after all - apart from that one incident with Layla - and that had only been half hearted. That had only been a prayer he made because of a promise.
Gabriel hadn’t learnt much about the Winchesters yet, but one of the things very important to them was keeping promises. So, the whole temptation thing probably wouldn’t work. After all, he was evil in their eyes. It was the principle of the thing.

So, the tacky peace offer wasn’t going to stand a chance. Dean Winchester was giving it stealthy glances - the women were right up his alley, even if the disco ball was a little over the top - but he had the kind of look in his eyes that he was about to do something he’d regret.

“I can’t let you go,” Dean told him, although he didn’t sound very sure. Gabriel grinned; he was right. The man was easily tempted. But, good for him, the job was put first.

“Too bad,” Gabriel replied. “Like I said, I like you.” And he did; he felt sympathy for the two. Even if they were about to kill him, or so they thought. He feigned surprise at the fact the other brother and an older man entered the theater and watched the play coming to life. The hunters versus a couple lingerie wearing women - and a man with a chainsaw to make the picture complete.

The brothers were quite smart, he concluded - and let Dean fall into the seats close to him. They might not make a total mess of their destiny just yet. “Nice toss, ladies!” he called at his own illusion. Gabriel got up, slowly. Or rather, his illusion got up. Gabriel himself had hidden behind the ridiculously large bed. Time for the real trick. “Dean - I did not want to have to do this,” he began.

He watched as Dean had his back turned to him, catching a stake - so they did do their research, well done - and ramming the thing into his chest.

Ouch. That would’ve hurt.

“Me neither,” Dean concluded. The people he had conjured disappeared, save for his own dead body, but their surroundings didn’t. Really, that should’ve been a clue, but none of the hunters picked it up. That was disappointing.

The three quickly made it out of the building; Gabriel emerged from underneath the bed. With him, Crowley also emerged from underneath the bed.

“Really, Gabriel - what was the point of this?”

“Do you see why I can’t go back to Heaven now?”

“No, not really.”

Gabriel groaned, walked over to the theater seats, let his dead illusion disappear and produced a chocolate bar. Crowley sat on the bed, squinting at him, trying to make sense of everything.

“They aren’t equipped for the amount of crap that’s about to come at them, that’s why,” Gabriel said, munching on the bar. So many tricks in such a short time made anyone hungry. “They need someone to keep them alive at least.”

“What crap?” Crowley asked warily. Hell’s crap? Why hadn’t Hell told him? Why hadn’t Fergus told him?

“You’ll find out soon enough,” the Archangel said, suddenly serious. “You’re holding the key, after all.”
Gabriel’s prediction came true a few days later, when Crowley found himself in South Dakota. A ghost town, with only a couple inhabitants.

“You are seven kinds of crazy,” Crowley said to Azazel, who only smiled. If Crowley could smile like a snake, Azazel could smile like a crocodile, baring teeth so sharp it could tear through half the world. They were currently watching a couple young adults killing each other, one after another.

“Isn’t it marvelous?” he said, while they wandered past the abandoned houses. Crowley could tell there were bodies scattered everywhere, if only by the amount of stink the other demons were carrying around. They were forced to take corpses. How unhygienic. It was pretty unhygienic in the first place to possess humans instead of getting your own body - a human body came with all kinds of inconveniences - but a dead one? That was just asking for trouble.

“No, not really,” said Crowley, watching how a girl murdered her peers with just her mind.

“That’s Ava,” Azazel replied when he saw the other demon looking. “My favourite.”

“I see.”

“How do you mean, not really?” Azazel exclaimed once he realised what Crowley had said. He grinned nastily at him. “I thought you’d appreciate it. You like long-term plans.”

“What even is your plan?” Crowley muttered, although he didn’t really want to know the details.

“Now, for that we need to relocate.” He bent over and whispered the location in Crowley’s ear. “Don’t mind it if I hold on, will you?”

Crowley didn’t have much of a choice, so he nodded and took off. Nowadays it was becoming a privilege for demons to be able to use your wings.*

*Not that many demons had wings to begin with. And technically, Azazel didn’t need to use wings to get somewhere fast. However, it was draining for most demons to vanish and relocate elsewhere, especially when confined in a vessel.

The two of them were looking at a piece of train track, successfully separating fields and forests from each other.


Azazel ignored him. “This is what it’s all about. The strongest kid is going to unleash hell on Earth.”

“Aha.” Crowley didn’t like that idea very much. He eyed the track. Iron. God have mercy, was that - It was as if Azazel was reading his mind. “It’s the biggest devil’s trap known on Earth. Aside from the Tibetan project*, of course, but those have been going at for centuries and it still isn’t finished.”

“And what is it holding? A devil’s gate?”

Azazel clapped him on the back. “Exactly! I knew you were smart. No more waiting in line and dealing with the bureaucracy. Thousands of tortured, once human souls who can’t wait to cause mischief. And they’ll forever be indebted to me, of course.”
“Naturally,” Crowley had to reluctantly agree.

* What else did you think the monks from Tibet were digging those tunnels for?

“So you think that Ava girl is going to do it?”

“Nope,” Azazel clacked his tongue. “My bet is on the prized horse. Sam Winchester.”

Always with the Winchesters. He was getting sick of them.

“I need the colt, by the way.”

“Excuse me?”

“Clean out your ears,” Azazel said in an eerily calm voice. “The colt. It’s the key to the devil’s gate.”

Crowley eyed the iron tracks. So that was why he needed one of those people to do it. But Sam Winchesters never wouldn’t. It would be against his principles. “The colt kills you.”

“If it’s used on me, yes,” Azazel smiled. Crowley must’ve still looked puzzled, because the elder demon continued. “The loop is the key. I’m not going to give them any bullets. I know fully well the minute I hand the gun over, he’ll try to shoot me in the head. I killed his dearest mommy after all.”

“You play a dangerous game, Azazel,” he just said, not liking the plan at all.

“Ah,” Azazel replied, smiling even wider. “At least I’m the one playing. And it’s my turn.”
Now, what has Agnes written exactly?”

“I didn’t bring my notes with me,” Anathema said, brushing her hair out of her eyes. “However, it said something would rise from the depths of darkness. It was either hell, Lucifer, or… an incredible lot of demons. You know, proper demons.” She eyed up Adam. “Or you.”

Adam poured a little extra milk in his drink.

It had become a regular thing by now. Every time they tried dining out, no matter how obscure the restaurant, they were always found. Granted, usually it was Crowley being dragged away from his meal, having to deliver more messages and packages than Hermes, and that was quite the feat. He didn’t like this new change of how Hell had chosen to operate; they used to leave him alone. They hadn’t given him orders for decennia. He had worked it out with Aziraphale just perfectly, seeing as they were one of the few demons and angels on Earth at all, and it had been a fine Arrangement. Now? Now he was just someone’s delivery boy. For demons and angels alike.

This time, however, an angel landed in the middle of the restaurant. A new one. Crowley didn’t know them. Sure, the face was rather familiar, but he knew it was borrowed. He nudged Aziraphale, who either hadn’t noticed or did a very good job ignoring the other angel, who had wanted to walk to their table and froze once they realised who was sitting on the other side. Or rather, what.

“Hm?” Aziraphale said, enjoying an extraordinary good piece of lamb.

Crowley had made comments about him ordering lamb.

“You might want to figure out what they want,” Crowley said, continuing to eat his dinner as calmly as he could. The thing about strange angels was, he never knew whether they were able to smite him on the spot. Of course, almost all angels had the desire to do so, but not all of them could pull it off. He hoped this angel was in the latter category.

“Oh! Yes, let’s…” he said, a little distracted. Aziraphale cleaned himself with a handkerchief, got up and walked towards the other angel, who did a marvelous job of standing in the way. He guided the angel to a corner of the room.

Crowley felt uneasy. Heaven didn’t bother to contact Aziraphale. And when they did, they certainly weren’t sending an angel. Not unless it was of utmost importance the message was delivered instantly.*

* Contacting Heaven via the traditional way was far from perfect. There was a delay from about twenty minutes, which could very well be crucial, and the connection leaked. The difference in timezone would make it even more complicated, something most humans couldn’t even try to begin to understand.
Aziraphale returned to him quickly, sat down and continued cutting his lamb as if nothing happened. Crowley stared at him, but the angel remained unfazed.

“What was that all about?” he insisted when it became clear Aziraphale had no intention to talk about his rendez-vous.

“Oh, yes… a devil’s gate opened.”

The demon stared. “What?” Azazel had managed it, then? Samuel Winchester opened the box. But why?

“And Samuel Winchester is dead,” Aziraphale said as if he had been reading his thoughts, on the tone of a bored weatherman that yes, tomorrow London would be overcast.

“That’s bloody great,” Crowley grumbled.

“It is!”

“How do you mean, it is?”

“Hell’s plan will fail without him, wouldn’t it? No apocalypse. Ta-dah, no bloodshed and terror either. No more than usual, anyway.”

Crowley shook his head. “You’re getting it all wrong, angel.”

“Then what?”

But Crowley had already left. As Aziraphale was finishing up his plate, he reflected that happened often, lately.

It was early in the morning when someone knocked on the door. It was eight am, and it might’ve been socially acceptable to knock on someone’s door at eight am on a normal weekday, when the majority of the population was pouring themselves their first coffee of the day - the younger generation, at least - but seeing as it was weekend it had just felt rude. Or really, really urgent. Tadfield, usually, didn’t do urgent.

And yet, the sound echoing through the house was the unmistakable sound of knuckles on wood.

Pepper was the first to wake. Stumbling around in her room - she had a view on the road, and conveniently, the front door - she got to the window and opened it. She poked her head through, stared down and groaned.

“It’s eight am!” she told the visitor in a not so friendly manner.

“My apologies, but this is important!” the visitor replied.

Pepper pursed her lips and disappeared. She knocked on Adam’s bedroom door. “Adam.”

Adam managed to mutter an undignified ‘uhmpf hmm what.’

“Your eco-freak is outside.”
“Can you open the door for me while I get dressed?”

Pepper gave him the evil eye, but seeing as the door was still closed, it didn’t have the desired effect. Grumbling she put on slippers and a warm, woolly vest and went downstairs. There she unlocked the door and opened it.

“We do have a doorbell, by the way,” she said, pointing towards the thing.

“Knocking is free and preserves energy.”

Pepper didn’t have that bad of a temper, but it was people like her who pushed all the wrong buttons.

“Anathema!”

Thank god. Adam to her rescue.

“Hello, Adam,” Anathema said. She had a smile reserved for Adam alone. Pepper shrugged, picked the newspaper out of Anathema’s hand and walked away.

“There’s something wrong,” Anathema said, as soon as Pepper had gone and they had moved the conversation to the kitchen, where Adam turned on their newest kitchen toy; the fruit blender. He manually turned off the grating sound, as if it was a radio. Dog yipped gratefully at him.

“What is?” said Adam.

“Well, it’s funny actually - do you remember the book?”

“The book you lost ages ago?”

“Yes! The book with prophecies in it. There is another one, and I - ”

“However, you lost that other book also, didn’t you?” Adam interrupted her. She gave him a puzzled look.

“How’d you know?” Then, continuing because she knew she wasn’t going to get a good answer on that question, she said: “Yes, Newt insisted we’d burn it. But how could I burn Agnes Nutter’s legacy? It is probably the only book in the whole world. So I sold it instead. Not before I gave it a wee bit of a read, though. Adam - she has written hell will rise! And yesterday I heard about all these strange disasters in the United States! Does this mean Armageddon?”

She looked rather panicked, Adam decided. Two minutes later she sat at the kitchen table with Dog at her feet, a tea mug in one hand and a toast in the other, of which she absentmindedly ate.

“Now, what has Agnes written exactly?”

“I didn’t bring my notes with me,” Anathema said, brushing her hair out of her eyes. “However, it said something would rise from the depths of darkness. It was either hell, Lucifer, or… an incredible lot of demons. You know, proper demons.” She eyed up Adam. “Or you.”

Adam poured a little extra milk in his drink.

“Anyway, do you remember how her prophecies worked? They’re all true, in a sense, but you don’t know how to interpret certain things until after they’ve happened.” She sighed. “I saw a documentary about some sort of demonic field. Train rails. I talked with an occultist over there. Apparently, if you watch over the rails from a helicopter or some sorts, you can see the form of a pentagram!”
“Your occultist is wrong. It’s not a pentagram,” Adam said.

“That - that doesn’t matter, it means that Agnes was right with her prophecy about a five pointed mark! The destruction of a five pointed mark!” Anathema sounded quite agitated by now.

“It is still intact.”

“Last time, I knew what was happening. Now I don’t. Do you know anything, Adam?”

“I’m sorry. My father doesn’t tell me much,” Adam told her with a small smile on his face, which wasn’t mocking, but it wasn’t going to reassure her either. Not even the Antichrist had the power of assuring Anathema that everything was going just fine.

“I’m worried,” she confessed. “This isn’t like last time.”

Adam regarded her. She deserved the truth, although he didn’t know much either. “No,” he said. “No. It isn’t.”

“Are we safe?”

Adam never gave an answer.

Robert Singer was this close to losing his cool. It was a damn shame what happened; the roadhouse gone, along with the Colt, Sam dead just as the world is going to throw some major crap at them. On top of all that, he had to deal with Dean Winchester, who was in such a state of grief he was useless. He loved Sam as he loved his late wife, and he loved Dean too, but they had to move on. For the sake of everything. Yellow Eyes was planning something real bad. He needed Dean.

With a sigh he opened the door; seeing the young man watching his brother’s body. Tormenting himself, Robert thought. He held up the lunch he had brought back with him. “Dean?”

“No thanks, I’m fine,” Dean said absentmindedly.

“You need to eat,” he pressured on.

“I said I’m fine!” Dean snapped.

It was hard dealing with Dean when he was like this. Robert didn’t blame him, but something big was coming, and it was coming fast. He couldn’t do it on his own. He had already lost one of the brothers; he couldn’t afford to lose both.

Dean, however, wasn’t ready yet. He needed more time. “Please, just go.” With a sigh, Robert turned around. It was no use trying to persuade him now. He was too caught up in his own sorrows. “You know where I’ll be.”

Once outside, Robert played with the idea to get drunk, or at least drink a beer or two. He bloody well deserved it. Instead he called Ellen. He caught the voicemail. “Ellen. If you receive this, give me a ring.” He paused for a bit. “I saw the roadhouse. Please tell me you made it out of there alive. We didn’t find your body, so… be alive, huh?”

With that he ended the message and started to walk; wherever his feet would take him.
It was a dreary day, with people walking past quickly and with haste, as if they were running out of time. He had walked past a flower boutique and made the thorns of the roses sharper than before, had passed a bookshop and changed the newspaper in that of yesterday’s and switched all the size labels of a clothing store. All in all, a busy morning and a bad job well done. It was time for a pleasant little break. Before he could get to anything suiting his fancy, though, he got called.

“Yes?”

“You don’t believe what the guy has cooked up,” an unfamiliar voice said in his ear. He frowned.

“Who’s this?”

“Oh, Crowles, forgotten me already? I’m hurt.”

“Hang on, how did you even get this number? Only a couple people got it -”

She laughed. “For a demon, especially one of your age, you’re sure naive. Azazel, of course. Not that I care about him anymore. He can stuff it.”

“Err…”

“It’s Meg,” she said on an impatient tone. “I need you for a favour.”


She ignored him. “I don’t like his plans anymore. I need you to stop him from opening the devil’s gate. I’m sure you’ll like that too, keeping on truckin’ without too many demons ruining everything.”

“I thought the devil’s gate was already opened!” Crowley exclaimed a little too loudly. Passerby’s looked at him strangely. He gave them something that might’ve passed for an reassuring grin, if not for the fact it was slightly too wide than humanly possible. The humans around him quickened their pace.

It was silent for a while. “No,” Meg said. “You need to find better sources of information. However, it’s happening soon. Probably tonight. Dean Winchester is making a deal as we speak.”

“Hell managed it after all,” Crowley commented, sourly.

“That they did. Thanks to your help, I believe. Fergus has been pulling the strings on that one, and he had never gotten the position if you…” she trailed off. “Oh. I’m not supposed to know about that. Never mind.”

He didn’t know what to say. He needed time to process all of that. So instead he said: “Your voice is different.”

“Well, dumbass,” Meg said, “not all of us have the privilege of owning their own body. Some of us have to possess people. It’s icky and my previous host has died, thanks to some morons. But I took revenge on them. It’s all good. Are you going to stop the devil’s gate?”

“No. Handle your own problems,” said Crowley.

“Ah. And here I thought we had something special,” said Meg. “Pity.”

“Indeed,” Crowley said and ended the call. He needed to call someone else.
“Balthazar, C’mere.”

Balthazar, who was idly watching how a touring car, full of elderly people crashed - or didn’t, as he didn’t want to see the mess that would be causing and brought the car to a halt, just before the solid stone of the mountain, looked up after this unimportant little rescue, and didn’t see anyone.

“That was cute,” the voice said.

The voice seemed to come from above, but when he looked up, he didn’t see anything. Nothing but a bird, whose wings seemed to change colour. That was odd. As soon as the bird noticed him looking, it flew towards him and perched on his knee, contently sighing. In the light, the bird’s wings had shone gold, but now that it was in the shadows, it had taken another hue, a deep blue. He knew this bird. Balthazar’s look of confusion made place for one of annoyance. “Are you spying on me now, Gabriel? As a bird, no less?”

The bird turned around to look at Balthazar properly. “Excuse me. You are being spied on, but I’m not the one spying. They won’t recognise me like this.”

“Who is they?” Balthazar wanted to know.

“Heaven.” He slapped a wing against Balthazar's leg.*

* If you’ve never seen a bird roll its eyes, you are missing out for sure.

“Who else. I wanted to let you know Hell succeeded in their plan.”

“Thanks for the warning,” Balthazar said.

“Yeah. Consider it payback. What’s Heaven going to do?”

Balthazar laughed, but it wasn’t one of joy. “Heaven? Nothing. They’re underestimating their foes. That, or they want this to happen.”

The bird whistled low. “I wonder what good old Michael is up to.”

Balthazar leant forward, reducing his voice to a whisper. “Between you and me…. I don’t think Heaven’s gonna win. It’s going to be in shambles.”

“Like Earth,” Gabriel added.

Neither said anything after that.

In a complete different part of the world, war broke out.
Chapter 14

Chapter Summary

“I never understood how some people could make such bad decisions. It was always good or bad in the beginning, but as you grow older you have to take all kinds of things into account, and in the end you just try to take the good decision. But you don’t know whether something’s good or bad anymore.” He sighed. “I wonder if I made a terrible decision.”

Pepper looked worried, but as soon as she saw him looking, rolled her eyes. “That’s called growing up. Like the rest of us did.”

Hell was throwing a party. Now, it was unsure how parties in Hell looked like, but there was Vivaldi, Grieg and Beethoven (all of them), and not even Louis Armstrong had passed the opportunity. After all, Hell usually didn’t have a lot to celebrate for, especially if you were stuck in there.

There was music, and singing, but no dancing - and the music was barely loud enough to block the screams from underneath. Food was lain on the table; no one ate from it. The screams were getting louder. Fergus, unofficially crowned king of the crossroads after making it clear that it was one of his subjects who wriggled a deal out of Dean Winchester, shot a dirty look at the ground. Or whatever it was they were standing on, anyway - it was hardly passable for ‘ground.’

Then, it was silent; the music stopped at the same time the screaming did. It was no coincidence. Lilith strolled in, contained and cool, eyes milky white. Fergus could hardly read any expression in her eyes, but he thought he saw glee.

No one dared speaking. Lilith smiled sweetly at all of them. “The gate is opening.” It meant little to Fergus, who had picked up a few privileges along the way to the top. It meant everything to Lilith, who hadn’t seen Earth since she was cast out and forgotten as the first wife of Adam.

“The final hours are upon us! He will be free. Crowley -”  She turned around, addressing Fergus.

“I’ll leave the crossroads under your charge.”

Fergus was pleased with himself. “I won’t disappoint.”

She gave him a smile. “I’m going back to Earth.”

With that she left the room as she had entered; calm and collected. The screams in the distance were returning, but Fergus realises they weren’t screams of terror. They were screams of freedom, as the gate to Earth had opened just a bit; thousands of demons pushing their way through, including Lilith.

And with her, a fairly young demon with an entirely different plan than most of them, who just wanted to cause havoc. No. She was ambitious; perhaps even more than Lilith. They’d both play their roles, accepting only one outcome; the rise of Lucifer.
Aziraphale honestly tried to make it himself comfortable in the place, but it was hard when the walls were completely bare and the only piece of furniture was an uncomfortable, long leather couch in an L-shape; the type that squeaked whenever you moved. The only thing nice about the place was the rather spectacular view. It was five am in the morning and the sun was barely up, painting the sky in a more colourful palette than a box of crayola’s.

“Why here? Why do you want to talk about these things here? I can’t believe you live here.”

“I don’t live here,” Crowley said.

“I can see that,” Aziraphale replied. “There’s nothing in here. Not even - where are your plants?”

