

"His Sheltering Wings" **(A Fan Fiction story based on Good Omens, by Neil Gaiman and Terry Pratchett)**

Saint Mary Adermanbury Church Ruins, London - 1967

It'd been twenty-six years since he was here last. Back then it was holy ground. Someplace he'd have sworn he'd rather be disincorporated than end up. Then Aziraphale went and wandered into the clutches of that trio of Nazi thugs. Naturally, he couldn't leave his angel in there. The mere thought of what could have happened *still* made his head hurt and his skin crawl.

Crowley would have braved a full-on exorcism in progress, if it meant hauling Aziraphale out of there alive. He was still coming to grips with just how quickly the millennia of simmering interest coalesced that night, starting right across the road from where he sat in his Bentley, staring out at the hollow where old ghosts still roamed.

There wasn't much left of the church, now - not even a trace of sanctity remained on the grounds. What little of the stonework survived his well-placed bomb had been dismantled and hauled off to America last year, leaving only sad lines of a foundation and the stone effigy of a bird - an eagle, once, if he remembered correctly. Honestly, he hadn't really paid it any attention, at the time. He'd just been focused on getting his angel out of there before the shooting started or the bomb landed. Either one.

He sat there, staring at the stone bird -- rising from amidst the verdant garden like a phoenix frozen before it could burst into reviving flame - as he battled memories.

He empathized with the singed, scarred ruin of a bird more than he cared to admit. He often felt trapped halfway between the Hell he was forced to report to and his own personal idea of what Heaven *should* be, tucked away in amongst the shops of Whickber Street, in Soho. Both he and the bird were scarred, broken, ugly remnants of something once brighter, stronger, and more beautiful. With every decade that passed, he felt the brittle anger of abandonment more. Not God's - that was wasted effort. Not Satan's, either. Both were ultimately pointless.

Instead, he felt the keen blade of his own abandonment. He somehow got himself caught on a wheel of perpetual inadequacy. Oh, he hid it well. It was amazing what just the right head tilt and sarcastic quip could deflect. Most people never gave him a second glance. They just called him an arsehole and moved on.

To be fair, he *was* a bloody arshehole, with most people. Fuck, he didn't even know why he came back here, tonight.

Nostalgia, maybe.

Nah, not likely. Wasn't too much about that night he had any desire to remember.

Trust me.

The words, mouthed without a single sound while he stared through the sight of a rifle and wondered who he should pray to that his fingers quit shaking and he didn't disincorporate the being he'd only just realized he couldn't face life on Earth without. If he had, the moment would have ended *him*, too. There wasn't any coming back from that kind of act. And with a human war on at the time, it was doubtful Heaven would have let Aziraphale have another body to come back for a long while, if ever.

His hands shook against the Bentley's steering wheel and his gaze went unerringly to the tartan thermos laying on the passenger seat, the cap carefully pointed away from him. He really was a liar, because he knew *exactly* why he came back here, tonight. It was the same reason he forced himself to stay away from Soho as much as possible for the past two decades. He was only so strong, and he had enough living nightmares. Anyone who ever walked the corridors of Hell did, whether demon or damned.

Hell didn't have *anything* on the bloody nightmare he lived through in 1941. First, hearing through his spy network about the double agent in Military Intelligence and how she'd roped Aziraphale into some half-arsed Nazi scheme under the pretense of an arrest. Then he arrived at the bookshop to warn Aziraphale, only to find his angel already gone. Of course the adorable, overly excited idiot had to be punctual.

Crowley'd put the Bentley's engine to the test, that night, pressing it as fast as it would go and then begging for just a little more. The car wasn't the only thing in overdrive, either. His imagination kept creating images of a world with no Aziraphale. The bleak pit opening in his chest, that night, was one he never wanted to experience again.

Except, in his panic, he forgot God hated him. God wanted him punished, which meant him watching his angel stare down the barrel of a gun *twice* that night back in 1941.

Once, he might have been able to get past, in time. He'd already had a rescue plan cobbled together before he hit Wood Street. And it worked - well, up until Hell stuck their interfering noses in his life. He even managed to remember to save Aziraphale's books and ignore the soft light emanating from his angel's cerulean eyes. It'd been a struggle, but he managed to hang onto his gruff mask by the skin of his teeth and tell Aziraphale to shut up.

He'd thought his angel was safe. Right up until Aziraphale opened his mouth and tried to help him with the offer of a magic act. Long before they reached that magic shop, Crowley knew he was fucked - and not in the way he'd prefer. He'd wanted to blame Aziraphale for doing some kind of miracle on him, except... Except the only miracle in the entire bookshop was Aziraphale, and Crowley's heart had already rolled over, run up the white flag, and utterly surrendered the moment Aziraphale gave him that soft little look and murmured he'd get used to Crowley's first name, left over from his time in Florence.

He'd wondered in that moment what *else* Aziraphale might be willing or able to get used to, as it pertained to him. Until he realized -- standing on the Windmill Theatre's stage, aware neither of their miracles were working as he pointed an actual gun at his angel, his entire *being* screaming to drop it, grab Aziraphale, and get the Heaven out of there before things went any *more* wrong -- that the best way to protect his angel was to stay the Heaven away from him.