He didn’t like where the conversation was going. “Never mind about my plants. There are demons on the loose. A lot of them,” he added, when Aziraphale didn’t even blink and instead looked at the windows, where the plants had been.

“And Dean’s soul belongs to Hell. Definitely. No loopholes. He’s going down. Hello? Listening?”

“We are being watched,” the angel muttered.

Crowley joined him, looking outside as well. The angel was right; they were being watched. They were running out of safe places for holding private conversations. Conversations both Hell and Heaven would probably find quite interesting to hear. Hastur and Ligur knew about St. James Park. The bookshop was found last week and somehow, they were always found whenever they were in a public place.*


* Then again, how hard can it be to find an angel and a demon together in London, who never change their form? It’s like Where’s Waldo; you’re bound to find him eventually.

“I don’t suppose you can undo a deal?”

Crowley shook his head. “You don’t know what you’re asking. No one but the Queen of the crossroads has that right.”

“Who?” Aziraphale asked.

“Lilith.”

It stirred no reaction in Aziraphale. Not outwardly, at least. “I knew her,” he finally said.

“You can pay her a visit if you want,” said a voice behind them. “She’s gone topside. Earth’s gonna be in for a wild ride.”

They heard some squeaking, and the unsettling sound of plastic against leather. “Gabriel?” Crowley said, not turning around yet.

“Yes?” said the Archangel as innocently as he possibly could.

“No shoes on my sofa. I’ll turn your laces into maggots.”

“Got it.”
Gabriel jumped up and joined the two at the window. “We’ve got an audience,” he commented when he saw various demons hovering and lurking around the apartment building.

“So you better get away from the window,” Aziraphale said in a biting tone.

The Archangel groaned. “Oh, geez. I was just trying to make friendly conversation. This just in. News report from the States… Lilith has escaped. Lock your doors, ladies and gents. It’s going to be quite the show.”

He miracled some curtains in existence, shrouding themselves from the demons outside. “Seals are going to break real soon. Within a year.”

“How are you so sure?” Aziraphale asked.

“Spoilers,” Gabriel replied. “A time traveling angel. Just a year away and the Seals are breaking.”

Crowley and Aziraphale both looked at each other, at a loss for words. Crowley mouthed if the angel knew anything about it, but he in turn shook his head.

“You have known that we couldn’t stop the First Seal?” Crowley asked, anger seeping in - and Crowley was quite skilled in keeping his emotions at bay.

“Since the seventies.” As soon as that had escaped Gabriel’s mouth, he knew he had made a mistake. Upon seeing Crowley’s expression, Aziraphale materialised some good, ancient Greek wine. Over two thousand years old. Incredibly rich and ripened, but probably necessary. The demon accepted the glass; he didn’t drink yet.

“Who did you meet?” Aziraphale questioned, keeping his voice neutral enough.

Gabriel helped himself to a glass and went back to the couch, where he sat down, thoughtful. “I thought that was strange. Castiel. It seemed he still had difficulties being confined to the limits of a human body.”

“When was he from?”

It took a while to answer that question. “Next year,” Gabriel admitted. “2008, and the First Seal is broken by then. And with Lilith being on Earth – ”

“What has Lilith to do with it?” Crowley interrupted him. Apart from being utterly terrifying, that was. He hoped Lilith would stay well out of his way.

The Archangel looked at the both of them, being reminded of the fact that he was, in fact, more knowledgeable on certain topics than they would ever be, no matter how much time they had spent on Earth. “You know what Father did when Lucifer twisted Lilith? He threw Lucifer in the pit. As Lilith was the first created demon, she’s the last Seal.”

Crowley looked warily at him. “Kill Lilith, and…Lucifer is free?”

“Well guessed.”

He groaned. “Who came up with a twisted idea like that? Why would you use such a lock? Who thought - then again, the apple doesn’t fall - ” In this incredible moment in which he threw all usual cautiousness, hidden underneath a thin, smooth mixture of sass,* optimism and a good sense of humour in the wind, he suddenly caught himself, daring not to finish the sentence. No matter how
unusual the angels were, there were boundaries he probably shouldn’t tiptoe on. But the other two angels weren’t exactly saints, and they didn’t call him out.

*Honestly, it seems sass is in a demon’s work description.*

Crowley wasn’t one for losing his cool. So he didn’t, but if his optimism was like an old stuffed toy, then Gabriel had tossed it around and thrown it through the room - old and patched up, with stuffing threatening to fall out. Barely keeping together. If Gabriel had seen the breaking of the seals, what else was in store for them?

“You look like you’re about to cry,” Gabriel said bluntly. “It’s not the end of the world.”

The moment when the door swung open and Sam was back on his feet, looking worse for the wear but alive nonetheless, he had a sneaky suspicion.

The moment when another door swung open, triggered by the colt, capturing the tiniest impression of what Hell was like, the suspicion rose.

But the moment he knew for sure was when the yellow-eyed demon was shot dead with the last, remaining bullet of the colt, that special colt successfully removing a demon of this world.

The world was going to end. It was the end of the world.

And yet he never realised how wrong he was. And hopefully, he’ll never have to.

After barely successfully resisting the temptation to plan something utterly evil because quite frankly, Gabriel deserved to be put in his place and the guy really should stop acting like he didn’t care - and Aziraphale on top of it, saying that ‘even Crowley noticed Gabriel secretly cared, and he is a demon, so that’s about impossible, isn’t it dear, that’s against your being’ - he just left his apartment and booked the most expensive room in the nearest hotel he found.

He requested not to be disturbed.

Crowley awoke five weeks later. Something just occurred to him.

He wasn’t very high on the food chain, but that didn’t mean he didn’t notice things. At least a hundred demons were afoot. Two, three hundred.

He threw the covers from his body, enjoying the few seconds left of lingering warmth. It was July, but it felt chilly. It felt chilly for him. Crowley’s neck cracked loudly as he moved, along with his arms when he stretched them, hiding a large yawn behind his hand. It had been a long time since he had slept for weeks. There had been a time when he could easily sleep through decades, but that time wasn’t coming back. Maybe for the better.

He eyed the bathroom door. It had been a long time since he took an actual, proper shower too, since he didn’t need to. But today it was just the kind of thing to get him started, and while it didn’t make him feel a lot better, it appeared that he did, and that was all he needed to get through the day
Crowley ignored the letter that was addressed to him and was carefully propped against a plastic flower on a nightstand, obviously put there by a maid with curiosity larger than her wisdom. It had been opened and sealed shut again sloppily. The letter could wait.

Instead he grabbed the old fashioned landline phone next to it, placed the thing on his lap and dialed a number.

“Hello,” Fergus’ voice greeted him, almost bit too cheerful to be Fergus, but with that little touch of underlying snark, which made it sound like him after all. “And what can I do for you today.”

“Hi,” said Crowley. “Listen, there’s something weird going on. What has happened?”

He thought he heard the other demon laughing.

“You really are uninformed, aren’t you? They did say they don’t like you very much down here. I can’t imagine why. You’ve got some nice ideas, if you ask me. Just need a little tweak and fix. I liked that idea you did in Britain. Making everyone waiting in a line as a social custom, which will be infuriating for the foreigners. Just between the two of us, I think we could try that out in Hell. Modern torture.”


“Oh, yeah. Didn’t Lilith inform you?”

Crowley was glad he hadn’t eaten yet that day. He tried not to look at the letter. It looked as if his name was written by a child. But there had been a sigil underneath it. His sigil. His real name. No child could’ve known that.

“Lilith is on Earth?”

No offense to Gabriel, but Gabriel's information wasn't always very accurate.

There was an annoying popping sound on the other end. “Yeah, didn’t you get her instructions? She got you a letter. She’s surprisingly polite.”

Lilith on Earth was not a good thing. And Crowley didn’t want to be near her, at all. No less reading her instructions. No doubt would she have cooked up some crazy plans while she was locked up in there.

It was a good thing Crowley didn’t need to remember to breathe.

“Where’s Azazel?” he asked.

“Dead,” Fergus said with that same, strangely cheerful tone in his voice. “Oh, we mourned him appropriately. I think. It was some good Craig. I don’t know where they got it from, but that was the best Craig I’ve had.”

“...what?”

“Glencraig,” Fergus clarified. “Malt whisky.”

“Dead?”

“Like I told you. Dead. Gone. Vamooshed. Good riddance, he was weird. Lilith’s your superior anyway.
now. You should really read her instructions.”

Fergus hung up on him.

Later, he checked out of the hotel, bought a lighter at a convenience store and set the letter on flames, throwing the burnt remnants, with lighter and all, into a garbage bin.

You’d think that after years and years of experiencing a perfect Christmas, with a cloudless sky and bright stars, and thick, good, dry but sticky snow, frosty but never glazed over and slippery would become boring after a while. But it wasn’t for Adam, and 2007 wasn’t any different.

None of them were children anymore, and none of them had children of themselves either, and yet there stood a snowman, proud and big in front of Adam’s house and a few discarded bikes propped up against the wall, temporarily remodeled into reindeers of snow.

Usually they didn’t go to church, but they made an exception for Christmas Eve, which was nothing exceptional. A lot of people made an exception for Christmas Eve. Along with easter and possibly their own wedding.

It had been packed in the church, which could house the entire population of Lower Tadfield at least three times. It was a small miracle the church even had a regular choir with the amount of people living in Lower Tadfield.

“I always love Christmas,” Pepper said breathlessly when they were back into the pleasant warmth of the house after a midnight stroll, both enjoying a mug with hot soup.

“Your mum can stay over more often, by the way. This is fantastic,” she said, pointing towards the soup.

Adam gave her a smile, but didn’t say anything.

She wasn’t having any of that. She placed her mug carefully on the coffee table and glared at him.

“What’s up with you, huh? Don’t tell me Anathema has gotten to you. She’s paranoid.”

He shook his head. “It’s nothing bad. I was just thinking about Gabriel.”

Her face scrunched up. “Why in the world would you willingly think about **him**.”

“He did some terrible things in the Bible, didn’t he? He leveled cities to the ground. He had to tell Mary to not fear him, meaning angels were people you had to be afraid of.”

His behaviour puzzled Pepper, but she let him talk.

“I never understood how some people could make such bad decisions. It was always good or bad in the beginning, but as you grow older you have to take all kinds of things into account, and in the end you just try to take the good decision. But you don’t know whether something’s good or bad anymore.” He sighed. “I wonder if I made a terrible decision.”

Pepper looked worried, but as soon as she saw him looking, rolled her eyes. “That’s called growing up. Like the rest of us did.”

“You know what I’m talking about.”
She climbed on the couch from her to his seat and gave him a hug. Nothing more, nothing less. “Don’t worry about that. It’s Christmas.” She felt Adam smiling and released him. She poked him playfully in his side.

“You should really think about taking up a study, though. You can’t just bend the world and live the life,” she grinned.

Adam grinned, too. “Yeah, I’ve been thinking about it. But there’s just too much interesting stuff in the world. I don’t know what to pick.”

“That’s a luxury problem, and you know it,” Pepper said, picking up her soup. The bells of the church tolled twice.

“Hmhm. Maybe something zoology.”

Pepper laughed. “And end up like my little sis. Please don’t.”

Adam got up, stretching his legs. “I’m going to turn in.”

“Okay. Goodnight,” she said.

“Merry Christmas, Pepper.”

“Just go to bed. You’re getting sappy. It's gross.”

She promptly got hit in the face with a pillow. When she threw the thing on the couch, she heard Adam walking upstairs. Pepper grinned as she turned on the radio.

“Merry Christmas, Adam.”
Chapter 15

Chapter Summary

She gave him a blank stare and dug with her foot a hole in the sand. “Whatever. Did you bring it?”

He started to look slightly pale, but nodded and retrieved an envelope out of his jacket. The paper was frayed slightly and there was a suspicious, reddish brown splatter on top of a name written in faded ink.

She smiled broadly. “Thanks!”

You’d think he had given her her ice cream.

For most, 2007 passed by peacefully and after a hectic month and the many promises of New Year’s resolutions, people fell back in their slumber and routine and went on with their life as they usually did. There were few who knew the signs of a proper Apocalypse - let alone more than one version - and the few who tried to warn the rest were mocked.

The End of Times. That was a myth. If there was anything to happen to the human race, it would be due to the sun, or perhaps the exhaustion of natural resources, or anything in outer space happening to bump into the planet. Perhaps unlikely, but not as impossible as experiencing Last Judgement Day in your lifetime.

It was like a cavity in your tooth. Invisible at first. Then it started to hurt and the drill had to get rid of all the decay before the dentist was able to give the tooth a new filling.

That was how Armageddon worked, but the new filling would probably never come. Instead, the dentist would simply destroy the whole tooth; because he was incompetent.

The entire world was incompetent, Gabriel reflected.

As much as he wanted, he couldn’t interfere with Dean’s fate. A soul sold was a soul sold; he could not, by any means, steal it back. * Dean’s soul was destined to go to Hell. As it had been from the day he was born, some devouts would say. And maybe it was, but Gabriel had had the hope it would never come to that deal.

* Besides that, angels didn’t deal in souls; not even those who had turned away from the Host a long time ago. Runaway or not, Gabriel still had standards.

It was strange to realise more than half of that year had passed by already. The day the Hellhounds would pay Dean a visit was coming closer every day. And Gabriel had grown frustrated. With all the rumours he heard from Heaven… it seemed as if Heaven wasn’t fully prepared for what was
Neither were the Winchesters, with how they were stumbling about, Sam desperately trying to find a way to undo the deal. There was no way. It was frustrating to watch. It was like watching a person trying to build a house on sand. Falling apart halfway through. Bah, depressing. He needed a distraction.

“Kali.”

The woman at the table, leafing through a book, didn’t even bother to look up. “I didn’t invite you.”

He gave her a big smile. “Hmm. That’s what surprises are for.”

She stopped turning the pages and moved her head in a slow manner, giving Gabriel an uninterested glance.

“I know. I don’t like your surprises.”

“Oh, Kali,” he said. “No tricks, I promise.”

She shut the book and got up, trailing the deep grooves of the table with a finger as she did so. Without a second thought she tenderly plucked a petal from a single, white rose that was on the table and pulverised the soft material. The rose had not been there a few seconds ago. “Your promises don’t mean much.”

He said nothing. He came closer instead, quickly bridging the gap between them and kissed her. She leant in for a few seconds before taking over, turning the kiss in something more than a fleeting, tender one. Kissing Kali was not unlike kissing fire. Not exactly the same, but similar. She stopped, moving her hand towards his jaw.

“What are you doing here? We broke up.”

He felt her warm breath touching his lips. “No reason,” he murmured. “You still love me.”

“No,” she said. “Liar.”

Later, Gabriel was left wondering who was lying to whom.

A girl sat alone in the sand, watching other children occupying the swings. The swings were old and creaked as they went back and forth. Although looking bored, she made no attempt to try and get a turn on the swings herself, nor did she express interest in any of the other equipment scattered throughout the playground. She just sat there. Without realising it, the other children and even the adults started to walk around her, as if no one wanted to come close.

After about half an hour someone did approach her, but he too wore the expression of someone who was not entirely comfortable. He sat down in the sand next to her. It was time for dinner; the swings were empty and the playground was a lot quieter than before.

“It took you a long time to come here,” the girl accused him.

“You know how it is,” he replied. “British paranoia, and all that.”

“No, I don’t,” she said.
“You could’ve flown here using your wings instead of relying on silly human inventions,” she said after a moment of silence. “You’ve kept me waiting. Do you remember how much I hate being kept waiting?”

More silence.

“I was on the other side of the world,” he defended himself. “Sort of. That’s an exhausting journey.”

She gave him a blank stare and dug with her foot a hole in the sand. “Whatever. Did you bring it?”

He started to look slightly pale, but nodded and retrieved an envelope out of his jacket. The paper was frayed slightly and there was a suspicious, reddish brown splatter on top of a name written in faded ink.

She smiled broadly. “Thanks!”

You’d think he had given her ice cream.

She took it carefully and opened the envelope, peeking at the contents. She seemed satisfied and smiled at him, again.

“Well. I thought you had fallen off the wagon. Seems to me you’re crawling up again. But that’s just you, isn’t it? Making questionable decisions until you see, ah, the light. Like a circle, over and over. But that fits you too, I suppose.”

“I suppose it does,” he said after a while. He pulled himself up, but she grabbed his arm and pushed him down, firmly, with the ease of squatting a mosquito.*

* Squatting a mosquito is not actually all that easy, tiny and fast little buggers. Not for humans, anyway. Lilith would only have to think about it and the mosquito would drop dead.

“Did I say I was done with you?” she asked, eyes wide and glittering.

“I supposed you were,” he said in a calm tone.

The girl regarded him for a moment. “You suppose too much.” She reached out and lifted shaded glasses from his nose. She stared at him intensely, and without warning pinched his arm. He snagged the glasses back from her and gave her a glare.

“What was that for?”

“You’re not possessing anyone,” she said. He was fairly sure it wasn’t actually meant for his ears. “How do you do that?”

“You can’t,” he replied. “I was an angel. You were human. No matter where we are now, we started out differently. That’s why I can do things you can’t. It’s that simple.”

There was a dry sound; a flat hand making contact with skin. Whether she was possessing a little girl or not, her strength was not underestimated.

“You spoke out of line, Crawly,” she snarled. “I’m done with you now.”
He quickly left.

One of the advantages of living in a several decades old building, was that these kind of buildings had the ability and talent to gather dust. You could clean the entire place and by the time you turned your back, a fine layer would be sitting on top of everything, as if you never cleaned at all. Many people regarded this as an inconvenience and a source of irritation.

Aziraphale wasn’t like many people.

It just added that tiny bit extra to make the bookshop all the more unappealing. It sadly didn’t stop many more people from coming, though.

As the books on the bookshelves gathered dust, so did some of his other belongings, and even some objects that really didn’t belong to him at all. And one box that didn’t. That was odd. Furthermore, there was a dust-free trail on the shelf roughly around the width of said box. So Aziraphale gently lifted the box from the shelf, set it on the table and took off the lid. “Oh, bugger,” the angel just said and left it at that.

First he made himself a nice cup of cocoa and sat at the kitchen table, staring at the box. Then he couldn’t stare at it any longer and placed it back, returned to his cocoa and promptly burnt his tongue at the scalding hot liquid.

He was in the middle of his second cup of cocoa and a crossword puzzle when a bell jingled. Ah. The culprit decided to pay him a visit.

Sure enough, there he was, hair slightly tousled. Now, that was rather strange. But there was no time reflecting upon Crowley’s hair, he thought; no, there were far more important matters at hand.

“Come in, dear,” he called. “Do try to close the door properly, the wind is particularly strong today.”

Crowley glanced at the front door, then back at the angel. “You sent me a message,” he said, looking at the amount of dirty mugs in the sink.

“Yes, I did. It is rather important. Please, sit down.”

Aziraphale took his time. He finished the rest of his cocoa, offered Crowley cocoa twice and a few macarons on top of that, and Crowley refused every single time, only growing agitated. Oh, it was subtle, but after knowing someone for 6,000 years, you picked up on some tell-tale signs and other tiny little details.

Crowley was nervous. Good; he should be.

“What is it, angel?” he finally said, impatience getting the better of him.

“I need to talk to you about something,” Aziraphale said. “I’m afraid there was a robbery while I was away.”

“Oh,” said Crowley.

“Fortunately, the thief didn’t touch any of the valuable books,” Aziraphale continued. “Unfortunately, the thief got away with something… far more valuable.” He pursed his lips. “Clearly the thief knew what they were looking for.”
The atmosphere changed.

“Where is it, Crowley?” asked Aziraphale, in a still gentle voice, but with narrowed eyes and a tired expression. “And don’t lie to me. I know you took it.”

Crowley sat perfectly still.

“I had orders,” he said. “I couldn’t ignore them.”

“That’s not what I asked,” said Aziraphale.

He was relieved and frustrated at the same time, both emotions clashing with each other. He decided on a resigned expression.

“Yes, I took it. I don’t know where it is… it is with Lilith.”

Aziraphale closed his eyes for a moment, as if in prayer. “Lilith. The first twisted soul, I presume. The woman.”

He licked his dry lips and slumped in his chair. Not in a casual manner, like he usually did; more the defeated kind. “That one, yeah.”

“And what a cruel fate that was, too,” Aziraphale said softly. He scraped his throat and continued: “You put me in quite the difficult situation, Crowley.”

“In my defense, you shouldn’t have told me you had it in the first place,” said Crowley. “Besides, having to choose between Lilith’s wrath or yours was not a hard decision at all. She is absolutely nuts.” He hoped he did make the right decision.

“There were orders,” he said again, when Aziraphale was silent. He didn’t like it when Aziraphale was silent like that. “I could hardly ignore them. Surely you understand.”

The angel groaned slightly. “You haven’t made this easy for me. What if Gabriel finds out? He’ll have my head.”

Crowley blinked.

“Yes, you’re screwed,” he said.

Aziraphale glared at him.

“...sorry,” Crowley said, and it felt weird saying it. He hadn’t apologised to anyone in a very long time, and the last time had definitely not been an angel, even if said angel was Aziraphale. No, the last time had been Hell, and as Hell’s policy wasn’t approving of apologies in general, even if they were addressed to them, they hadn’t been happy about that either.