Crowley sighed to himself, his attention going back across the road to the last traces of the bombed-out church. Yeah, he knew why he was here. That blessed bloody statue had been calling his name for twenty-six years, hadn't it? Demanding he put it somewhere it could remind him on the daily not to be a fucking idiot ever again. He was a broken, marred, *ugly* thing, on the inside. He didn't deserve an angel's grace. He certainly didn't deserve Aziraphale's love or trust.

Yet, his angel showed up earlier tonight to offer him trust, if not love. His angel was trusting him to handle a loaded weapon, yet again, and this time not off *himself* in the process.

"Let's get this over with," he muttered to himself as he slid from the Bentley and went to claim his reminder to watch his back, before his wings got singed again.

In the end, it always came down to feathers and flames, didn't it?

Crowley's Flat, Mayfair, London - Night after Armageddon't, Mark I

He wasn't sure *what* to make of Aziraphale's strange reaction to the Mona Lisa sketch. There was a weird feeling in the air - he could feel it rasping against his skin like invisible sandpaper the entire time they hashed out their plan to deal with Agnes Nutter's impending final prophecy. He'd had to reassure his angel repeatedly - and prove it once with a brief "test run" - that they could swap appearances without any difficulty or side effects.

Still, the flashes of pain he kept seeing in Aziraphale's eyes before his angel would swiftly look away bothered Crowley. His angel never avoided his gaze. If anything, Aziraphale sought out his gaze, unafraid of him. It was humbling, and though he'd never admit it, Crowley felt *seen* when Aziraphale looked at him.

This avoidance – new since they'd arrived at the flat -- was like having someone prod around beneath his ribcage with a dull pair of scissors. Not sharp enough to do permanent damage, but uncomfortable enough to make having his fingernails pulled out one at a time sound like a fun alternative.

Crowley figured it was the angel stressing over the upcoming face swap.

"Quit worrying, angel. You'll be fine," he tried again, careful to keep the soft concern he felt out of his voice.

"I'm not worried, Crowley. I'm..." Aziraphale's mouth pressed shut in that prim, pursed little line that always drove Crowley insane and looked away. The clear distress on what Crowley could see of his angel's face poured acid into his already aching chest.

He had to keep reminding himself not to touch, long fingers shoved into the pocket of his jeans. He almost made a mess of everything at Tadfield Manor the moment he grabbed Aziraphale's lapels, his frustration overriding good sense and personal safety. Had that nun from St. Beryl's not interrupted, he feared he might have given in. After all, Aziraphale was right *there*, and Crowley'd been desperate for him since 1941. Longer, even.

Before Crowley could question what Aziraphale was so afraid to say, his angel cast another indecipherable glance at Leonardo's sketch, sighed heavily, and made his way into the room where Crowley kept all his plants. Crowley let him go without comment. Aziraphale made it clear back in 1967 that they weren't even close to on the same page. Maybe being around the plants would help settle his angel, because that he *was* unsettled couldn't be clearer.

Crowley leaned back against the wall next to the sketch, his head tipped back and his eyes closed as his fingers drummed restlessly against the wall.

I have a plan. We just need to get through this last prophecy... Then we can have some peace.

Maybe he could even finally get Aziraphale on the same page as him regarding what they meant to each other. They could be their own side, finally, and he could stop jumping at the shadows of their pasts...

"Crowley..."

His eyes popped open, immediately hypervigilant. Aziraphale's voice sounded thin, faraway, and pitched high with fear.

Had he underestimated Hell? *Shit, shit, shit.*

He was moving before he responded. "Aziraphale!"

He nearly melted to the floor in relief when found his angel standing in the middle of the plant room, facing Crowley. Relief evaporated as he saw the rigid expression on Aziraphale's face. The angel looked frozen in place, except for the swift rise and fall of his chest and shoulders to match his quick, frightened breaths.

"Angel, what's wrong?" He crossed the room in two panicked strides, his brow furrowing in confusion. "What the Heaven is wrong with you? There's nothing there!"

"What is *that*," Aziraphale's arm lifted, his finger jabbing past Crowley with an emphatic tremble, "doing here?"

Crowley followed his gesture, and realization settled over him like a lead-lined blanket, dragging his hope straight through the floor. *Fuck.* He saw the statue every day. Had for over half a century. Familiarity numbed the sting of memory... for *him*. He forgot Aziraphale probably hadn't seen the blessed thing since 1941, or that he might have similarly strong negative reactions to it like Crowley had in 1967. After all, his angel had been the one with the gun almost literally to his head.

"Right. Fuck. I'm sorry, angel," he apologized immediately. "I sort of forgot it was there, or I'd have warned you."

Aziraphale's attention turned slowly his way, even as the angel's arm lowered back to his side. "Crowley, why on earth would you even *have* that wretched thing?"

Crowley raised one eyebrow, surprised. He'd thought, of anyone on this planet, Aziraphale would understand why he brought it here. "Why do *you* insist on continuing to play at being a magician?"