Aziraphale gave him a weary smile. A genuine apology from a demon was rare, even if said demon was Crowley.

“There’s nothing we can change about it now, I suppose,” he said. “Did you at least figure out what she wants? She must have realised that the Horn on its own is not doing a whole lot. She’s older than most. She should know how these ancient artefacts work.”

“Oh, she knows,” Crowley replied. “But the Horn doesn’t do nothing for her. It gives her prestige. Like someone owning a Porsche. Or, diving into your views of the world, owning a centuries old Bible.”
Aziraphale frowned at him. “She wants to gather followers.”

“Not just that. She… is the new leader, so to speak. Of Azazel’s army that came through the gate. They’re scattered now. Imagine what they can do* if they’re all going to team up.”

* Neither of them wanted to actually do so, imagining that. Imagination was a powerful thing and while often genius and useful, sometimes best left alone.

“And how tangled are you in this new situation?”

Crowley looked at him with a careful expression. It was an odd question; usually the angel didn’t bother. They occasionally leant each other a hand; they did not ask about jobs in such detail. But there was a first time for everything, and times were definitely changing. Not for the better. There weren’t many he could trust.

“Pretty tangled, I’d say,” he said airily.

“Be careful,” Aziraphale said, not falling for the act and pretend.

Crowley hadn’t thought he would have been able to fool him from the get-go.

“I will.”

For people who were traveling all around the United States and probably had traveled the entirety of the States twice, they probably spent most of their money on fuel. They had stopped at the gas station that morning. While Dean was refueling their classic but easily recognisable car, Sam had went into the small store to buy some food.

He returned with a plastic bag full of it. While they were back on the road, each of them enjoying a two-days-old-but-still-good croissant, Sam was reading aloud from the newspaper. Something had caught his interest.

“A vanishing case, Sam? Really?”

“Why not? It sounds weird enough to be our kind of thing.”

Dean drummed on the steering wheel. “We’re already dealing with a vanishing case. The vanishing of Bela Talbot.”

Sam narrowed his eyes at his brother. “I know. But do we have any leads? No. So we can either sit around and hope she’ll pop up, or we can make ourselves useful.”

Dean grumbled.

“Come on.”

“Alright, humour me. Who went missing and where?”

“Hang on.” He went a few pages back until he found the headline he was looking for. “Here. Missing - Dexter Hasselback last seen in Broward, Florida. It’s practically around the corner.”
Dean finished the rest of the sandwich. He still didn’t look convinced, but sighed. “Fine. We’ll check it out.”

However, neither brother could fully apprehend at the time how life changing that decision was going to be.
Chapter 16

Chapter Summary

When he arrived in Broward, Florida, Dean Winchester was dead.

And then he wasn’t, and Aziraphale watched time spinning back, clocks resetting to eleven, ten, nine, eight am…

Bewildered he went into a restaurant, where he saw a young man pointing at today’s meal. Pig ‘n’ a poke. Tuesday.

It wasn’t Tuesday when he arrived here.

Chapter Notes

"Don't call me Shurley?" I saw that Airplane! reference, SPN writers. (And I approve. In fact, I had been planning to use it way later as a pun. D: )

Aziraphale was no traveler. Not in the sense of wanting to go on a trip and go do some sightseeing, anyway. Oh, he used to be; but after spending six thousand years and then some on Earth made one a seasoned traveler alright, and Aziraphale was certain he had seen most of the wonders of the world.

He didn’t make trips for the sake of travel and the experience; he made trips with a higher purpose in mind. That higher purpose usually included books. Or food. Or other little human things Aziraphale couldn’t get quite enough of.

Or in this case, information.

Now, he couldn’t say that this gloomy little house was one of those little human things he loved, but that aside.

Gingerly he slipped his way inside, his mind registering a few new protection spells last time he had been here. To be fair, it was expected, after the thousands of demons running rampage in the United States. It was only a matter of time before they would spread out to the rest of the world as well, he mused.

The man was alone, as he had been all the other times before when Aziraphale visited him. Yet there were signs of others frequently staying over. Wrappings of food sticking out of the container, the kind of food he surely wouldn’t eat - the kind containing plastic cheese. And another time he had seen clothing hanging over the sofa to dry, clothing at least a few inches too tall. Other hunters in their witchfinder network? Family, perhaps?

The door went open and Aziraphale looked at the gun pointed at his face. He smiled, not at all startled by the sight. “Hello, mister Singer. I had hoped we would have passed these, erm, formalities...
by now.”

“I can’t take any chances,” Robert Singer said tensely and offered him a cup.

When he drank from it and he didn’t turn into a steamy, black pile of goo, hiss, curse or do any of the sort but simply handing it back, the man visibly relaxed and opened the door for him.

“My dear man, I thought you clever enough not to make a deal with demons.”

“I’ve got enough brain cells left to realise that whatever they are offering, it’s not worth it.” He fell silent, leaning back in his chair with a sigh. “It’s not for me.”

“A good friend of yours?” Aziraphale guessed, ignoring the unpleasant feeling in his chest. There was a definite possibility… after all, these hunters had a network not unlike the one back in England, and this man seemed to be in charge of things…

It fit.

“Not me,” Robert said. “That’s not important. You said you were an expert on these things. Can it be undone?”

Aziraphale looked at him. “No,” he simply said. “A demon’s deal cannot be unbroken. It is a binding deal. Only the demon who holds the deals can break it. You sell the most precious thing you own, a demon is not going to back away from this prize.”

“Do you know who does?”

As a matter of fact he did if his assumptions were right, but he was hesitant to tell.

“No. It depends. How more important the deal and the brighter and purer the soul - ”

“So not just any demon, then?” Robert interrupted him.
“Like I said, it depends. It depends on how important that deal was to Hell.” And if this was the deal of Dean Winchester they were talking about, that was a rather important deal indeed.

“A demon’s deal is rather final, I’m afraid,” Aziraphale continued. “It cannot even be delayed; not by methods I know of. I am truly sorry for your friend, but there is nothing I can do. His fate is… I’d say it’s… sealed.”

If Crowley were here, he would have appreciated the irony.

Several hours later, Aziraphale had gotten the confirmation he wanted. It had been for Dean Winchester. Alas, there was nothing they could do about it. However, he supposed, he could give the man a little blessing before he went. Who knew what it was good for. And it never hurt to try and appeal to Heaven a little, especially after the whole fiasco in Lower Tadfield.

However, when he arrived in Broward, Florida, Dean Winchester was dead.

And then he wasn’t, and Aziraphale watched time spinning back, clocks resetting to eleven, ten, nine, eight am…

Bewildered he went into a restaurant, where he saw a young man pointing at today’s meal. Pig ‘n’ a poke. Tuesday.

It wasn’t Tuesday when he arrived here.

The young man was in company of another - he assumed it were the Winchester brothers - and the younger one turned around, eyes growing wide at the sight of him. Before he could wave, say hi, or do any of the sort, he got yanked back.

He was outside this time, watching how a truck stopped a few houses further, with two men jumping out of the truck.

“You are in the way,” someone said to his left.

Aziraphale looked startled.

“Goodness me, Gabriel, what are you doing here?”

Gabriel raised his eyebrows high. “No, I should be asking that. Why aren’t you in your musty little place full of zen and cobwebs?”

The two men opened up the truck and he saw a desk. They carefully lowered the huge thing to the ground. He wondered how that desk was supposed to be delivered - the door didn’t seem big enough.

“There was something I needed to take care of,” said Aziraphale, eyeing the Archangel warily - and perhaps a tad nervous.

“But, but, let’s get little old me out of the way, I won’t bother you any further - ”

He stopped, watching how Sam and Dean Winchester got out of the diner, an arm cutting straight through him. On top of that, the taller of the two seemed rather agitated.
Something was amiss, here.

“Told you it wouldn’t fit,” said the first mover to the second.

“What do you want, a Pulitzer?”

He spun around. “Gabriel -”

But there was a loud bang and he spun around again, just in time to see a person flying after being hit by a car. It was a spectacular crash, if anything; Aziraphale wanted to go and see, trying to make sense of the situation, but Gabriel’s grip on his arm prevented him.

All they heard was Dean’s name being muttered over and over, and time spun backwards again.

He stared wide-eyed at Gabriel.

“What is going on?”

“Don’t interfere, that’s what,” said Gabriel.

“Yes, but -”

Gabriel grabbed his arm again, and instead of time spinning backwards, it went forward, going from early morning to noon in just a few seconds; and it went even further. Evening fell. They slowed back to real time, just hearing the last snippet of: “Who wants Chinese?”

The desk, something the two movers had been struggling with all day, crashed down, on top of Dean Winchester. For a few seconds it was silent, and time spun back again.

Eight am. No, not eight. Seven thirty.

“Right,” said Aziraphale. “I think I’ll go.”

“Yes, off you go. I’d like you to go back to your place, because every second you spend here is one second too many. If I send you something precious, that doesn’t mean you can hobble off to America and get it out of your sight. I was counting on you being practically married to that island. Excuse me, I have a few minutes left to go in there and have pancakes at the diner.”

Aziraphale frowned at him. Things didn’t make sense.

“Move it.”

“One thing,” Aziraphale began.

Gabriel let out an exasperated sigh. “What? Come tell me you lost my precious little trumpet, ey? Because that’s not a joke I’m going to appreciate.”

“No,” Aziraphale said, keeping his face as straight as possible. Luckily he had had a little practise throughout the years. “Castiel contacted me again. They’re asking for you. They want your advice.”

The Archangel glowered at him. “You can tell him he can stick it where the sun doesn’t shine. I’m not coming back. I can’t help them. They don’t want my advice; they want me to fight. Whoever told them I was alive - time’s up. Bye.”

He snapped his fingers; Aziraphale disappeared.
Today, Pepper almost burnt down the apple tree.

It wasn’t intentional but it still happened and it was only because of Adam’s quick thinking (and his quite handy occult powers) that the apple tree was saved from certain death.

The left side of the tree was still slightly blackened, though.

“If you wanted to redecorate the garden, you could have said so,” said Adam with a slight grin. “I reckon you don’t have to set everything on fire first.”

Pepper huffed, then beckoned for Adam to come closer. She was wielding the sword in her hand; the sword Gabriel had given her on a very special and confusing Christmas Eve.

“Look, I can control it!” she said and the flames reappeared, lashing out playfully at Adam.

“And then what?” said Adam, who was a little impressed.

“I don’t know. It’s neat though, isn’t it?” She drew a little circle with the tip of the sword. The flames lingered in the air for a few seconds before disappearing.

“I wonder why he gave it to me in the first place.”

“He said it was for safekeeping,” said Adam. “I’m pretty sure he didn’t mean it for you to play around with it.”

Pepper grinned widely. “But would you have resisted the temptation?”

He mirrored her smile. “No, not really.”

She ran a hand over the sword; the flames died out. She offered the hilt to Adam, who accepted it, but the sword’s flames didn’t appear. It looked just like a regular sword, as far as swords were regular in the twenty first century in the first place. He gave it back.

“Why, though? Why me, and not you?”

“Maybe you were meant to have it,” said Adam. “Balance of the world, and all. You do remember what happened.”

“The memory is fuzzy,” she said. “You are the Antichrist, but I was simply there at the time. I don’t see how I had a significant role from the start, unlike you. I mean. You know.”

“Because you were my friend.” Adam nudged her in the shoulder. “It is just how it happened. I think no one can explain the real technical bits.”

She gave him a half-smile that was more of a worried frown. “I suppose not. D’you think Wensleydale and Brian secretly got their crown and what was it?”

“Nah,” Adam said. “They would’ve told us.”

But Pepper wasn’t so sure. “I don’t know. We haven’t told them about this.” She lifted the sword in the air, catching the reflection of the sun on the cool metal.
“Did you speak with Anathema today?” she wanted to know.

Adam nodded slowly in concentration as he carefully caught a butterfly. He admired the wings as he answered. “I did. I said there was no reason to worry. The omens are anything but good, but they don’t have to mean anything.”

Pepper glanced at him. “That was a lie, wasn’t it?”

Adam let the butterfly go. “Yes. Yes, it was.”

Aziraphale was back in the bookshop. And just about time too, because only minutes after he had set precious books on the counter - he thought he’d better make his trip to the Americas worthwhile if he was going there - and turned on the kettle to make some tea, he got a guest. He figured, that when he had given the new books their new rightful place, the tea would be ready.

Sometimes he liked doing things the human way, even if he couldn’t always be bothered.

This guest wouldn’t be fancying a cup of tea, though.

Aziraphale stared at the blue light. Oh dear.

“Hello?” he called into the blue light. “I am terribly sorry, I wasn’t expecting your call.” He reconsidered his words. “Not that I mean to say you startled me, of course! It’s always delightful to talk with fellow -”

“Hello, Aziraphale.”

Ah. It was the Metatron. Not the angel Aziraphale particularly wanted to talk to. Really, he wasn’t much in the mood to talk to any angel, but if it had to be one speaking from Heaven to him, he’d like it to be Castiel.

Castiel was not the nicest angel he had ever known. But at least he was honest and Aziraphale could appreciate that. In fact, he had rather taken a liking to the younger angel.

The Metatron was silent. Which was odd for the Metatron.

“Aziraphale,” the Metatron started. “Are you hiding something?”

Aziraphale looked faint. “Oh no, good sir. I wouldn’t dare.”

The blue light buzzed a little.

“I am picking up remnants of angels long gone,” said the Metatron. He could vaguely hear other angels laughing and giggling through the call. He reddened; the cheek. Listening into other angel’s calls. As if they had nothing better to do.

“As it were, I just picked up a few old tomes,” said Aziraphale hastily, gesturing towards the books on the counter. “Very rare and very old. They might have been touched by angels. Maybe it lingered.”

He thought he heard an angel cackle, if it was possible for an angel to do so. The Metatron remained unfazed.
“No. There are traces in the air. One very old angel. Cannot pinpoint exactly…”

If there was any word that could describe Aziraphale’s expression, it would be nausea. And that wasn’t even all that accurate.

“Oh, no. I apologise, but I have no clue what you are talking about,” said Aziraphale, wringing his hands.

“Very well,” the Metatron replied. “We have just had word. The Trumpet has been sighted on Earth.”

“Erm… not the Trumpet of the Archangel Gabriel by any chance, sir?” he asked. Oh, he felt so lucky today. He was going to throttle Crowley after all.

“Yes. Get it back and bring it to us.”

Oh. Of course. If only it were that easy. But there was no disobeying orders* - not if they didn’t directly result in the end of the world, anyway - so he simply had to accept and pack his bags. It didn’t mean he liked it.

* While he didn’t regret what he had done on that Saturday, questioning the ineffable plan and everything else around it, it was better not to disobey them too often. He’d rather stay an angel, thank you very much.

There was a jingling sound. The door of the shop had swung open, even though it was firmly locked and the sign said it was closed.

“Angel, I’ve got to share this...” Crowley stopped talking.

“Never mind. I see you’re a bit occupied. I’ll… swing by later.”

And back through the door he went, dashing out as quickly as possible.

Aziraphale closed his eyes and silently prayed.

“The demon Lilith has sounded the Trumpet,” the Metatron said, who hadn’t noticed Crowley’s sudden appearance. At least something was going right today, he thought wretchedly.

“Seek her out and see to it that it returns to our side.”

It was an impossible request. But he didn’t tell the Metatron that. “Yes, right away. Have a good day and, err, may God smile upon you.”

The Metatron didn’t say anything. As abruptly as it came, it went. He glanced at the table. In the meantime, his tea had gotten cold.

It wasn’t Tuesday. As a matter of fact, it was Wednesday, but Gabriel had long since forgotten about the technical details. When he dropped the façade and the whole scene they were in, it would return
to Wednesday, half an hour after seven, one day after the Winchesters drove into town.

He groaned. He was never going to learn. Never! A hundred days they’d been doing this, a hundred days after he made the man shoot Dean. And all Sam cared about, all he wanted was revenge. Revenge or… his brother back. He could practically hear him thinking.

Denser than a floor full of concrete. This was exactly why the world was going apeshit. This was why. Bloody Winchesters too incompetent and caring about the other more than what they do to the world. He supposed it ran in the family.

Caring too much was something he could relate to, but if it were up to him those two idiots weren’t going to make the same mistake. And yet. A hundred days. A hundred days and Sam was still as driven as he was on the first to find him, avenge his brother or make him resurrect the man.

Maybe Gabriel wasn’t a very good teacher, but Sam certainly wasn’t a very good student.

He was fed up with it. Done. A hundred days should have done the trick. But it didn’t, so it was time to end this whole charade.

It seemed Sam was tired of it, too.

“He’s my brother,” he pleaded. *

* Oh, and how Gabriel could relate to that.

“Yup,” Gabriel said. “And like it or not, this is what life’s gonna be like without him.”

But Sam wouldn’t listen. Gabriel hadn’t expected him to. Not after he watched what happened. An absolute trainwreck. Completely derailed. He just wasn’t sure who derailed the train.

“Please,” Sam said. “Just - please.”

Fine. He groaned. “I swear, it’s like talking to a brick wall. Okay, look. This all stopped being fun months ago. You’re Travis Bickle in a skirt, pal. I’m over it.”

Sam seemed confused.

“Meaning what?”

“Meaning that’s for me to know and for you to find out.”

He snapped his fingers.
Chapter 17

Chapter Summary

“You let them escape,” said Lilith. “I don’t like you very much.”

Nancy stared wide-eyed at her, in fear.

Lilith looked at them all. “I think I’ll start with you first. And you two can watch.”

She closed in on Nancy. “I think I’m going to flay you, piece for piece. Shall I start with the scalping first, or last? You can choose.” She laughed, just as a child would when presented with unexpected ice cream.

“It’ll be fun!”

“Hm,” Lilith said. She smiled an unsettling smile and nursed her left hand, where burns and blackened stains were spotting her fingers and palm. It smelled; no, it stank of burnt leather and oil. The body seemed to have a hard time healing the damage, but nevertheless the demon seemed pleased.

She ticked with a pencil against the smooth metal of the object in front of her; it made a pleasant sound and rang in their ears for seconds after.

“Any progress?” she asked, looking at herself in the gleam of the polished metal. Her reflection mirrored her smile.

“He buys the story,” another demon said. “Trust is a big word, but I have saved him a couple times. I think the seed I planted has taken root.”

Lilith smiled even wider. “Great.”

She ticked on the metal again. “Ruby, do you know what this is?”

The demon scoffed. “I was a witch, Lilith. Not a nun. I don’t know.”

Her hand was slowly healing itself, stains and burns vanishing into nothing. The stink however hung still in the room, like thick fog. She looked at her hand, fascinated, before shaking it slightly, as if to speed up the process.

“This is far more precious than the knife I’ve given you,” said Lilith. Her freshly healed fingers hovered over it, but she didn’t dare touching it a second time.

“One of the holy instruments of the Apocalypse.”

Ruby eyed the instrument and hesitantly reached out to it - but just as Lilith, didn’t dare touching it. She had seen what had happened.

“To herald the coming of the Apocalypse,” she said. “Gabriel’s horn, isn’t it?”

Lilith’s smile was all she needed to know, and although she wondered what the demon planned to do
with it, it wasn’t her place. Nor was it her concern. There were far more pressing things to worry about, if a demon could figure out the concept of worry in the first place.

“So tonight we’re going to set it all in motion, right?” said Ruby, not wanting to talk about the holy instrument any longer. “Pitting Sam against you?”

Lilith’s eyes glittered as they turned milky white. “Hm. I’m looking forward to it. Kill as many demons as you want; they’re expendable. All that matters is that in the end, I triumph. The Winchester brothers have to survive, but… the people around them are booking an one way ticket to death.”

Her eyes flickered back to normal and there was a strange mixture of expressions on the child’s face, Lilith’s emotions conflicting and surfacing all at once. “Many demons will see your betrayal tonight. Are you prepared?”

“Yes,” Ruby said breathlessly. “No sacrifice will be too great. I’ll do anything.”

Lilith tilted her head. “That’s what I like to hear. Now, I suggest you leave. I’m spreading word I have this in my possession.”

Ruby was smart; she knew what she meant by that. Few demons were stupid enough to not flock to the demon with the biggest guns. She nodded and got up from her chair.

“Until next time,” she said and left.

Essentially, there were two different types of demons. There were demons who had been angels, once and rebelled with Lucifer in the first war way before the word war was invented. They were defeated and cast away, with Lucifer the leader thrown off Heaven and his fellow angels that sided with him following him. Their beings twisted, not abruptly, but the Fall took a long time, from Heaven all the way to Hell.

Those angels were Fallen angels and were a different sort of demons. They were older, for a start. The younger ones went ice skating on the road to Hell, probably because they remembered what it was like.

They were demons who had been humans, once. It started with Lilith, who couldn’t escape Lucifer’s wrath. Her soul was twisted and in a way, she was the first demon. For the Fallen angels, it took a lot longer.

But Lilith wasn’t the only demon with a human past; there were many, after Hell figured out that making deals with humans was far more lucrative than trying to get humans to sin and hope for the best. How it brought out the worst in humans. There were a few whose minds were far more cruel than any ancient demon was.

Hastur, Ligur. They were terrifying. But neither of them were quite as imaginative as Azazel and Alastair. The ancient demons missed that creative spark humans were known for. The unpredictability. Maggots, after a while, just got old.

There were human demons who remembered their life on Earth, and there were human demons who had fallen so deeply, they only cared about destruction.
There were no Fallen angels who remembered their life in Heaven. All except one; Lucifer. Not even Crowley, who sometimes tried to remember but couldn’t, and sometimes willed himself to forget when he remembered. Forgetting was easier than remembering. It was less painful. And that was why Lucifer wasn’t allowed to forget.

After he had let them go, he started to wonder how much Dean had left. Was it weeks? Was it months? When exactly did it happen? Of course, time didn’t matter in the long run; a demon’s deal could not be unbroken. Every angel knew this.

He sank down on a picnic bench in the park. He had foreseen this - of course he had foreseen this. They all knew it was going to end eventually. He just didn’t appreciate the way how it was going to end.

He had had his eyes shut tight and his hands plastered against his ears. Blind and deaf for all that was around him, because it was easier to pretend.

Everyone knew where the easy road led to, but he had stopped caring about that a long time ago. Still, he started to wonder. Why was Heaven suddenly asking for him after centuries of silence? Why did they think he would change his mind? Did they know something he didn’t?

The wind carried the fluff and the seeds of a dandelion past him. But it was February. Dandelions weren’t supposed to bloom this time of the year in the first place.

As on reflex, he captured one of the seeds and placed it in his hand. Gabriel looked around; But there were no dandelions. The only flowers blooming in the area were snowdrops and crocuses and not even they were fully grown.

Peculiar.

Impulsively he lifted his hand and blew it away, making a silent prayer.

As he watched the seed being picked up by the wind again, someone took a seat next to him.

“How human of you.”

“The place grows on you after a while,” Gabriel admitted, and then wasn’t so sure why he shared that extremely private thought. He looked aside. Another angel. It had to be. And yet, while he didn’t want to be found, exactly, he didn’t run. Something compelled him not to.

“Who are you?” he asked, the usual snark strangely absent from his voice. He sought for recognition, familiarity, but didn’t find any.

The stranger smiled. It was a sad smile.

“I hear your wish,” he replied, answering another, unspoken question. “I am not here to take you back. Your secret is safe.”

Gabriel frowned. “I didn’t say anything.”

“It’s clearly written on your face. Sometimes you seem so very human.”

“Who - ”
“Gabriel.” A hand was on his cheek, now, and another one on his knee. It was strangely comforting. “You are so lost. But I think I am beginning to understand. I understand why you made your decision. It was disappointing, impulsive and selfish, but I think I can see why.”

Gabriel stared at him, bewildered, mask dropped. The ethereal presence of this angel was completely cloaked, and unless Gabriel wanted to attract unwanted attention to himself, he couldn’t figure out who was hiding behind the human face.

But he could only come to one conclusion. The Healer. The Kindhearted. It had to be. That dandelion was no coincidence.*

“Raphael?” he called out the name.

The stranger didn’t confirm nor deny it, but patted him on the knee. “It has been a long time since you left, hasn’t it?”

* The dandelion has been historically used as a medicinal herb in Europe, North America and China. More importantly to Gabriel, you can also brew wine from it.

Gabriel looked away.

“Why have you come?” he demanded.

“I heard your prayer. That’s all.”

He left before Gabriel could ask him anything else.

“Oh, hey there,” said Nancy, when she saw a girl coming in, accompanied by a woman.

“Excuse me,” the little girl asked.

Nancy Fitzgerald smiled at her. She was a young woman - a secretary working in a police office, and she just had had the night of her life. Not saying it was a good night at all, but it was definitely a night she’d remember.

She had met demons that night. She had met bad people who weren’t really bad people and she even had met a demon who wasn’t really a bad demon, no matter what her religion told otherwise.

She had been ready to sacrifice herself for all these strangers, because it was the right thing to do. But the others stopped her and somehow, the two brothers, Sam and Dean Winchesters escaped. The demons were gone. Everything was back to normal; or… as normal as possible, at least.

There were countless of bodies to be cleaned up around the building.

Overall, she thought she was keeping herself together pretty well.

“One’s really tall and one’s really cute,” the girl continued.
After everything, Nancy had to laugh a bit. After everything, there was just something about the pure innocence of a little child that made the world that little bit brighter again, after it had grown so dark in just a matter of hours.

“What’s your name, sweetie?”

The girl took a breath. “Lilith.”

Her eyes turned white as Nancy stepped back, shocked, a policeman behind her looking up in alarm. Lilith. She saw the FBI man, Victor Henriksen making a turn around the desk, closing in on Lilith, but the girl simply stretched her arm out, and her hand, knocking Hendriksen away. Everything went light, bright, white - she heard screams in her head, and then a moment later she realised they were all screaming, including herself. She just didn’t couldn’t seem to stop.

The light dimmed, just enough to see the others. The policeman. The woman Lilith had come with. The FBI. All of them pinned in place. Lilith stood in the middle.

“You let them escape,” said Lilith. “I don’t like you very much.”

Nancy stared wide-eyed at her, in fear.

Lilith looked at them all. “I think I’ll start with you first. And you two can watch.”

She closed in on Nancy. “I think I’m going to flay you, piece for piece. Shall I start with the scalping first, or last? You can choose.” She laughed, just as a child would when presented with unexpected ice cream.

“It’ll be fun!”

Heaven was an indescribable place. It didn’t look like anything on Earth, simply because what was found on Earth, despite the native flora and fauna, was created and designed by humans. Heaven was decidedly not designed by humans, which was probably a good thing.

No one wanted to go to Earth 2.0 after Earth 1.0 had been such a disaster.

Where Earth was created in the morning, a little more than six thousand years ago,* Heaven existed way before that, way before time existed.

*But of course, when Earth came into existence, time wasn’t invented yet either, so it was up for debate when Earth really happened. Nevertheless, Earth’s birthday was on the 21st of October and she wished people would celebrate it a little more.

After the first humans started dying and their souls started to ascend to Heaven, as they were promised, they started to experience Heaven as the angels did, but not entirely; their senses were dulled. Oh, they were brighter and more intense than things ever had been on Earth, but their senses came nowhere near that of an angel.

For a while everything was good and all, until Heaven slowly started to morph into something else.
Ideas happened. Opinions. And slowly but surely, everyone started to get their own views on how Heaven was supposed to look like, and having to deal with the sheer disappointment of souls when they got to Heaven tired out the angels, even if they never got tired.

They heard that Hell invented bureaucracy and Heaven, not wanting to be left behind on the moving train forward, wanted in on the trends.

Everyone could get their own, personal little heaven. For some this included clouds behind a golden gate and angels plucking at harps. For others it looked like Paris, Rome, Tokyo, what have you. For some it looked like their house with white picket fence, dog and children. And then there were some who wanted peace and spent their Heaven largely alone. A nice, rustic cottage at the lake.

Of course, angels did, and would not ever experience Heaven as such, but for the humans it was nice Heaven was so tailored to their wishes. For most it was a dream come true, or simply a safe haven. Maybe that was what it was all about. A safe haven, protected by the universe’s greatest guardian.

Well. If the Lord were actually there.

Despite the concept being hundreds of years old, Castiel was still getting used to the concept. He still saw Heaven as it always had been, but it received certain additions. Crossing from one little Heaven to another was new to him.

At the moment he was trying to find a certain individual. There were traces, lingering in Heaven, faintly but there. One glance at this Heaven told him he wasn’t going to find him here. It was a human construct, filled with… well, confusing things, but it appeared to be liquid in glass containers. The person this Heaven belonged to was enjoying it, apparently.

And as stealthy as Castiel was trying to be - for an angel - the person called him out.

“Hello?”

Castiel stiffened and stood still.

The person got up lazily from their chair, placed the bottle of beer on the nearest table and made his way over to the angel.

“That’s new,” the person remarked. “I’ve never had visitors before.”

Castiel looked at him and learnt his name.

“I’m an angel of the Lord,” he told Ash. “I’m not visiting you.”

Ash squinted his eyes at him. “Whatever.”

And Castiel left, because he suddenly knew where to go.

A few moments later he arrived in Eden. Another angel gave him a friendly smile. He inclined his head.

“Joshua,” Castiel greeted him.

Joshua took a few seconds to answer. “Castiel! It has been a while. It is good to see you.”
“It is good to see you too, brother,” said Castiel. They were rehearsed words, but genuine all the same. He inclined his head.
“You are looking for Balthazar,” said Joshua when no question came.

Castiel didn’t know how he knew, but it was true, so he didn’t say anything. There was something Balthazar had said, something he mentioned during their last encounter and it had given Castiel… something to think about. Balthazar knew something he didn’t, and while that never bothered him before, it did bother him now.

“I apologise,” Joshua said. “I don’t know where he is. He is not in Heaven. Not anywhere in Heaven.”

“He is supposed to be in Heaven,” Castiel said.

Joshua simply gave him a smile.

“You are supposed to be on your post.”

Castiel casted his eyes down. It was true, however. Joshua was good at speaking the truth.

“Go back,” the angel said. “He doesn’t want to be found. Not by you, even if he has confided in others. He will return to Heaven when the time is right.”

Castiel was silent for a while. “Do you…”

But he didn’t finish the question, because… of course Joshua had faith. All angels had faith. They had faith in their Lord and faith in their fellow Archangels and faith in their fellow brothers. They had faith in all of their Lord’s creations and faith in the Apocalypse. That was how an angel was supposed to be.

A tiny, really, really tiny part of Castiel thought otherwise. He didn’t know what it was. He couldn’t describe it - and he certainly couldn’t voice it to any angel, not even Balthazar.

But knowing that Gabriel was alive and keeping himself from the Host deliberately was enough to instill doubt in Castiel’s being. Even if he didn’t know it yet.

Castiel went back to his post, just as he was supposed to.
Chapter 18

Chapter Summary

Before Balthazar could reply that no, he had never gone to the Louvre or the Sistine Chapel, and that he could care less about human crafted handiwork, when they heard a soft thump. Aziraphale looked at the door again.

“Er,” he said to his visitor. “I'm terribly sorry, but – excuse me.”

The angel nodded and disappeared.

When he opened the door he saw Crowley lying on the ground in a disarray of limbs.

Chapter Notes

Urk, that took way longer than I wanted to update. I had lost my outline due to a hard disk crash and felt very unmotivated to try and figure out what my detailed plan was. However a week ago I found some snippets in past Skype chats, kicked myself into business and rewrote the outline. And tada, new chapter. Story's back on the road!

Also ... WARNING... spoilers for the fifth Star Wars movie that happened just a few decades ago. Can't be too careful.

The phone rang. These days Crowley was inclined to pick up his phone immediately, for it could be several reasons to why people* were calling him and none of them good. Yet, what would happen to him when he didn't pick up the phone was probably even worse, so he drew out his mobile phone and brought it to his ear.

“Hi.”

He could practically feel the smile of the caller on the other end. Whether this meant good means was debatable.

“Can I just say, job well done? It was excellent,” said Fergus, purring into the phone.

It put Crowley on edge.

* Not-people looking like people that was – or not-people looking like not-people, not actual people. He never gave out his number to anyone human. In case they ever rang his number by accident, he'd let it hop straight to his second voice mail, which only contained the biggest spoilers** from books, movies and television from the last fifty years. He updated this voice mail every single year and took great pleasure out of it.
** Dark Vader is Luke's father. 

“I'm just doing as asked,” said Crowley. “Honour to, erm, Satan, and all that.”

“Because you have been so concerned with that lately,” said Fergus. “I want information.”

He materialised a glass of wine in front of him and drank it in one go. Refilling the glass, he sauntered over to his pristine white sofa and made a plant spontaneously shake off its dead leaves.

“I believe,” began Crowley, wondering how to approach this subject with tact, because Fergus wasn't one of those demons who reacted well to being beaten into the right mindset, “that our deal didn't quite work that way. You should be the one giving me information.”

He was suddenly very aware of a clock ticking three floors underneath him.

“I believe is a strange choice of words for a demon,” Fergus replied, voice smooth and light and uncomfortable. Like Crowley's sofa.

“Six thousand years, the humans rub off on you.”

“Or so you told me before. You've been resourceful lately. I've been checking out your file and it says you're awfully incompetent.”

Crowley made a noise of protest. Old school demons were the worst. That said, the modern ones weren't all that pleasant either.

“I disagree,” Fergus said. “You and I, we have different ideas on how to run the show. We've talked about it before. You can be my right hand man, when I have this place under my command.”

“If that's all fine with you, I don't have any interest in playing the crossroads market. I'm not good in that sort of thing.”

“I'm not talking about the crossroads,” Fergus drawled. “I'm painting a bigger - ”

“Got to go,” Crowley interrupted him and pressed away the call, eyes moving to his apartment door. He slid his phone back in his jacket and gestured to open the door.

The phone buzzed against his leg.

“They told me I'd find you here.”

He glanced over at his visitor, who turned out to be some kind of demon he hadn't seen before, and wasn't as relaxed as she tried to be. She carried herself stiffly. His phone buzzed some more.

“Who are you?”

She had her hands behind her back and looked innocent. A lost sheep, as Aziraphale would sometimes say, the kind of person he'd miracle a little something for. Or easily corruptible, as Crowley would say, and would undo anything what Aziraphale had created.

“Lilith sent me. Can I come in?”

He just nodded. His phone kept buzzing, so he took it out. Three texts from Fergus and counting. Then Crowley felt something and craned his neck to look behind him.
There the other demon stood. She looked almost remorseful and uneasy; one hand empty, the other one holding a knife. The other end of the knife was was firmly lodged in his back. She took back her weapon.

“Lilith sends her regards,” she said, and fled the scene as Crowley crumpled down.

The phone stopped buzzing.

Meanwhile, Aziraphale was doing his accounts. He thought it to be proper and would feel guilty if he didn't do his accounts, even if one took into account that his slightly improper ways to never sell books had a success rate of over ninety-five percent.

He didn't do his accounts on a sleek, high-end, just released laptop and it didn't have as many functions as these sleek, high-end, typically Crowley computers usually had, but he could do his accounts on the old thing and that was good enough for him. Last week Crowley had tried to get him to replace his computer with something better, with fast internet and spiffy computer programs and what else they were inventing these days, but Aziraphale had put his foot down. He certainly didn't need all that. His and Crowley's needs were vastly different. He had put it like this; Aziraphale needed the core, Crowley the decor.

He was rather cross with Crowley.

Crowley knew this, too, and had not visited him in a while. Oh, there was that time that he dashed in when he was conversing with the Metatron, but Aziraphale had had hardly any time to give him attention. Crowley had dashed out just as quick and never returned afterwards.

The entire bookshop started to shake.

This wasn't Aziraphale's first earthquake however, and as he did not sense any nearby human beings in distress, he deduced it was a pretty local earthquake. Books moved in their shelves and tea was splashing over the rim of his cup. It threatened to throw the Further Nife and Accurate Prophecies from the table and he quickly rescued it, holding it tight as another (far cheaper and less important) book slid and slowly made its way to the edge.

As sudden as it had come, it had stopped, and Aziraphale placed his book gingerly back on the table, cleaning up the splashed tea and rearranging some thin books back into a neat pile.

He was unsurprised to find another angel strolling into his store. It was, however, not Gabriel at all, but an angel he momentarily couldn't place.

“Hello,” Aziraphale said cordially, for it was one of his brethren, and it was not the Metatron. As an angel, he loved everyone equally, of course, but as Aziraphale, some of these equally loved ones made him nervous.

“Hi,” said the angel, rather lazily, and these manners reminded him oddly of Crowley. “Gabriel asked me to send a little shake-me-down your way.”

The angel put his hands in his pockets and slouched. “Of course I had no other choice but to oblige. So terribly sorry about the inconvenience.” Aziraphale secretly suspected that the angel wasn't that sorry at all, and had rather enjoyed himself with Gabriels request.

“Don't fret about it, dear boy,” Aziraphale replied.
The angel extended a hand. “Balthazar.”

“What a peculiar name,” he said.

“Not as peculiar as Aziraphale,” Balthazar said, the corner of his mouth tilted that could pass for a smirk and a soft smile at the same time.

Although Aziraphale did definitely see some similarities between Balthazar and Crowley, there were more differences than he first anticipated. The way the angel carried himself was still strangely unnatural and straight, even as he slouched and sauntered around the place. Their personality was a little similar, perhaps, but the difference was between six thousand years of experience on Earth and a few months or so. Balthazar, for example, was not used to the practise of breathing.

“So,” Balthazar said conversationally, “I heard you lost a little something. I can help you get it back.”

Aziraphale offered him some tea.

“The Metatron sent you, didn't he? I do appreciate the help,” said Aziraphale, once they were both seated with a cup of tea. The other angel wasn't touching the cup at all, ignoring it for the sake of other, more important things to focus on. He himself was dropping some sugar cubes in his own tea and stirred it gently.

“Nah,” Balthazar said. “I don't get sent. I talked with our good wayward hiding friend, and came to the conclusion that it's in the best of everyone's interests if I get the horn back for you. In return for... something small, of course.”

“A rather free spirit, aren't you?” replied Aziraphale.

“I'm not as self-sacrificing as some of our kin,” admitted Balthazar.

Aziraphale took a sip of his tea. “No. You remind me a little bit of my friend. What is it that you would like in return?”

Balthazar didn't waste the opportunity. “Your sword.”

To Aziraphale's credit, he lowered his cup gently and looked calmly at the other angel.

“I am afraid I do not have it in my possession.”

“I thought you had found it again,” said Balthazar, the smirk gone. He sounded confused.

Aziraphale's cheeks coloured involuntarily. There were a few human habits he embraced, and some he was not so fond of, and this clearly belonged into the latter category.

“Er, yes, but it seems that I, er – misplaced it somewhere.”

Balthazar gave him a disbelieving look. “How can one lose a sword? Twice?”

Aziraphale drank the rest of his tea. “Since you are so adamant about it,” he said with a tinge of irritation, “the Anti-Christ somehowmiracled it away.”

“That is a shame,” said Balthazar after a moment of silence. “But there's something else I would like.”

Aziraphale nodded and gestured for him to continue. His eyes flickered towards the door. Something was amiss. He couldn't quite put his finger on it; it was nothing about this unfamiliar angel and he
wasn't *too* concerned about Gabriel's wrath. The Metatron would not show itself for another few days at least. Still, there was something in the air that gave him chills.

He smiled at his visitor.

“And what might that be?” he asked, refilling his cup without another thought.

“There is this amulet,” Balthazar hummed. “It shines with a bright light when - ”

“In the nearby presence of our Lord and Father,” Aziraphale filled in. His steady breath had become irregular for just a few seconds. “They say it is lost.”

“They say it is on Earth,” Balthazar corrected him. “You have been here for ages.”

He sagged a little in his chair. “That might be, but I have never been able to lay my eyes on it. They say it is lovely though, that it was more beautiful than the Louvre and the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel combined, which I think is the pinnacle of human art.* Have you ever been there?”

* It was true; he loved the Sistine Chapel and has been there more than few times. There had been a period where he visited so often that people asked if he worked there, and if he could tell them something about the paintings, and he had obliged.

Before Balthazar could reply that no, he had never gone to the Louvre or the Sistine Chapel, and that he could care less about human crafted handiwork, when they heard a soft thump. Aziraphale looked at the door again.

“Er,” he said to his visitor. “I'm terribly sorry, but – excuse me.”

The angel nodded and disappeared.

When he opened the door he saw Crowley lying on the ground in a disarray of limbs. Behind him stood a woman – a girl, really, who was possessed by a demon. He winced. Possessing someone was such a messy business.

The demon pointed a gun at him, and if he wasn't slightly concerned about the state Crowley was in on his doorstep, he would have gently reminded her that a gun was not going to do all that much to his being.

“Don't smite me,” she said. She kicked the Crowley lump softly with her foot. Nothing happened. “He told me to bring him here.”

“Oh dear,” said Aziraphale, looking at Crowley and then back at the girl. “How kind of you. It is really quite unusual for your sort to help each other out.” He reached out to pat her on the shoulder, but she only stepped back.


Aziraphale smiled and turned his attention to the demon at his feet.

“Get up, dear boy,” he said. “You are not actually unconscious. I can hear you think.”

Crowley prompted rose and dusted himself off and grinned back, although he was looking pale.
“Never thought my thoughts were that loud.”

“They are,” Aziraphale said. “I find them quite deafening. Care for a cuppa?”

“Please,” said Crowley without thinking, who walked slowly into the bookshop without his usual swagger and coughed.

He sat down at the kitchen table, on the exact same chair Balthazar had perched on minutes before. This however wasn't as remarkable as you'd think, seeing as Aziraphale had only two chairs at the table that didn't have books on it. Crowley idly picked up a book from the nearest pile and heaved a sigh.

Aziraphale tutted.

“Give me a break,” he said. “I just got stabbed by a bloody demon. I think it was supposed to kill me.” He gestured vaguely towards his torso.

“In your chest?”

“My back.”

“Oh, of course,” replied Aziraphale. “Let me.”

It was healed in a bit and a yiffy, and Crowley was feeling much better.

“What are you doing anyway?” he asked immediately, waving the book around. “Good Omens of the Seventeenth Century?”

Aziraphale perked up. “Oh, I got the entire set now. Truth be told, I thought the Good Omens collection would be... bigger.”

He raised an eyebrow. “There are only so many centuries to write about, angel.”

“You know what I mean. They are awfully thin.” Aziraphale looked sadly at the pile. “The Nineteenth is no bigger than a pamphlet, really.”

“No surprise there,” Crowley muttered, who had slept through most of it. He left the books for what it was and picked up the sheet of paper that had been wedged halfway. He held it up and shook it, as if to shake the creases and folds out of the paper, and as such it happened precisely so.

“Really?” he said, glancing over the paper to Aziraphale.

Aziraphale wrung his hands. “I don’t see any harm in covering all the possibilities.”

“Give that old bat a rest,” Crowley muttered. “I’ve had enough of Agnes Nutter for the rest of my life, and that's saying something.”

That certainly was. Aziraphale was pondering if one could truly have had enough for the rest of an, for now, immortal life, until one got inconveniently whisked out of existence, and all that. While he did not quite entertain the thought of watching the Sound of Music for all of eternity, he would also find it regretful if he could never watch it again.

Crowley suddenly winced.

“Say, Aziraphale – I think I’m going to lay down for just a –”
But his jaw went slack and so went the rest of his body, his head missing the table completely. As he fell from his chair, Aziraphale moved and locked the shop. He came back to Crowley, who lied completely still.

He rolled him over. As he touched Crowley's back, his finger tips were burning and the demon – there was no other word for it – smoldered.

It smelled oddly like marshmallows.

“Nothing?” Sam asked, trying to ignore how much it had sounded like a whine.

“Nothing,” Robert Singer's voice repeated in the phone. “I talked to my English contact, but nothing at all. I'm sorry, kid.”

He started to play with the pen in his hands, and clicked it again and again onto the paper, slowly morphing it into a steady rhythm. He eyed the door.

“Listen, Bobby, I was thinking. There is someone we could ask.” He fell silent for a second, took a deep breath and plunged. “The Trickster.”

He had rendered Bobby completely speechless. Then: “Are you out of your mind?”

“I know! I know. It sounds crazy,” he amended. It wasn't exactly his first choice, either.

“But think about it. For someone who just gives out just desserts, he's pretty knowledgeable on all that is happening in the world. How does he know about Dean's deal? How is he so sure that it's going to happen no matter what? Maybe he knows something else.”

“Oh, I don't know. Maybe because it's a creature and a demigod and has connections to all that is unholy,” Bobby scoffed. “It probably has some demons for company.”

“But,” Sam said, because he was not ready to give up so soon, “we could use him. We could trick him into giving us information. He must have information that he isn't sharing with us. Perhaps he does have ways to undo the deal. We'll just have to convince him into sharing them with us.”

It had sounded implausible in his own thoughts and downright impossible when spoken aloud, but there had to be something.

“Tricking the Trickster? No, it is best if you stay far away from him. We'll keep looking. Don't seek him out, hear ya?”

A key card was held against the door and the door opened, revealing his brother looking disgruntled with a few plastic bags full of food.

“Thanks, Bobby,” he said and ended the call.

“Bobby had anything new?” Dean said, unloading his bags. He held up a wrapped package. “They only had vegan burgers. Can you believe it?”

“Dean - ”

“Not a single normal one! Oh, but they had your salad shake or however you call that crap. Of course.”
“Dean,” Sam said.

His brother stilled.

“I thought we agreed that you'd stop pretending everything's fine. We only have weeks.” He met Deans eyes. “Bobby didn't have anything.”

“Nada.” Dean said. He tossed Sam a pear, before getting the rest of the groceries out. “I thought you'd like that. Health freak.”

He stopped rummaging in the bags, then, and looked at Sam. “We'll just have to find Bela. No more detours. No more – zombies – and doctor Frankenstein. No more books that gets us squat. Tracking down Bela is the only way.”

With that, he opened a beer.

Dandelions were funny flowers. No one wanted them in their garden. Not really. The thick stem was unappealing and its yellow petals unassuming. Instead they littered the meadows and the side of the roads, turning green fields of grass into green fields of grass with blotches of yellow. As if someone was painting said meadow and accidentally let yellow paint drop onto the canvas, and before they realised it was too late.

But then the yellow petals fall, and the weed turns into a round ball of silver, puffy, fluffy and soft tufts, each carrying a seed, spreading them wherever the wind brings them. From unassuming they became irresistible; people plucked them or lowered themselves, and blew. They watched it go, each seed going into all kinds of directions, where the wind picked them up, and they made a wish.

People made wishes upon throwing coins in fountains. People made wishes upon seeing a falling star, or perhaps a comet. People made wishes on their birthday, when the cake was presented to them, and they blew out the candles.

People made wishes on the seeds of the dandelion. People made wishes on a lot of things, and he found it charming; to him it seemed like a prayer, somewhat.

He thought of Gabriel, and the talk they had had. Gabriel was rather like a dandelion. Unappealing, unassuming, but well-liked when the time was right.

Dandelions. No one wanted them in their garden. No one, except for a few. He tucked a few of them in a glass jar and filled it with water.

He whispered a wish.

One of the dandelions turned white in the span of a few seconds, and a single seed separated itself from the rest. He opened the window for the seed to pass through, and watched it go.

He smiled.

Then he clapped in his hands, and dust darted around him like butterflies on a sunny summer day. It was time for some gospel to be written and create history.
They listened to dewdrops falling slowly from leaf to leaf and little insects crawling and fluttering through stems and petals. It was quiet; but it wasn't silent. It was never silent in the garden. Unlike some other parts of Heaven, it was just so full of life.

For many angels this was their favourite place.

After a while, Castiel asked a question.

“What is a train?”

Ligur's arm had fallen off again. It had been nothing short of a miracle that he was alive at all – as much as alive meant to proper medieval-minded demons like Hastur and Ligur – but his recovery had come with a few annoyances. For some reason, his right arm never wanted to stick to the rest of his body. Now, this was inconvenient whenever he had to go to Earth, and in Hell he was just seen carrying a bit of himself everywhere.

It was irritating him.

Some low ranking demons were currently sewing it together.

“What's going on over there?” said Ligur, who saw shadows flickering around the corner, but couldn't quite figure out what was happening.

“They're celebrating,” answered Hastur, who was in a humanoid shape – more or less - and attempted to lean against the wall with his current form.

“Oh,” said Ligur, who nearly swatted away one of the tending demons.

“Careful where you put that thing,” he grumbled. “What are they celebrating for? Is just a soul. Is not nearly as exciting after a while.”

Hastur shrugged. “It's Dean Winchester. He's a big deal.”

“I dun care about him bein' a big deal,” Ligur said, glaring at the demons around him. “Is not like he's going to stay here forever.”

Hastur shrugged again.

“You are done, sir, duke, sir,” said one of the demons to Ligur.

He grunted. “It better stay on.”

The demons scurried away, a little too fast and relieved to get away from their superiors. Most young demons weren't fallen, but originally human after all, and while there had definitely been something twisted and wicked in their souls, they were usually very, very afraid of the fallen angels. Hastur and Ligur didn't instill as much fear as, say, Beelzebub, but they still got an appropriate amount of
* Crowley usually earnt this kind of respect, too, until the demons actually met him in person, and thought by themselves: is this it?

“It'd be nice if I could have a round,” said Ligur, now being able to look around the corner and grinning widely at the sight. “We don't do that nearly as often anymore, breaking them humans.”

Hastur shrugged a third time. “Dunno. I don't think Alastair's going to share.”

The two demons looked into the room that was prepared especially for Dean Winchester, who had been strapped on some kind of typical medieval torturing device. For those with a weak stomach we won't go into details, but let it just be said that the device wasn't entirely scrubbed clean from blood, hair, flesh and organs.

If demons had ever invented the dentist, then this was how it would have looked like, and then the entire human population would have developed a fear of the dentist, as opposed to only half the population.

“Alastair's having fun,” Hastur continued. “Still, would be nice.”

“Yeah,” echoed Ligur.

In front of them, Dean told Alastair to stick it where the sun didn't shine.

In his dreams, Meg was telling him a story.

“I like to say,” Meg said, grinning widely. “That salvation was created for sinners. That's what he said, and he smiled, and then his face when I let him know who I really was – ha! He really believed demons couldn't get into his stupid little church.”

Crowley laughed with her, because he wanted to keep her on his side, but he knew he would think twice before setting foot in a church. Even, as she phrased it, hallowed ground would have no power over stronger demons and fallen angels, he was hesitant to try it out for the heck of it.

Meg's face changed into the demon who stabbed him, and then into Lilith, and then he woke up.

He discovered he was lying on a sofa. It wasn't his sofa, for it was oddly comfortable and soft, and it was in a hideous colour. It also couldn't be Aziraphale's sofa, because he didn't remember Aziraphale having a sofa. It did seem to be Aziraphale's kind of sofa nevertheless, and when he lifted his head a little more, he did see the angel bustling about in his own kitchen.

Then his sight got blocked by a pair of jeans, and when he wanted to get up, he got pushed back down.

“Easy,” said Gabriel. “But if you want to faint like a girl in a fifties movie for the third time today, go ahead.”

He narrowed his eyes at the jeans. He didn't remember fainting.
“Oh, good,” said Aziraphale and came towards them. “You're awake. It has been a few weeks.”

The confusion must have been written on his face, because Aziraphale's voice took on a softer tone. “You had fallen seriously ill.”

The angel helped him sit upright and promptly left a cup of cocoa in his hands.

“This better not be the cuppa you had promised me a few weeks ago,” Crowley tried to joke.

Gabriel groaned and sat on the armrest. He looked positively pissed off, and in his dazed state he suddenly remembered that Gabriel had a pretty good reason to look like that, and now warily moved slightly to the left, away from the Archangel.

Gabriel had seen his movement and scoffed. “Yeah, you better be afraid. I heard you stole it.”

“I'm not afraid,” Crowley said, but he didn't take his eyes off Gabriel. “Just somewhat concerned, that's all.”

“You have such a way with words. Let me recap for you, yeah? One, some of those demons of yours got their grubby hands on the Colt. Which, by the way, I'm very tempted to shoot you with.”

Crowley made a noise of protest.

“Oh, shut up. Two, you gave my horn away to adorable little Lilith, who proceeded to blow it and alerted – everything, basically, except for the humans. Thanks for that, by the way. You're just like the Winchesters, and that's no compliment - ”

“I have a question about that,” Aziraphale slid in serenely into the conversation, voice gentle as always, as if Gabriel hadn't promised him lands and fields of doom just a few hours prior.

“I thought you said you were the only one who was able to sound the horn.”

Gabriel's eyes were speaking volumes. Rage and calmth fought a violent battle, and calmth only won it just barely. “Apparently the horn is a mystery even to me. Mysterious ways and all that, you know how that crap goes.”

Crowley made a noncommittal noise. He usually didn't admit he was afraid, and him being afraid didn't happen all that much in the first place. At least, not when there wasn't an Apocalypse going on. But the noise of Gabriel's horn... it had resounded within him when he heard it, an hollow, inhuman sound, both too shrill and too deep for human ears, or even for dogs and most other animals (presumably). If he had to describe the sound, he would have tried describing it as three ghouls and a poultergeist locked up in a closet, and that didn't even come close to the truth. There hadn't been anything musical about it.

“Oh, yeah,” Gabriel continued, clearly not caring about whatever Crowley was thinking. “And Dean Winchester just arrived in Hell. Freaking hurr-ay. I mean, we all knew it was gonna happen, but now it has happened, and you know what? Hell is holding all the cards. We've got nothing. I've got to thank you two useless idiots for that.”

Crowley slumped back, still holding the cocoa and threw his head backwards.

“You amaze me,” he said. “You keep harping on how it's going to happen anyway, and how you want no part in it, and yet you complain.”

Gabriel's face contorted and grabbed the demon by the collar, despite Aziraphale's protests. Crowley
was still recovering, after all, and they weren't even sure what had happened to get him out of business like that.

“I don't expect you to actually understand,” he said in a low voice. “But this is my family we're talking about. I might have a front seat for the show, but it doesn't mean I have to like it. Capiche?”

Crowley nodded, and the angel let him go.

“Now, what's up with you? How did you get your ass kicked?”

Crowley glared at him, but he didn't put a lot of effort into it and instead of took a nip from his drink, which pleasantly warmed him from the inside up, and then drank the rest in one go. He let the cup vanish.

“A demon I didn't know stabbed me with a dagger, or something. She, err, came from Lilith.”

That grabbed Gabriels interest. “Oh?”

“I'm pretty sure it was supposed to kill me,” Crowley said lightly.

“Evidently it did not.”

“I was lucky,” replied Crowley. “I called in a favour.”

Aziraphale nodded, remembering the demon on his doorstep.

“So you fell out of grace by Lilith,” Gabriel immediately said.

“Well,” said Crowley. “That's one way to put it. I think I know too much.”

“Do you?” Gabriel asked shrewdly.

“Hell if I know.”

Aziraphale, who had been mostly silent throughout the discussion, took Crowley's cup from wherever he had vanished it to and brought it to the kitchen. He returned with his arms full of papers and two books, books Crowley immediately recognised.

“Did you actually find anything useful in there?” he said, gesturing towards them.

“A lot of it is incredibly vague,” Aziraphale sighed. “And – well, it's not exactly about us, but about Anathema Device.” His nose wrinkled. “There are some inappropriate things written about her. Even when gifted with the Sight, one should not put those words to paper where everyone can read it.”

Crowley bent over to Gabriel. “Since when has he gotten prude?”

“He isn't?” Gabriel said, genuinely astonished about this.

Crowley smirked. “I firmly believe he isn't ever since I saw him getting all giddy about obtaining an extended version of the Canticle of Canticles* and quoting it to me for weeks.”

It was pretty funny watching Aziraphale's skin going slightly puffy and red.

“I meant nothing by that, and you know it,” said Aziraphale. “You twist my words, you old snake.”

Crowley just grinned.
*Also known as the Song of Songs or the Song of Solomon. Some people write it off as a beautiful love song, whether that be between two people or between God and Israel, others see it as sexual, while some even go as far as describing it as erotic.*

“For the record, I never want to be invited to his garden,” said Gabriel. He hopped from the armrest and had the intention to leave the two alone, for there wasn't much they could do at this point anymore. Crowley held him by the arm.

“One question,” Crowley said. “How come we haven't been murdered yet by you?”

The angel shook his arm free. “It draws too much attention. But I am mad. Next time you're in trouble, don't come running for me. You really blew it this time.”

Gabriel disappeared without so much as a sound.

“He's quite the character,” sighed Aziraphale. It was almost admirable how unfazed Aziraphale seemed to be when dealing with an Archangel, who was so much higher in rank than Aziraphale was, until one realised that the one Archangel he was dealing with wasn't so much of a threat. When one was hiding, one couldn't do all those terrifying, terrible things that Archangels were known for. One could only threaten with it.

“So now we wait?” Crowley asked. There really wasn't much else to do. Gabriel, ultimately, had been right; Hell was holding all the cards. He wasn't sure if he preferred Heaven, but Hell holding the cards was quite a bad thing. And not a good bad thing.

Aziraphale nodded. “Yes. We wait.”

Sam Winchester didn't let himself get bothered by the fact that his brother was gone. He was bothered, deep inside, but that was no reason to get distressed about it. He wouldn't be of any help to anyone, and there still was the matter of Lilith to deal with. And if Lilith was dead – then maybe...

...maybe -

“Sam,” a voice cut through his thoughts. He mentally shook himself.

That was another thing. Now that Dean wasn't there to watch him like a hawk, he could – put that demon taint, that whatever the demon blood had given him to something good. And even if that meant working with a demon, then... that was fine with him. Besides, Ruby was different from the other demons. She had proven it again and again, and the prospect of not even needing Ruby's demon-killing knife or the long Latin chant... he could really help people, properly, without any injuries.

The possessed people get to live. If everything was going right, he could exorcise them with just a thought, with just his mind, without uttering a single word. If that was not well worth the training...

Now, he was not so far that he had managed it yet, but he was close; he could feel it. Just a bit more power.

“Sam, you're not focusing,” said Ruby.
“Right. Sorry.”

She eyed him critically. “You're not strong enough. At this rate you won't even be able to exorcise a
demon out of a cat. Perhaps you need a stronger dosis.”

Sam was a little reluctant to say yes to that. He knew what she meant, but it felt wrong. It didn't feel
more wrong than to work together with a demon, but – even though Ruby was different, admitting to
working with a demon was far easier than admitting he was deliberately fueling his powers.

With her blood.

And while it did make his mental powers easier to control and use, he still didn't feel comfortable
about the idea. It had been an experiment, really. That he was having a little bit semi-regularly of it
now was bad enough.

“I will manage this,” he said. “Let me try without it first.”

Ruby sighed deeply. “Fine. But it could go much quicker if you actually listened to me.”

He held her gaze. “I know – we'll resort to your idea if I don't, okay? Just give me a bit more time.
I'll get the hang of it soon, I'm sure.”

She crossed her arms. “Have it your way.”

The horn of Gabriel was an anomaly and a mystery even to Gabriel himself. Perhaps it was because
he was mainly given it to wield it; he never owned it, not truly. It belonged to God and to Him alone
and it was He who knew all its secrets.

It was true that the horn of Gabriel would mark the beginning of the End of Times. With Gabriel
playing the role of God's Messenger it was only fitting that he would wield this horn, the horn that
existed to bring such important announcements to the world.

But when was the beginning of the End of Times? It was a question where more than one answer
would fit, and none of them would be wrong. Maybe it was when the Archangels Lucifer and
Michael were on Earth, each leading an army of ethereal (or occult) beings, with Earth as its
battleground. Maybe it was when the horsemen set foot on land, foreboding what was yet to come.
Maybe it was when Earth was created – all beginning had an end, after all.

In the beginning, there was nothing. Nothing but God. He simply was.

The rest had come into being; and as such, the rest had an end, no matter how long or short that
journey would take.

The Archangel Gabriel, no matter how long ago he had come into being, was not immortal. It was
just that very few things could wink him out of existence again. But just in case – He did not make it
so that Gabriel was the only one to call the End of Times.

The horn itself did. It was not ideal, but it did the trick in a pinch.

Lilith had not blown the horn when she had received it, for she could barely even touch such a holy-
infused device, but the horn itself had announced it had come into the hands of the wrong side.
Perhaps that wasn't the beginning of the End of Times, but it certainly was a beginning.
There were always multiple paths to tread, after all.

The horn sounded again when the first Seal broke in Hell. It was a warning; the warning bell for an upcoming big battle, the biggest battle of them all. The humans couldn't hear it, but the demons could, and the angels certainly could, and they weren't the only ones.

The horn of Gabriel would not just sound at the battlefield.

It also had the ability to summon the angels, bringing them together. Its purpose was to unite them, bringing them all to one place, from whenever the angels had been, to stand against the forces of evil and darkness, and be good.

Good, not gentle. Good, and necessarily ruthless.

Nowhere in the sacred texts was it denied that angels weren't terrifying.

Unbeknownst to Gabriel, as well as everyone else – almost everyone else, except for its Creator – not just anyone could call upon the angels. Only if the horn was in the hands of an angel, it would summon them, send an underlying message underneath the cacaphony of the horn. Even if God for whatever reason was not walking amongst angels and humans in Heaven, He still cared, for who wouldn't care about their creations? So safety measures were taken, and when the horn had sounded twice in that year, the angels had not been summoned.

That time had yet to come.

It was a strange summer. He had spent summers without Dean before, of course; he had spent summers with Jessica, in college, studying pre-law. But that was different. The knowledge that Dean wasn't alive but dead, and not just dead but trapped in Hell, dragged down by Hellhounds of all things - it ate at him.

With Ruby helping him into preparing for Lilith he barely took the time for anything else, but Bobby had coaxed him into coming over anyway. Told him that while he hadn't had a breakthrough yet on getting Dean out of Hell or do anything about Lilith, there was something Sam ought to meet.

And that was how Sam met Aziraphale, although neither Bobby or Sam knew him as Aziraphale, but as one of Aziraphale's aliases; mister Fell.

Malak Fell.

And he had some interesting information. Sam decided to humour the pair of them.

They were spending time in the garden.

“I'm not really keen on the idea,” Balthazar said. His voice was light, but the rest of his being betrayed how he really felt about it all.

Castiel seemed surprised. “It's not up to me to judge my orders. Neither is it up to you.”

Maybe Earth had had a bigger impact on Balthazar than he thought, or maybe he was a little more free spirited than he himself would have accounted for. Those were odd traits in an angel. Whether it was something that had always been in him or something that he had picked up during the few visits
to Earth he didn't know, but it now clung to him and never really went away.

“Still – Hell. We are talking about Hell, Castiel. Doesn't that creep you out?”

“They're my orders,” said Castiel. “That's just what they are.”

“And you may not survive.”

“I will. I will raise him from Hell. I can't do that if I don't survive, so therefore I'll survive.” There was something defiant in Castiel's eyes, something that Balthazar treasured. Good, he thought; there was something to make out of Castiel yet.

“I like your train of logic,” he replied.

They listened to dewdrops falling slowly from leaf to leaf and little insects crawling and fluttering through stems and petals. It was quiet; but it wasn't silent. It was never silent in the garden. Unlike some other parts of Heaven, it was just so full of life.

For many angels this was their favourite place.

After a while, Castiel asked a question.

“What is a train?”

Balthazar laughed. “I'll show you after you're back.” The laugh morphed into a little grin.

“Or, of course, I could show you now. Just a little trip to Earth and back. No one would know.”

Castiel denied. “I can't. I can get called any moment.”

“I know,” Balthazar sighed. “Ass.”

“Why exactly would you use descriptions of human parts to - ”

“That will take too long to explain.” Balthazar waved it away. If he had to go and let Castiel in on humanity's dirty secrets and their love of figure of speech, the Righteous Man would never get rescued out of Hell.

“Be careful, Castiel.”

“Of course.”

“Stop.”

He barely recognised his own voice anymore. It pained him. But he couldn't. He just couldn't. His voice, like the rest of him, was just completely, utterly broken. It had taken years, but in the end it didn't matter how long it had taken. It had happened after all.

“Just stop.”
Chapter 20

Chapter Summary

Everything was blurry and felt delightfully warm. If Castiel had ever experienced the joys of a fuzzy, fluffy blanket to cuddle into then that was what he would have used to describe it, but he hadn’t, so instead he described it as coming home.

He opened his eyes.

It was a nice day. All the days had been nice. Where the residents of Lower Tadfield used to wonder why, they just stopped bothering questioning the weather and its fickle inconsistencies. It were dreary days according to the news in South East England – it rained, and the clouds were a stormy grey all over the place. Oxford, Canterbury, Winchester; even Milton Keynes and Slough.

But not Lower Tadfield. In Lower Tadfield the sun shone, bright and warm, and it was a perfect day for a picnic, or a barbecue.

The Them were doing exactly that. Oh, they didn't exactly refer to themselves as that anymore, but the name had still stuck and everyone in Tadfield knew who one meant when one was talking about the Them. Even though they had grown up and all lived their own lives, they were still inseparable on days like these.

They were with just the four of them, too – or five, if you included Dog, and Adam would absolutely include Dog and sneak some barbecued meat to his pet.

Pepper was lying down in the grass, staining her jeans and top and didn't get bothered about it in the slightest. Wensleydale was berating her for refusing to eat anything else than steak and chicken, and she replied that the vegetables could wait one more day. Besides, who would eat carrots when you could have barbecue?

Dog flopped next to her, his small belly full of meat and proceeded to lie down without a care in the world.

“Sometimes I wish it could be summer forever,” she told Dog, murmuring into his ear. “But don’t tell him, because he would make it so.”

As if she was talking about the Devil, Adam stood next to them with an honest-to-god boyish grin. Time and time again proved that the Adversary, Destroyer of Kings, Angel of the Bottomless Pit, Great Beast that is called Dragon, Prince of This World, Father of Lies, Spawn of Satan and Lord of Darkness simply wasn't a very threatening* being.

She didn't bother to get up.

* The scary thing was that he could give angels and demons a run for their money without even trying, and it only took a well-formulated question or two.
“What are you thinking about?” she said, seeing the grin was still in place.

“I decided what I'm going to do.”

She perked up and sat, leaning with her elbows on her crossed legs. “What? What are you going to pick?”

“I decided I'll take up a study next year,” said Adam, still grinning.

She groaned and let herself fall back in the grass.

“Really? You said that last year!”

“It's not that I strictly need to,” Adam defended himself. “It would just be something to do. I could get any job without a degree. And I reckon I'll have plenty to do coming september.”

She stretched her arms and rolled on her side, giving Adam an unimpressed look.

“You're just lazy. I'm not telling you to study so you can get a degree, you know. I'm telling you that so that you can experience the feeling of having accomplished something. Instead of – the world doing it for you.”

Adam shrugged. “I'd say that cancelling the end of the world is quite the accomplishment.”

“Eh,” was her answer. “That was a while ago.”

“True,” he said with the air of someone who knew he was wrong, and didn't have any trouble to admit it. “Come on. I've got dessert.”

He offered her a hand and she let herself pull up.

The four of them happily dug into the chocolate mousse that had been prepared – by hand, because both Wensleydale and Pepper had put their foot down when it came to Adam miracling food into existence, and Brian didn't particularly care, as long as it tasted good – and Brian sighed somewhat happily.

“I kind of like this,” he said.

Pepper glanced at his almost empty bowl. “Well, duh.”

“No! I don't mean that – I mean, I love the chocolate. But I mean... this.” He gestured vaguely. “It's summer. Nothing weird's happening. I like that. Just a lazy, uneventful summer.”

Wensleydale nodded his agreement, while Pepper and Adam just exchanged a glance. As occupied as Brian was with his dessert he didn't miss the silent conversation the two had, and put his spoon down.

“What?” said Pepper, but the damage was done.

Adam sighed. “We should just tell them.”

They had another silent exchange, but Adam won and she said: “Fine!” and went inside. The other men were just watching the two of them into somewhat stunned silence. As Brian opened his mouth, he only got two words out before Adam put up his hand.

“She'll be back in a bit, and we'll explain. It's just, that, well, you'll have to sort of see it.”
As predicted Pepper did come back after a few minutes.

Brian put his bowl aside.

“That's a sword,” he stated.

“Yes,” Pepper confirmed.

Brian's hand hovered above the table, near the tip, but Pepper grabbed him by the wrist before he could touch it.

“It's not a toy,” she said. “And it's not just a sword. It's – well. Adam seems to think it's the same sword War had. From... you remember, right?”

They all did, but none of them remembered it as clearly as Adam.

“I don't remember the details,” interrupted Wensleydale.

“Nor do I,” Pepper admitted, “but Adam does, and he thinks it's War's. Not really War's, though, it's an angel sword, but War had it.”

Pepper picked it up and held it high; soft, blue and purple flames appeared, slowly changing colour until they settled on a warm ochre yellow.

“Wicked,” said Brian.

“Where did you get it?” said Wensleydale.

She flicked her wrist – not the one that was holding the sword, mind you – and the flames extinguished itself. It hissed and sizzled slightly as she laid it back on the table.

Pepper hesitated just a second to answer the question. “An – an angel gave it to me. For safekeeping.”

Brian was still paying more attention to the actual sword than to Pepper, but Wensleydale leant forward.

“Why?”

“You're smart,” said Adam. “You can figure it out.”

Wensleydale already had.

Crowley wasn't happy about this whole ordeal, but in the end he had little choice in the matter. He had had to make it up to Aziraphale somehow, and if he helped Aziraphale, Gabriel would cool down a bit, too. Or so he hoped. Choosing between the wrath of angels or the wrath of demons was tough, but demons were at least predictable and fairly uncreative.

The angels he knew were either rogues, renegades or had gone native and learnt how to plant and grow their imagination. It would be rather unpleasant.

He was not surprised when Sam Winchester greeted him with a gun in his face.

“Samuel!” said Aziraphale, who appeared next to him. “I invited him. His expertise will help us, I'm
certain of that.”

Crowley attempted to give a small, non-threatening smile, but the gun wasn't lowered.

After a few long seconds, Sam gave in and shrugged. “My apologies, mister Fell. I cannot be too careful.”

“And right you are, my dear,” said Aziraphale. “This here is Anthony Crowley.”

“Ah,” Sam said, rather nonplussed. He stared and narrowed his eyes slightly at Crowley's sunglasses for a few seconds before nodding. “Come in.”

The two of them stepped inside Sam's motel room, Aziraphale carrying a book. He placed the book gingerly on the table after the three of them were seated.

“Bobby said you knew things.”

Sam's gun was still on the table within reach, and Crowley did not appreciate that the loop was pointed to him. Not that it could kill him – but there was exactly the problem. It would only arise suspicion and he doubted that Sam Winchester appreciated a demon's help. Especially not from someone who was up to his neck in the stink pit that was the Apocalypse.

“Yes,” Aziraphale answered the question. He seemed much more at ease. “There are things you should know. There are... most likely, at least, worse things that will happen in the near future than Lilith.”

“You know about Lilith.”

Aziraphale tutted. “Yes. Lilith and her nefarious plans are a worldwide concern. Some of it is profetised – in this book. It's a rather cryptic book,” he said apologetically.

He handed the book over to Sam, who opened it carefully at a random bookmarked page and read a few sentences, trying to wrap his mind around the old English text.

“How is Anathema?”

This time it was Crowley who answered. “That is not important. While part of the prophecies are about her, it speaks of the future of the world in general. That means beyond the place wherever Anathema is holed up.”

Sam glanced at him. “You sound like you know her.”

“I do,” said Crowley. “Vaguely.”

Aziraphale cleared his throat.

“Right,” said Sam. He tapped on the page. “Can I track Lilith with this? Predict where she'll be?”

“Err,” said Crowley. “Not exactly.” He looked at Aziraphale. “Come on, angel, you know more about it than I do.”

Angel, huh. Sam's eyes flickered from one visitor to the other and landed back on Aziraphale.

“Agnes Nutter's predictions cannot be read in a straightforward fashion, I'm afraid,” Aziraphale replied.
“They only make sense after it happened. It's a bit of a pain.”

“He is right,” Aziraphale agreed. “However, we have been able to decipher some of the predictions and the three of us might take some well-educated guesses. It will be more than what you have now, I assume. Lilith will not be easy to track, let alone... secure her and stop her from doing harm.”

Sam let out a soft, humourless laugh. “Yeah. Just hang on. Why are you doing this? You're no hunters. Are you?”

“No, but we do know what is going on,” Crowley said. “We're experts. We know about the occult. I don't mind sharing the info if that means you can clean up Lilith.”

Aziraphale had an odd expression on his face, and Sam caught it. But it had been barely there, and then the man smiled softly.

“Robert Singer asked me to help out. Between Crowley and me, we cover a lot of ground when it comes to information about the occult and the ethereal.”

Sam raised an eyebrow and had half a mind asking what they knew about angels, whether they existed or not and if yes, why they weren't helping out. He was caught guard however by his door being kicked open, revealing a young woman who was quite pissed off.

“Ruby!” he got up. “It's alright, it's - ”

“No, Sam, it's not,” said the girl. She glared at the two men still seated, who had by now turned around to watch the commotion. Crowley visibly paled at the sight.

“I leave you be for two days and you're happily chatting with a demon! Are you out of your mind? He works for Lilith, they all do!”

Now, that was quite unfair, Crowley thought, seeing as the girl wasn't exactly human herself. Besides, how did she even know? He had concealed his presence – as had the angel – as they tended to do in the past few centuries. It was easier that way. A random demon would not be able to sense him that way.

“Come on, you can't just...”

But Sam did fall silent and was now looking at them. Scrutinising them.

Ruby crossed her arms, refusing to come closer. “Him. He's a demon.”

She pointed towards Crowley, who raised his hands in a 'who, me?' kind of manner.

“Exorcise him, now,” Ruby said.

Aziraphale cleared his throat again, but no one was paying attention to him.

“We'll test him,” said Sam. “If that eases your mind.”

Crowley briefly tensed, for he did not want to know what that test entailed. Next to him, Aziraphale put a hand on his shoulder, asking him silently to stay put. He forced himself to relax, but didn’t feel very reassured.

“Test him? Just exorcise him! It's not as if anything will happen if he is human, and he isn't! Besides, I'm not carrying any Holy Water around and you used the last of what you had a week ago.”
“Salt will have to do,” Sam muttered.

Ruby scoffed at him, but sat on the edge of the bed as he retrieved the salt from his duffelbag.

“Mister Crowley, please get up and stand right there.”

Crowley rose slowly. “I'll cooperate. Don't do anything hasty.”

He stepped into the middle of the room, where Ruby kept an eye on him while Sam poured a large circle of salt. Crowley tried not to look too relieved, because if there was anything he could handle, it was salt.

“Now get out of that circle,” Sam said, after he made sure there was no gap in the circle.

Crowley did so without any difficulty of the sorts. He simply stepped over the line, causing Ruby looking completely gobsmacked for a second.

“Well,” said Aziraphale. “That's solved, then.”

“No, it isn't!” said Ruby. “I know he's a demon!”

But he wasn't, not really, and he played by different rules.

“Demons cannot cross a line of salt,” Crowley informed her.

She seethed.

“Sam, can I talk to you for a second?”

The two disappeared in the bathroom. They were evidently keeping things quiet, although snippets from the conversations were audible; not to humans, probably, but both Aziraphale and Crowley had the advantage to hear perhaps a little better. They weren't paying attention to it however, because Crowley was trying to tell something that he'd like to keep under the table, thank you very much.

“It's her,” he said in a hushed tone. “She was the one who had stabbed me.”

“Are you certain?”

“She *stabbed* me, I wouldn't forget that face. She clearly intended for me to be dead. We should just run away.”

“Because that won't arise suspicion,” Aziraphale whispered back.

“And this is just delaying the inevitable, don't you think? I'm not sitting here until they *do* bring out the Holy Water – salt I can handle, that not so much.”

“Just stay calm,” was all that Aziraphale mentioned to say before the two emerged from the bathroom again. Ruby still looked positively pissed off.

“How about an exorcism, just in case?” said Aziraphale. Crowley whipped his head to glare at Aziraphale.

“Just a Latin based one ought to cover it, I think.”

Ruby looked up alarmed.
“Oh Christ,” Crowley managed to utter. “This is just a waste of time. Can't we just go back to doing what we were doing?”

“What were you doing?” Ruby immediately asked.

“None of your business.”

Sam sighed, stared at the three of them, walked to the refrigerator to retrieve a beer, opened and drank from said beer and leant against the kitchen counters.

“Fine, I will.” He hoisted his bag on the counter and rummaged through it, eventually finding a small, battered little book. As he flipped to the right page, Aziraphale was trying to take a glance at the cover.

“Exorcizamus te, omnis immundus spiritus, omnis satanica potestas, omnius incursio...”

As Sam Winchester continued, Crowley didn't feel anything happen to him. He carefully hid his confusion and instead focused on what was happening to the other demon in the room, who had a lot more trouble keeping her cool.

“Ergo drago maledicte - ”

“It's draco,” said Crowley. “And your pronunciation isn't particularly good.”

Almost simultaneously, Ruby managed to bring out: “Sam, stop!”

Sam did stop and Ruby's essence forced itself into the human vessel again. She gasped, and took a deep breath, and pointed a finger at Crowley. “How do you do that?”

The end of his mouth twitched. “Clearly I'm no demon. Clearly, you are.”

Next to him, Aziraphale feigned surprise. And was good at it. “Oh dear.”

She narrowed her eyes at them. “Yes. Well. I'm not on their side. Take off your glasses.”

“What? No!”

Sam scoffed. “Ruby, come on. It's obvious he's no demon.”

She looked absolutely livid. “He is. And I will prove it to you. If you aren't dead before the end of the day, that is. All demons want a piece of you, Sam.”

He actually grinned. “Do you?”

Crowley managed to hide a grin by scratching behind his ear and decided he liked the kid. From the looks of it, Sam Winchester had always been the serious and studious one, but he had some mean witty retorts in his backpocket. Good for him.

Ruby sent a smoldering look to all of them and stomped out of the room, letting the door slam behind her.

“So,” said Crowley, getting long looks from Sam Winchester, “what were we talking about again?”

There were some things in the world that had an impact beyond belief and imagination. One of them
was the sounding of the trumpet of the End of Times; it resonated in every being – except humans, and animals, and plants for that matter – and reminded them there were dark times ahead. A get together of deities could cause a local earthquake or storm simply by being there, a concentrated place of power and energy.

When War traveled the Earth, War left behind a trail of disaster. The same applied to Famine, and Pestilence, although Pestilence was retired now and someone from the new generation, Pollution had taken the job.

Death didn't travel, for he was already omnipresent. But he could if he so decided, for who didn't love traveling; one hadn't truly lived if one had never partaken in a quiz or eaten a well-made pizza in a lovely little restaurant.

When Jesus was born, a ripple went through the Earth. When Mohammed reached the top of the mountain, the same happened. There were some things in the world that had some impact on the entire world; an impact one couldn't deny.

As of such, Gabriel knew precisely when Dean Winchester was pulled out of Hell.

The game was on.

“Oh! Steady Castiel, stay with us.”

Castiel was feeling strange. He couldn't entirely focus – anything, really, and while he did recognise the voice that was talking to him, the voice did sound strange. Muffled wasn't entirely the right word. More as if it was coming from far away, as if there was distance between the two of them. However he knew that wasn't true, for he was being helped upright by the owner of the voice.

Everything was blurry and felt delightfully warm. If Castiel had ever experienced the joys of a fuzzy, fluffy blanket to cuddle into then that was what he would have used to describe it, but he hadn't, so instead he described it as coming home.

He opened his eyes.

“Balthazar,” he managed, although his voice wasn't steady and calm, and instead stuttered and croaked.

“Easy now,” said Balthazar. “You just came back from Hell. That's not exactly a vacation to the Bahamas. Easy. Where'd you leave the Winchester?”

Castiel closed his eyes again, and instead leaned into the warm touch. It had been cold in Hell. Clammy. And never quiet. Good God, it had never been quiet.

“I didn't particularly leave him anywhere,” he eventually answered the question.

He startled when Balthazar began to laugh.

“Castiel, are you for real? You left a crater where he was buried; every tree in a radius of at least fifty feet was felled. Your power is left in the air, static energy in the entire area, and you think he's going to, I don't know, calmly accept these things as he climbs out of his coffin himself? You could have... at least gotten him out of the ground.”
Even in his exhausted state Castiel managed to impressively glare at the other angel. “It was my task to raise the Righteous Man from Hell. It wasn't my task to stay around and bring him to a safe location.”

Balthazar shook his head, expression still full of mirth. “I know, I know. Don't you worry. The guy's being watched.”

“I did not express my concerns for the Righteous Man,” said Castiel, who was tiring of the conversation and just wanted some peace and quiet. Just for a little. That wasn't too much to ask, was it?

“Of course not,” said Balthazar, dragging him up. “Let's get you to Joshua. He'll have you on your legs in no-time.”

They got to Joshua almost instantly. Castiel felt himself loosen up; his tenseness flooded right out of him, feeling completely at peace in the Garden. That, perhaps wasn't so strange, for most angels experienced the gardens this way. It was pure and serene; you couldn't help but feel content. As things were supposed to be. Paradise, perhaps.

A cool hand touched his forehead, and when Castiel opened his eyes he felt instantly better.

“Thank you, my brothers.”

“You are most welcome,” replied Joshua, while Balthazar just grinned at him.

“I am afraid you cannot rest, Castiel,” Joshua said. “For Heaven has another task for you. Find Uriel. I believe he is already waiting for you.”

Castiel simply nodded and disappeared.
Chapter 21

Chapter Summary

Sam's shoulders tensed again. He pushed himself up from his chair and retrieved two beer bottles from the fridge, tossing one to the demon on the bed. She caught it, but put it on the ground. That gesture sort of stung; it reminded him, as so many things reminded him, that Dean would've reacted differently, had he been here.

Chapter Notes

I moved out of my father's house into a place of my own. The whole moving business took more time than I thought. And of course, my outline notebook got lost for a little while... but I've got it back, now. Hi, again!

Robert Singer got called often lately. This was not so surprising when he had at least three landlines and two mobile phones, all of them used for various and separate purposes. It also probably wouldn't be so surprising that he sometimes missed a call or two. He usually didn't bother calling back.

There were some exceptions to be made however, and as such he was on the phone with a good acquaintance while he was pouring himself a beer.

“Where've you been, Ellen?”

“Oh, around,” said the woman on the other end of the line, also known as Ellen Harvelle and known sympathisant of the Winchester brothers. “Sometimes I'm thinking to stay at a more permanent place, get an apartment or a house again, but... that time is past. With all the recent demonic activity lately we need every able bodied hunter on the road. Speaking of, Sam isn't returning my calls. How is he?”

“Alive,” Robert grumbled. “Or he was six weeks ago. It's the only time I've seen him since Dean went to Hell, and the times I got him answering the phone I can count on one hand.”

It was silent for a few seconds.

“I'm concerned about him,” she said.

“Me too,” Robert admitted. “Not much we can do about it.”

“I have half a mind to drag him out of wherever he's holed up and give him an earful,” she scoffed. “He shouldn't deal with this on his own.”

Robert took a large swig from his glass and began to lift up books and papers, looking for a pen he had lost about half an hour ago amidst the chaos.

“Believe me, I tried to get him to talk and come over. He's only ever interested when I have new information about Hell. That boy's not in a good place, but there's nothing to do about it.”
She sighed.

“Stubborn, the lot of them. Can't let things go. Of course, that's usually one of the reasons why people become hunters in the first place,” Ellen added humourlessly.

Robert found his pen, emptied his glass and pulled a notebook towards him, flipping over its pages until he found an empty sheet.

“How's Jo? She as hard to catch as Sam?”

“No, actually,” Ellen said, and her relief was heard in her voice. “We're hunting together, now. It works quite well. She gets to do what she wants and I get to keep an eye on her.”

“That's good,” said Robert, who now moved the phone to his other ear and started to write what looked like a shopping list, although it was a shopping list where one wouldn't find potatoes and carrots on it, but rather more belladonna, wormwood and dead man's blood.

“Listen, I'm about to send Rufus on retrieving some supplies, you need any?”

He only heard a few murmurs for a few seconds, and then Ellen actually laughed.

“Is that so? Because I've got Rufus standing next to me and he tells me he won't be doing a thing for you until you give him his precious gun back.”

“He can get his gun back when he brings me the acacia back that he borrowed. He completely emptied the entire box, and I had over twenty different variants in there.”

“Acacia is not that hard to -”

“Ssh.” Robert's head snapped up when he heard the unmistakenable sound of a car riding up to his house. He got up, glanced out of the window, cursed and shoved his grocery list underneath a dated encyclopedia.

“I'll talk to you later, I've got a visitor.”

He threw the phone on the desk and hurried over to the front door.

“Sheriff Mills.”

The long arm of the law, in the form of a darkhaired woman with a ponytail and a fed up expression thrust out a few envelopes, and then proceeded to point in the general direction of a few broken down cars.

“Bobby Singer, this is the third time this month that I've gotten complains about you. Cut out the crap or I'll have to arrest you again. And here's a fine.”

With that she walked away, not even giving him a chance to ask what he was fined for this time.

They were sitting down in a small café, which had been excruciatingly hard to find; for there had been MacDonalds, and Burger King, and Wendy's, and all those other places Crowley had pointed out where surely, they would be able to get a cup of tea. But Aziraphale had shaken his head and didn't believe in drinking in tea in snackbars or in any foodchain, really, and had wished for something small and authentic.
None of the other places Crowley then proceeded to point out had been quite cosy enough for the angel, and it took another twenty minutes before the angel finally agreed with Crowley's choice.

“We need to tell him,” said Aziraphale, who had asked for a pot of tea, rather than a cup, and his request had been met with a perplexed expression. He had gotten it anyway, and was now refilling both their cups for a second time.

“We don't need to tell him anything,” corrected Crowley.

“Fine, then. We ought to tell him. That Ruby girl is clearly deceiving the poor man and he has no idea.”

He shrugged and nicked a biscuit from a plate that a waiter was carrying past their table. Aziraphale looked reproachfully at him, but he shrugged again, and ate it.

“It would be our word against hers. He knows she's a demon and he hasn't gotten rid of her, ergo, we don't stand a chance.”

He leant forward a little. “By the way – how'd you figure that exorcism wouldn't work on me?”

Aziraphale took the time to open up a sugar packet and add its contents to his tea.

“I had a suspicion.”

Crowley blanched. “You took a gamble?”

“No. I was really rather sure that an exorcism performed by humans would only expel those who aren't technically in charge of the body.”

“It wasn't your body you were betting on, it was mine!”

Aziraphale hummed. “I told you, I was rather sure that you would be unaffected, seeing as you have your own body and all. There's more needed than just a Latin chant to discorporate you. I'd know.”

“This topic makes me uncomfortable.”

Aziraphale was still occupied with his tea. “Dear, I thought you liked uncomfortable.”

“Not when it happens to me!”

“Could have fooled me, with the way you dress and live.”

Crowley glowered at him, unsure whether the angel was having a go at him or not. He decided that the angel was in a rather cranky mood, and while he couldn't entirely blame him being in such a state, he still didn't appreciate being at the receiving end of those moods. It usually became annoying very fast.

“I don't know about you, Crowley, but I am going back home soon.”

“I will, too,” Crowley said quickly. “I don't really want to stick around while Lilith's out for my blood.”

He tensed, then, as he had flagged down a waiter and made eyecontact with one of the patrons. A demon. They were bloody everywhere lately. The angel hummed as he retrieved his wallet and began to count out the money, throwing a generous tip on top of it.
Crowley was trying to think of how to dispose of the demon without drawing too much attention to himself – it was unfortunate enough that Lilith by now surely must have heard he was in fact, still very much alive – while Aziraphale simply stood up, walked past by the tables to get his coat in the hall, placed two fingers on the demon's forehead and let its host slump in the chair it had been sitting in.

Their dining partner got up and shouted for help; a minute later the ambulance was called and the unconscious, but now depossessed man was now put down on the floor.

In the midst of all the ruckus, Aziraphale and Crowley slipped out, but not before Aziraphale made sure that the man wasn't going to remember anything from his brief possession and exorcism.

“Couldn't you have done that with a little more tact and a little less out there?” Crowley asked once they had gotten outside. “I was going to deal with it!”

“It worked, didn't it?” Aziraphale said distractedly. “Hm, but I do not entirely fancy flying the way back.”

“I do,” said Crowley. “And I'll do it the human way.”

“You always complain about plane seats and leg space,” Aziraphale replied with the air of someone who secretly agreed with the complaints, but decided to keep it to himself either way. “Not to mention the time it takes - ”

“No, that's just you. I for one know what I'm going to do on the plane.”

Aziraphale eyed him warily, but didn't ask, for they both knew Crowley was going to be asleep for the entire journey.

“Sam,” Ruby began.

The two of them were in Sam's latest motel room, which was the very same room, still, and Ruby sat half dressed on the bed. Sam's current state of dress wasn't much better. It was stuffy. This was the result of a hot summer day, and the air conditioning in the room was non existent, and the windows couldn't open at all.

Not the best room Sam Winchester had ever stayed in, but far from the worst, either. He didn't even acknowledge her and just continued typing away at his laptop.

“Sam.”

His shoulders tensed, and he turned to meet Ruby's eyes.

“I'm mad at you. That guy was a demon, and you know it.”

“I do believe you,” Sam said, and sighed.

“It didn't look like you did,” Ruby fired at him. “What's wrong with you?”

He leant back in his chair. “Look – mister Fell is harmless. They are quite knowledgeable on the subject. We should use all the help we can get when it comes to Lilith.”

But Ruby shook her head. “No. I understand it, Sam. I really do. But you cannot trust other demons. Too many are under Lilith's command. Demons are not on your side. The few who are won't dare to
reach out. Trust me on this.”

His shoulders tensed again. He pushed himself up from his chair and retrieved two beer bottles from the fridge, tossing one to the demon on the bed. She caught it, but put it on the ground. That gesture sort of stung; it reminded him, as so many things reminded him, that Dean would've reacted differently, had he been here.

“Did they have any information on Lilith?”

Sam opened his bottle.”

“Nothing we didn't already know,” he admitted. “They had this book of predictions – that are so vague that most of the time, you will only be able to puzzle it out after it already happened.”

Ruby scoffed. “That's useless.”

“No, it can be valuable,” Sam argued. “It is just a matter of trying to find patterns in the text. Mister Fell and his companion had already figured out the order of about half the book. It takes time, maybe - ”

“Time we don't have,” she interrupted. “Sam, you cannot devote your time to a book that may or may not have a few things pointing to Lilith. Besides – don't forget one of them was a demon. These predictions might not be real at all. They might be fooling you, Sam Winchester. Don't forget that. You're so hung up about getting information that you aren't thinking straight. We should get back to work.”

“Fine,” Sam replied half-heartedly, already walking back to his laptop, planning to ignore Ruby for the rest of the evening.

If Crowley hadn't been a demon, he would have been suffering from a jetlag still, when he heard from Fergus. He was outside at the moment, walking through a rather busy neighbourhood in the middle of London.

Although Fergus looked different this time, he was still easily recognisable. It was the way he carried himself, for one.

“I don't see the appeal of London,” Fergus said, skipping the entire greeting stage. “And I sure don't get what you see in it.”

Crowley shrugged. “It's a central place.”

Then, anything could be a central place, as, would you believe it, the earth was round. It was just a matter of perspective and a feeling of self-importantness. As such any cartographers would happily make their continent, or even their country the center of the world. The rest simply revolved around it.

Ah, it was no wonder that both Crowley and Aziraphale had made Europe their base of operations from medieval times and onward. So many self-centered beings, pushing boundaries, religions, cultures onto other territory.

It was also no wonder that both sometimes needed a break from it all. But despite everything, London had grown on him.
“Word goes you got stabbed to death,” said Fergus, easily keeping up with Crowley, who continued to walk.

“I did,” said Crowley, as if it wasn't trivial, “but I got better.”

“Good.” Then: “I learnt things about Lilith. More specifically, about her plans. They don’t appeal much to me, either.”

“You might want to be careful about going around and saying things like that,” said Crowley.

“If you are so concerned about my well-being, you better come with me and make it worth your while,” came the smooth reply. “You will want to listen to what I have to tell you.”

Fergus stopped at the nearest parked car, opened the door and gestured for Crowley to get in.

It was an uncomfortable car, but it worked wonderfully for Fergus' plan. One did not double-cross Lilith without good consideration. Lilith would make your life a living hell, and your afterlife a living hell, and it would be a most unpleasant experience.

Fergus took the seat next to him.

“Lilith is trying to set Lucifer free,” began Fergus.

“I know,” Crowley said, but he was shushed.

“I do not want that. The rest of the idiots don’t realise it, but we will be the first to be torn to shreds when Lucifer gets back out. I can’t phantom he’d be happy with you, either.

That horn – we need to get it out of her grasp. There’s no telling if she will use it again, but more and more demons will flock to her if she does. I know where it is. What you do with the information isn’t my concern, but I strongly suggest you take the horn elsewhere, if you value your life on Earth.”

Crowley stuck the proffered piece of paper in his pocket.

“I suppose there is a reason why you refuse to handle this yourself?”

“You're still our field agent, are you not? You're out here for our best interests. And right now, crippling Lilith is in Hells best interests. For most of us, anyway.”

Fergus opened the door again and stepped out, turning around slightly to lean into the car. “Keep me up to date.”

He left Crowley alone, then, who glanced at the piece of paper. It was seemingly empty, but when he had taken it, he knew. And as much as Crowley just wanted to spend a few days drunk, or asleep, or possibly both, time had taught him again and again that solutions like those weren't solutions at all.

There was a lot at stake. He lit up a cigarette, set the bit of paper on fire and threw it on the ground. After making sure that all that remained was ash, he left.

Maybe he really should take permanent residence in the United States, after all, if he didn't find the place so unbelievably dreadful. And big, too.

Whereas Crowley vanished without a trace, someone stopped not three feet from where he had been five minutes ago. The ash was quickly noticed and the person crouched down. They scooped some
It had been like any other day. It had been gorgeous weather, and with a few friends Anna Milton had been enjoying said day outside, as many other people had done. None of them felt for a movie nor did they feel like shopping, and as such they had parked themselves at a little café, thoroughly enjoying the sun and watching the people walk by.

Anna Milton was on her second glass of wine. It was a nice wine; fruity and sweet. A perfect choice for a drink on days like these.

Without warning, a sharp ache pierced her head and settled in the back. The sunlight, which was warm and inviting, was too bright and burned even as she closed her eyes.

The ache spread through her head and she took her head in her hands, her fingers massaging her forehead.

“Anna?” she heard one of her friends, but she couldn't tell who it was. She could barely hear it. There were other voices that were drowning it out. Thousands of voices. They all whispered the same thing. And when so many voices whispered, it felt as if they were yelling, and there was no more room for anything else.

She didn't understand the thing they were saying. And they just kept going. Her head hurt, it hurt so much as if she had walked into a door, made out of concrete. Her ears were ringing.

She didn't hear her friends calling out her name, she didn't hear them calling for help and assistance. She only heard four words, echoed by thousands of voices.

Dean Winchester is saved.
Chapter 22

Chapter Summary

He spoke with Joshua.

“You would need to confine yourself into a being,” said Joshua, gently patting a small oak tree. It grew two inches.

“A human would be most practical, I think. As you have done before, a few years ago.”

Castiel didn't stop to wonder how he knew that.

Though innovative and twisted one's mind could be, there were always patterns in one's way of thinking. One just had to figure out those patterns, that was all.

Anthony Crowley was currently busying himself doing exactly that. He could think of better pastimes he could be busying himself with, including but not limited to making sure the entire population of London would run out of gas for a day, getting merrily drunk and pretending to forget what was currently going on in his lately adventure-filled life and just pulling over the covers from his bed and sleep for a week or two.

Alas. The world could be a miserable place, and it didn't see why demons would be exempt from that rule. Furthermore, if Anthony Crowley wasn't going to try and interfere, the world would indeed become a miserable place, and it would treat both humans and demons with little difference.

Lucifer, like his peers, was a complicated being.

As was Lilith.

Yet he was determined to crack the puzzle. There wasn't much that could prevent Lucifer from rising; in fact, only Lilith's timely death would suffice. And there was the problem; either Lilith had to die fast, or locked away and kept alive for eternity.

The address Fergus had given him turned out to be a lone house. The house was empty. There was no furniture; there weren't even toilets and sinks installed and the floors and walls consisted of just concrete. The only indication that this house could be called a house at all was the door, the chimney, and the gaping holes in the outer walls where windows should've been.

It wasn't here.

Nothing was here.

Nothing, except for the view of a forest on one side of the house, and a playground across the street on the other. Crowley sped to the playground, which was as bare looking as the house. It was silent, and devoid of – well, anything, really.

A blade hacked through the air, and Crowley had only enough time to duck. He stepped back, hands frantically searching his jacket if there was anything on his person to defend himself with. There was not, and thus he willed a blade of his own in existence.
He blocked another swing and felt the strain of sheer force going through his sword. It wasn't going to last long.

He hardly had the time to identify his attacker. The face seemed familiar, but truth be told, Crowley was more concerned about the blade than the angel's face. Oh, an angel it surely was; there was no mistaking that aura, the wisp and tendrils of power that were so close to his own, and yet, not.

He swiftly stepped around the edge of a slide that was in desperate need of a paint job. He parried more swings, trying to keep up with the attacks while simultaneously putting in more effort into keeping his sword from breaking. It was only a matter of time, however; nothing he could think up himself was going to win over a properly forged angel blade.

The angel was overpowering him soon after and the sword cracked, leaving Crowley only with the hilt and the sad remnants of a blade.

He made to scramble away and take flight, but then the attacks stopped.

"Leave," said the angel.

"Well," began Crowley. "I can't really do that."

"Would you just leave?" The angel almost sounded bored, and Crowley had the feeling he had met this angel before.

"I need -"

"The horn?" the angel interrupted him. "I know. It's just that I can't let you do that."

Then, they were both blasted out of the area; the world went white around them. Crowley felt himself slam on the asphalt and rolled a few meters further until he had enough control of his surroundings to stop it. He pushed himself up, got rid of the dirt, healed his chaved skin and peered into the white light.

The light flickered slowly out of existence, then, and revealed nothing; the playground was gone, as if it was quite literally ripped out of the earth. Grass and all.

If one were to try and find it, then one would be surprised it had traveled quite a few miles.

He heard the angel grumble.

"What in the name of -"

Crowley had a vague inkling of what had happened. There weren't that many beings who could just take a playground and put it elsewhere or let it vanish. And none of them were on Hells side, really, so that was good news.

The angel stalked towards him. "You. Demon. What did you do?"

Crowley only shrugged. "I feel flattered that you think I can pull off a stunt like that."

The angel sobered. "I suppose you don't, no."

The angel took off, then, and Crowley didn't leave long after. No point in lingering there, after all.
Anathema Device was worriedly looking out of the windows. The weather was a little stormy today. That surprised her; after all, it was only September, and no one thought stormy days belonged in September. Therefore, they never were there. Nevertheless, the wind almost took hold of her laundry and she rushed outside to secure the lot.

“Hullo,” said Adam, who effortlessly biked down the road, despite the wind.

“Adam!”

She continued taking her laundry off the pole, only to discover that everything was already in her basket, neatly folded with the clothespins on top.

“Now that that's done, do you have time to drink a cup of tea with me?”

“Ah – yes, of course. I didn't expect company...”

“That's quite alright,” said Adam cheerfully. “I don't mind.”

It was hard to refuse Adam anything; if his smile wouldn't win you over, then it surely was the fact that he was the Antichrist. It would do one well to remember that bit. And even if that was not the case, she liked Adam.

“What brings you here?” she asked, carrying the basket into her house. Adam was trailing her and sat down at her kitchen table, which was never empty.

“Oh,” said Adam. “I wanted to ask about witches.”

She smiled slightly, put the basket on the ground and turned on the kettle.

“Why is that?”

“It seems to me there are different kind of witches.”

Anathema retrieved freshly baked apple biscuits out of her pantry and offered the plate to Adam.

“Did you ever make a deal with a demon?”

She startled.

“No, I suppose not,” Adam answered his own question, taking a biscuit.

She took a seat of her own. “Adam – I do not associate myself with those kind of witches. And I told you. I'm an occultist. Not a witch, really. Not that sort of witch, anyway.”

“But you do know about them, is what I'm saying.”

“Yes.”

She took the time to pour the two of them a cup. “Witches that do dealing with demons are, well, they are under some kind of contract. They agree with the demon to do their bidding, and after a certain amount of time, the demon takes their souls. They're rather dangerous, Adam. I don't advise to seek them out.”

Adam didn't seem to be perturbed by her story at all.

“Thing is, they choose to gain power. Usually for revenge, or to put themselves in a better position.”

“But you chose to be an occultist, too.” said Adam.
“That's true,” said Anathema. “But you know the difference between the two.”

“Oh, yes. But I've got to admit that there are also occultists who call themselves witches. And witches who call themselves occultists. And there are wiccans, which I don't entirely get either.”

“Not all witches have access to supernatural arts. Most types of witches are entirely human.”

That caused Adam to ponder upon it a little bit. “Say, can you inherit it?”

“Being a witch? Genetically?”

She absentmindedly drank from her tea. “Hm. If you are referring to the witches who dabble with demons, then I do not know. It could be – upbringing is one of the most important aspects of forming one's character, and a proper witch would teach her child.”

Adam seemed momentarily lost in thought also, which was a weird look for him.

After that, he smiled at her with utmost sincerity. “Thank you, Anathema.” The weather outside was beginning to calm down; the trees didn't buckle over as much as they did, and the kitchen window stopped creaking.

He made to stand up; Anathema reached out and put her hand on his arm. “Adam, please answer me this. Is the world going to be alright?”

Adam's smile fell like a feather would fall; slow, and without noise.

“I certainly hope so.”

Castiel was currently in the middle of figuring out how he was supposed to bring the message to Dean Winchester safely. Human eyes simply weren't fit for the sight of an angel; their eyes wouldn't comprehend. It would blind them at best and kill them at worst, and if Castiel accidentally killed Dean Winchester, that probably didn't help matters.

Balthazar was no help. Oh, not because he had never descended to earth before, because he had, but he wasn't there. Castiel couldn't reach his brother, and he couldn't think of anyone else* who had gone to earth in the past few millennia.

* That was, anyone who had gone to earth and came back within a reasonable time frame.

So he spoke with Joshua.

“You would need to confine yourself into a being,” said Joshua, gently patting a small oak tree. It grew two inches.

“A human would be most practical, I think. As you have done before, a few years ago.”

Castiel didn't stop to wonder how he knew that.

“It was rather uncomfortable. Is there no other way?”

Joshua only smiled. “I'm afraid not. Not anymore. Some humans are better suited than others, so
keep that in mind."

Castiel went rigid, then, because a voice lodged into his head. *I invoke, conjure and command you, appear unto me before his circle.* No, he whispered back. My name is Castiel. Do not gaze upon my form. Turn back.

“Castiel?”

He ignored Joshua. Go back, he whispered back, even though the voice was persistent. For your own good, turn back. *I conjure and command you, show me your face.* Go back!

The chant continued, no matter what Castiel told them. It turned into screaming, and then nothing. Joshua looked at him, rather alarmed.

“A human. I... do not know what happened.” He knew partially what had happened, of course; he simply didn't know what had happened to the other party.

“Do not concern yourself with trivialities, Castiel.” Joshua's voice was soothing. “Find yourself a vessel.”

And so he did.

Of course, when he found one, Dean had moved from the spot where he had left him. It was rather easy to find him nevertheless – he left traces. It led Castiel to a little lunchroom that seemed to be strangely devoid of humans.

He proceeded to talk to the demons that were inside, or tried to at least – but they couldn't handle it. Speaking was difficult to master, apparently.

He found Dean again, but his voice cracked glass and destroyed lights, and he retreated, for he did not wish Dean Winchester harm. After all that time in Hell it would be rather counter productive.

Castiel wasn't concerned, though; his orders were to talk with the Righteous man, and therefore he would succeed. He just had to figure out the way.

Gabriel was currently being approached by a demon. This in itself was not so strange if not for the fact that he didn't know this demon, and last time he checked his identity was still not broadcasted over the entire world. No, it was still safe; as it should be.

The demons were itchy today, ever since it became known that a soul escaped from Hell. Heaven should've pulled such a stunt ages ago; it turned all of them into meek lambs. Or scared coyotes, more like, who suddenly realised they weren't on top of the food chain. But despite that, the news had left him sour and made him want to smite a town or throw Dean Winchester back to Hell himself. He figured that was probably not the best idea he'd ever had. Getting drunk in a bar was a nice alternative.

The demon sat next to him.

“You're Loki, aren't you?” She had sounded apprehensive.

Inwardly, Gabriel was rather pleased. But as it was, he barely acknowledged her existence, finishing his extremely fruity drink before giving her even so much as a glance.
“And what of it?”
He made the paper umbrella stand upright on the wood surface of the bar.

“What do you know anything?”
He refilled his drink with a thought. “Listen, hotshot. I know a lot about a lot.”
There was a look of annoyance flickering across the demon’s face.

“Dean Winchester.”
But of course.

“Is that name supposed to mean anything to me?”

“You're a pagan god,” said the demon. “Haven't you heard anything about him?”
He gave her a false smile. “Sweetheart, I only do gossip when there’s a profit for me in store.”
She started to look exasperated.

“Do you know of anything that could have pulled anyone from Hell like that?”

Gabriel raised his eyebrows.

“You want to know how your monster under the bed looks like?” He grinned widely, almost maliciously. “You're right to fear it. I will tell you, in exchange for your name.”

The demon spilled no time. “Meg.”

“Meg? Interesting.”

“Meg. The answer is simple. Just think where demons come from.”

“Humans.”

“No.”

She frowned at him.

Gabriel could pinpoint the exact moment where she had figured it out, and took delight in the way the colour vanished in her face. She was possessing someone, he was sure of it, and yet that was a rather human reaction. Again, interesting.

“Gloria in excelsis deo,” he said in a mocking tone.

She turned even whiter after that, and left.

The universe is infinite. No matter when the world would eventually end, the universe would still be there. Some people think everything would have a beginning and an end, as such was life, and life mirrored, well... everything. However, there were some exceptions; that exception being God, and the universe God was in.

God and the universe had no beginning, for they had always been there. The rest was created, and as
a general rule creations could be destroyed. Would be destroyed, eventually, if given enough time.

Humans usually didn't forget that, whereas beings with a far longer lifespan had a tendency to stop thinking about that sort of thing. Just because one wouldn't die of old age didn't mean one couldn't die and cease to exist.

It would do them well to remember that.

As it were, they had gotten a nasty wake up call in the early nineties in terms of the human calendar, and were now biding their time.

A game of cards would make waiting a far less strenuous activity, and thus they were playing.

War knew it wouldn't matter whether she put effort into her appearance or not, but did it anyway, and had again taken the shape of a woman, attractive by the masses of both human and in-human population. Her hair was blindingly red and alive to the point where one wondered when it would grow a pair of legs and walk away, wreaking havoc while it was at it.

Famine was sharp of wit and sharp of mind, and sharp of everything else. Always full of ideas. New inventions and innovations; he missed them just a bit. It had just been so much fun on Earth, something both War and Pollution would agree with.

Pollution and Pestilence were both present; exchanging stories about their time on Earth. Pollution was the kind of being who was content with letting it all happen. Watching things develop was his favourite thing to do, and thus he mainly listened, while Pestilence pulled out anecdote after anecdote.

And Death – ah, Death never changed.

The cards were on the table, and it would be their turn soon.
Chapter 23

Chapter Summary

It was common for Crowley to be on top of things, and it should be no surprise to the reader of this collection of retellings of what went down in Lower Tadfield and beyond, that we open this chapter with yet again Crowley. Crowley liked new things, and invented the word trendsetter, and infuriated those who didn't know what it meant or what it was good for.

Anyway.

After the whole fiasco with the playground simply vanishing from sight (not excluding other senses either) Crowley had had a quiet few days. It had almost felt like they were back a few decades ago; the world was perhaps a bit chaotic, but nothing on the scale of world destruction beyond Earth. Being able to do as he pleased, thinking up countless new things to stain the soul of humans without having to lift a finger was something he had sorely missed.

He wasn't lazy, he said, if the angel told him so. But if he was, it would be a good thing. Upon which Aziraphale had said that surely no employer wanted their people to be lazy, even if it was Hell they were talking about.

Speaking of the angel, Aziraphale had rather spontaneously asked to accompany him to a concert of a local symphonic orchestra he had forgotten the name of.

Everyone needed a day off, even beings from the occult, and thus he agreed to come and even offered to pick him up.

In hindsight he probably should have realised that the momentary cease fire wasn't going to last, and that it had lasted a few days was exceptional.

"CROWLEY," said the voice of the radio announcer, who had only moments ago offered advice about the weather.

He felt Aziraphale stir next to him, and he hoped Aziraphale would be clever enough to not make his presence known. He knew for a fact that Aziraphale was certainly intelligent enough to come to such decisions himself, but he had a habit lately of being unable to shut his mouth in unfortunate situations.

"CROWLEY," the voice said again.

"Oh. Yes. Hello," replied Crowley, wondering who it could be. Not Fergus, who had at least enough common sense to call him via far more practical, human means, and definitely not Lilith, who just wished* him dead at this point.

* God was all for helping people fulfill dreams when they show they're taking steps on the road to their wishes coming true, but God was making an exception for this one.
"HAIL SATAN."

"Likewise," he mumbled. "So, err, to what do I owe this pleasure? Is this about the horn?"

"NO. WE DON'T WANT THE HORN. WE WANT TO KNOW WHETHER GABRIEL IS DEAD."

Crowley's hand slipped from the steering wheel and only barely avoided a lantern pole.

"The angel? The, err, Archangel? The end of the world Archangel?"

"YES. WE HAVE CAUSE TO BELIEVE HE IS ALIVE. FIND HIM."

Aziraphale was poking his thigh at this point and he had half a mind to swat away his hand. Instead he just looked at Aziraphale, who was shaking his head sharply.

"Me? I'm honoured for receiving such an important task, surely. But - "

"YOU ARE OUR FIELD AGENT. ARE YOU NOT?"

Crowley kept himself from sighing with great effort. "Yes."

"THEN FIND HIM. CONFIRM IF HE IS DEAD OR ALIVE."

The voice crackled and went static. The noise morphed into a radio show that was, apparently, about anonymous love confessions. Utterly pointless, Crowley thought, and would turn it straight off, but this time he didn't even seem to hear what the people were talking about. The speed of the Bentley accelerated slightly.

Neither of them said a word for a while.

Aziraphale put a hand on his thigh again and patted him.

"Crowley, dear. You were supposed to go left two streets ago."

"Oops," said Crowley. "My bad." He let the steering wheel spin and made an u-turn in the middle of the street. He would have hit one of the cars on the opposite road if not for Aziraphale performing some impromptu miracles from the passenger's seat.

“I can't bloody believe them,” muttered Crowley. “Sending me after an Archangel. The Antichrist was quite bad enough, and he was still a baby at the time.”

“They don't know he is missing?” said Aziraphale. “Below, I mean.”

“No, we don't.” Crowley remembered to take his turn this time and caused three other drivers to hit their brakes, hard. He almost enjoyed the screeching sounds of the brakes, if he didn't feel sullen about the task that was given him.

“Remember, all we knew was that he went down in some battle. He was last seen somewhere around the randsacking of Sodom, or maybe Jericho. I'm not sure about the details. But it was a huge thing. I think that is when propaganda was invented. Everyone in Hell thought the guy was killed.”

“No,” hummed Aziraphale, “the concept of propaganda existed quite a bit before that. I'd know. After all, the angels were told he is missing, while he simply defected.”
“Got to admit it was quite the surprise to find out he was alive and well when I met him.”

“And you didn't tell me.”

“He made me promise! Sort of hard to break an Archangel's promise if you value your life.”

Aziraphale's silence was enough, and he amended his words. “Getting a new body is such a hassle. Anyway, you never told me he was MIA.”

“MIA?” asked Aziraphale.

“It means missing in action.”

“Ah.”

Just before they arrived at the concert building, Aziraphale cleared his throat.

“Are acronyms the invention of your side or mine?”

“Hm,” said Crowley, parking the Bentley neatly right in front of the building in an empty spot. “I think the humans thought that up all by themselves.”

The playground had not been taken out of the United States without purpose. Indeed, for one who had the power to take an entire playground out of the earth, surely would also have the power to simply take the horn that was buried there.

No, Adam thought something was lacking in Lower Tadfield when some of their generation began having children, and there was no nice playground to play with. It wasn't as if the Them and the Johsonites didn't have any spots to play in when they were younger, but alas, times changed and a playground simply belonged in little idyllic villages these days. And thus, Lower Tadfield needed one too.

Of course he could've wished it into existence, but this was too good of an opportunity to pass up.

The playground fit in quite nicely between a quaint little pond and the church. Alright, perhaps the pond did move a bit to the left, but it wasn't as if anyone would notice.

Adam retrieved the horn from the playground, went home, put the thing on the mantlepiece and called over the owner.

Gabriel arrived quite grumpily.

“I don't appreciate being your angel on speed dial,” he told Adam. “If you keep doing that, I'm out. No more help from me.”

“That wrongly implies you've actually been helping out,” said Pepper from her spot on the sofa. She was trying to teach herself to knit a scarf, despite never having knitted before, and peered at her tablet, rewinding a video again.

“Miss Pippi Longstocking,” he greeted her. “I did not miss you. What'd you call me for?”

Pepper pointed with her knitting needle towards the fireplace.
Gabriel narrowed his eyes at the horn.

“I recommend that you do not lose your belongings from now on,” said Adam. “Wouldn't do the world a lot of good if your belongings are in the hands of the wrong people.”

He cocked his head. “I don't lose my stuff. People I entrusted this to lose my stuff. Key difference there, bud.”

“I would not entrust your belongings to them anymore, then,” said Adam.

Gabriel managed to keep himself from snarling and instead grabbed the horn from the mantlepiece, touching the cool metal. It didn't leave any fingerstains; it never did.

“It is the real one,” he said after a bit of thorough examination. “I don't know how you found it. I don't want to know. Keep it.”

“It's not a museum in here,” said Pepper, not looking up from her laptop.

Gabriel let her ball of wool bounce off her lap, where it then rolled merrily across the floor and disappeared under the sofa opposite of her.

Adam said nothing.

“I'd appreciate it,” said Gabriel at long last. “Like you said. It shouldn't fall in the hands of the wrong people, and there are a lot of wrong people out there.”

He held the horn out to Adam, and Adam accepted it.

The horn didn't hurt him.

“Was that all? Because you interrupted me in something delicate – ”

Pepper snorted, but didn't otherwise engage herself in the conversation. Adam's head shot up. There was a breeze; a breeze that shouldn't be able to exist. Natural energies that were resisting to be pulled apart.

“What was that?” he asked. It was the first time that Gabriel saw him as a vulnerable human being; one who didn't have the answers ready. It was so innocent and child-like that one could forget he was the Antichrist. Or was supposed to be one, anyway. He wasn't much of a proper Antichrist; nothing like how it was written. That probably was a good thing.

“Nothing to worry about,” he said. “Time doesn't flow at a constant speed. Time can be stretched and warped. We're not supposed to feel anything when angels do that, but not everyone's a pro.”

He licked a finger and stuck it in the air, looking pensive for a moment.


Pepper decided that this topic of discussion was a lot more interesting than her futile attempts to follow a video tutorial about knitting in vague quality and put her needles down.

“Time travel? Really?”

“Oh yes,” said Gabriel, who made it himself comfortable on the couch, reached under there and threw the ball of wool back to her. She caught it effortlessly. “I've done it myself. Fun, but nauseating. As if you've spent the night in the washing machine. You know how that feels like.”
“No, not really,” said Adam, exchanging a glance with Pepper.

“So can you go to the future too?”

“I suppose,” Gabriel said on the tone of someone who clearly thought himself an expert on things like that. “Never tried it myself. Knowing your future? What's the fun in that?”

Pepper tried to hit him with the wool, but he caught the ball without a second thought and discarded it into a black hole three lightyears away from Mars.*

* This doesn't sound as difficult as it appears to be; one only needed to learn about the exact location of a black hole, otherwise one might accidentally lob the ball of wool on Mars itself instead. Explaining to NASA why a ball of wool was found on Mars was going to be difficult.

“How do they say that, I've been scared of a few things in my life, like the darkness. I expect you're that scaredy-cat, Adam.”

“I'm not scared of darkness,” Adam said, his eyes falling on the ceiling. “But I'm not afraid of it. I've seen the darkness, and it's not that bad.”

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“Not everyone's a scaredy-cat like you. I'd be excited to know about the future. Maybe there will be robots trying to take over.”

He moved his neck backward and let it lean on the sofa. “Oh please,” he said to the ceiling. “The robots won't have time for that. No, my good girls and boys, the world is ending, and it's gonna happen sooner than you think.”

Pepper crossed her arms.

“The world isn't ending because you say so.”

He growled. “The world is ending because my brothers say so, you little – ” He visibly deflated then, and promptly left. Left wasn't perhaps the right word; vanished, was more like. Pepper rounded up on Adam, who put his hands in the air.

“I didn't banish him. He left on his own behalf. Pity, I had wanted to ask him something.”

“You could just as easily bring him back if it's that important. He's far too scared you'll throw his little secret out in the world to ignore you.”

“Nah,” said Adam. “That's not the way to go about things. Besides, we should get this a nice spot in our house.” He gestured to the horn, that innocently sat on the coffeetable.

She looked irritated, her nose wrinkling, but gave him a single nod. “We probably should.”

Fergus had crafted himself a nice, large map. Or rather, he had given his subordinates the task of finding one or otherwise he would make it himself, on parchment made of the flesh of his very subordinates. And their blood to draw on. Alas that wasn't needed, as his subordinates had truly outdone themselves under the threat of having their bodies disfigured and brought him a nice world map. Human made, though, for Hell wasn't on it.

In it were a few pushpins of a few different colours.

“S a nice map,” said Ligur, Duke of Hell.

“Why thank you, sir,” said Fergus smoothly. “Just got word that a fifth seal is broken. The one with
the priest who beds some virgins. The Unholy Trinity and all that.”

Ligur peered at the map.

“They're all in America. If tha's America.”

Fergus looked at it also.

“Yes, it is America. It says so on the map.” Fergus looked smug. “It's where Lilith's hanging out. Can't be too much of a – shocker.”

Ligur's arm, which had only been stitched back on a little while ago had fallen off again.

One of the demons who had her desk close to Fergus' looked over. “That's gross.”

“Yes, thank you, sweetheart, we don't need your imput,” said Fergus. “Otherwise you can loan your right arm to the Duke over here. It seems he's in need of a good one. This must've been the third time in as many months.”

“You're crossin' the line,” said Ligur.

The female demon fell into apologies; Fergus simply shrugged and went back to his map. This was a fool's errand, and he knew it. Dean Winchester had only gotten out of Hell a few days ago and four more seals had already been broken down. Granted, it took them a month, but it still went at an alarming rate. The angels weren't prepared for this at all.

Then again, it was hardly fair, for there were over six hundred seals, and they only had to break sixty six of them. Lilith needed to be dealt with, and fast, before all Hell literally would break loose.

It was only luck that Balthazar had found the current prophet in this time. There were angelic traces found near the prophet's house, and there was an invisible warning painted on the door that told him to back off. Prophets of the Lord were guarded by Archangels.

It might baffle people that there were still prophets in this time and age; for most believe the Bible are stories. Stories they can learn from, but still stories, and therefore made up. They aren't anecdotes and they sure aren't God-given visions to let the people know the truth about the future and how the tide is high and the end is nigh.

But there were still prophets in this time and age. In this time and age, people just didn't took them seriously anymore. Which, if one thinks about it, was nothing new. There were many artists and writers who were only appreciated after their time, and it was no different for prophets. Not to mention the amount of false prophets out there, and how the false prophets were often telling more believable stories. Or at least, they told the stories that people would want to hear.

Angels – or demons for that matter – who were stationed on Earth for over a year all came to the general conclusion that humans must really like to lie to themselves.

Now, Balthazar had been hoping that this prophet would have seen something. About the horn, or perhaps even the amulet or the sword. It was a long shot, but Balthazar was in it for the long run.

He watched the prophet, rummaging around in a dresser, clothed into some kind of bathrobe. A towel hung over a chair, which was only a precedent for how messy the rest of the house was at the moment. Clearly the prophet had only just woken up.
He crept closer, trying to pinpoint exactly whose aura this was; with Lucifer in the pit and Gabriel gone, there weren't that many Archangels left. With a bit of luck the other two were preoccupied with preparing for the big showdown that was inevitably going to happen.

But the remainders of grace that had been lingering there reached out to him. He stepped back the moment he recognised it. He had never seen Raphael in person, but he had felt his presence numerous times. It certainly was familiar enough. The grace went back into the house and knocked over a glass jar. Dandelions spilled on the windowsill. Balthazar saw the man looking up distractedly, rushed over to the jar, put it upright and then seemed to stare right at Balthazar.

He recoiled and checked if he was still invisible to the human eye.

He was.

The prophet was smiling slightly and rearranged his wildflowers. Balthazar cast one last, wary look. Perhaps another time, then.

Meg had tracked him down after the concert. Or rather, in the middle of the concert, where she had popped up on the balcony where Aziraphale and Crowley had been residing, but he told her to shush and at least wait until they had finished playing Ravel. He had liked Ravel.

Aziraphale obviously knew who – or rather, what she was, but was courteous enough not to comment on it and instead offered her the booklet.

She was still holding onto it when the orchestra had a thirty minute break, and Crowley announced he was going to have a quick smoke outside. Normally Aziraphale would've been glad to accompany him, but he had instead insisted he'd get some drinks and had wandered off.

“So,” said Crowley, lighting two cigarettes and handing one over to her. “To what do I have this pleasure?”

“I have questions,” said Meg. “And Loki says you can answer them.”

Crowley tried to hide his surprise behind his cigarette and promptly made the mistake of inhaling too deeply.

“I doubt that. I don't really have dealings with demigods. Much less that one.”

“Fine... it was something he said. I just want to know if he told the truth or if he was messing with me.”

“As gods of mischief tend to do.” Crowley helpfully supplied.

She didn't say anything.

It was still pleasantly warm for September and many were trying to enjoy the last good summer days of the year. London usually didn't get that many summer days in the first place, so people were making the most of it; smiling, happily chattering, traveling to escape the city and go picknicking somewhere in a forest with ants. He didn't understand what people liked so much about that. He had tried it and had found it to be a miserably experience, much preferring the comfort of an actual café.

“The angels,” Meg began hesitantly. “He says it was them who pulled Dean Winchester out of Hell.”
“The angels did that. That shouldn't be so shocking to you, right?”

She was holding the booklet so tight that Crowley wondered if it would promptly crumble into dust from all the pressure it was currently succumbed to.

“Come on – you've sat next to a bloody angel for the past half an hour!”

“He's not exactly a prime example of a demon-hating angel, is he?” she said heatedly, colour flushing back in her pale cheeks in random splotches. “I mean – you two are ...buddies. Somehow. I'm not afraid of the likes of him, I'm afraid of the idea that dozens of angels are walking around. They don't like demons very much.”

“You get used to it.” Crowley checked his watch, and suddenly wondered if there would be a market for watches that did more than just tell the time. Besides being water and fireproof, of course. “I think the angels are down here to protect the seals. So just stay away from the seals, and things will be fine, I expect. I'm doing fine.”

She rolled her eyes. “Yeah, no. I'm not buying that. I heard the other day that Lilith knows you're alive and is sending more demons after you. She wants your hide.”

For the first time in the conversation he properly looked at her. “Oh.” That was news.

His phone started buzzing and he held up a hand to her.

“Fergus. This important? Because I'm doing important stuff right now.”

“Of course you are,” said Fergus' voice through the phone. “They asked me to order you to break a couple seals for them. Something with striking fishermen blind. You can do it right there in London.”

“I'm not in London,” said Crowley, who was very much in London. “And how am I supposed to do that when I have to track down – “ he moved away from Meg and lowered his voice considerably, “- an Archangel who may or may not be dead? I can't do both at the same time! Is Hell low on personnel these days?”

There was a little pause.

“Good. You actually have a solid excuse. Now I don't have to think of one.”

All in all, this was turning out to be a confusing day. “What?”

“Lilith doesn't need more help breaking seals. There are too many for her to choose from as it is. Moron.”

Crowley frowned at his phone. Demons liked to order him around, sure, and the threats came with the package, but they usually didn't insult him. He promptly ended the call.

“Let's go back inside before that angel hogs all the drinks for himself,” he called to Meg. “That would be far more terrifying than the handful of random angels who have never seen humans or demons before.”

She glowered at him.

“You're not being funny.”

“Never said I was. Well? Are you, or are you not coming?”
Later, she would think what had possessed her to do it, but Meg joined the two for the second half of
the concert. It wasn't her kind of gig in the slightest, no. It had just felt oddly compelling.

Whether it was because she had hope to fly under the radar of the angels or whether she wanted to
make her last days on earth count, she didn't know.

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