Aziraphale huffed out an affronted breath. "It's hardly the same thing. I happen to *enjoy* magic." A look of horror dawned on his face. "Don't tell me you actually *enjoy* remembering having a bomb dropped on your head? Or nearly getting dragged off to Hell?"

"Course not. That thing," Crowley nodded toward the statue, "is here to remind me to never let my guard down. Last time I did, some idiot got the drop on us and nearly made me shoot you in the face."

Crowley watched the tension drain out of Aziraphale, even as the angel's expression softened. The uncomfortable, scratchy feeling in the air and the dull digging beneath his ribs vanished, and he only just stifled a relieved sigh.

His gaze was drawn back to the statue, and he made a silent promise. The day he could be sure neither Heaven nor Hell were going to show up looking to destroy them, he was leaving this miserable flat and that fucking bird behind. He and his angel needed someplace to just be them.

They were *both* due a little peace, and he intended to create it.

A.Z. Fell and Co Bookshop, Soho, London – 3 Weeks Post-Thwarting the Second Coming

Aziraphale peered anxiously out the window above his desk, uncertain if he was more excited by the surprise he spent so long planning, or worried he was about to finally send his demonic love completely around the proverbial bend for good.

To say Crowley was still adjusting to a world where he didn't have to look over his shoulder every second of the day -- or wait for some apocalyptic, unspeakable plot of Heaven or Hell's to either try to kill one of them or drive a wedge between them -- would be tantamount to calling the Dead Sea mildly brackish. Even in their own little corner of Soho, Crowley still couldn't completely relax when they were out in public. He reminded Aziraphale a little too much of one of those shell-shocked soldiers he tended to back during the Great War, and the worry his beloved Anthony might never truly be able to let himself accept the peaceful life they finally had a real chance at plagued him. He so wanted to give Crowley peace.

When they'd packed up the few possessions – and the plants, of course – Crowley had in his flat, last week, the demon was adamant they leave behind the battered stone eagle sculpture -- its wings still spread wide, if chipped a bit – that once sat in the sanctuary of Saint Mary Adermanbury's Church. He'd called it a "wretched thing," and Aziraphale heard in his voice what Crowley *didn't* say. Sweet, mischievous Anthony, with his quick wit, cleverness, and good heart, thought he was a wretched thing, too. He still thought he was somehow less, somehow unforgiveable and undeserving, even after hearing the Almighty declare him beloved – even after *Aziraphale* told him how loved he was.

Aziraphale closed his eyes against the desire to cry. He battled the urge a lot, aware all the love he had to give -- and that was a *lot* -- couldn't heal all Crowley's wounds. While helping Crowley pack up his flat, Aziraphale realized he needed something grander -- a gesture that couldn't be mistaken. Knowing what Crowley thought, how could he leave the statue behind? How could he not do everything in his power to prove it wasn't -- that *Crowley* wasn't -- a wretched, unlovable thing?

He only hoped he hadn't done the wrong thing, in what he did, because if he inadvertently harmed his precious demon again, he didn't think he could bear it.

"What's got you looking all guilty *this* time, angel?" The words, full of familiar teasing, nearly catapulted him out of his skin with how close behind him they were. He spun around to find Crowley barely a step away, shades hanging from his long fingers as he eyed Aziraphale with mock suspicion and a teasing smirk. "Better not be any other naked Archangels."

"Of course -- Crowley, that's not funny," he protested, blushing, even as his demon's smirk widened. Crowley tossed his shades onto the desk and reached out to thread their hands together, lifting each of Aziraphale's to his lips as his golden, serpentine eyes met and held the angel's.

"Sorry, angel, but the last time you looked like that, Nina had just mentioned your 'naked man friend'." Crowley's wicked chuckle sent a warm shiver through the angel. "I wasn't sure at the time if I should be jealous or laugh."

"I'm thankful you did neither."

Crowley hummed a vague agreement. "You're avoiding the point."

Aziraphale smiled without answering, fighting down his nerves as he disengaged one hand from Crowley's grasp and tugged the demon along as he headed for the staircase. He was going to trust his heart to lead him right, and his heart told him Crowley *needed* this. It was time.

"Angel, what the Heaven are you up to?" Crowley protested warily, though he followed without breaking his hold on Aziraphale's hand. He did that a lot, lately -- clung as if he feared something was going to rip Aziraphale away. A wave of sorrow and love washed through the angel.

"Hush. I have something to show you."

Crowley's gaze flicked to the top of the steps, before a downright sinful grin spread across his lips and he waggled his eyebrows. "I've seen it, but by all means..."

"Behave," Aziraphale scolded with a mock reproachful look. He huffed out a half-sigh, half-laugh. "What am I going to do with you?"

"I told you, angel. I'm a demon. I don't know how. And I have a few suggestions..."

"Crowley!" He let it go at that admonishment, then stopped at the door to the room where they'd situated Crowley's beloved plants – not that the demon got around to admitting he cared, yet. But he would, in time. Aziraphale was sure of that. The real question was, would he still want this life they were painstakingly building, after he saw what Aziraphale had done?

Yes. The angel told himself. He wasn't going to start doubting everything now. Crowley loved him. Even if what he'd done caused pain, they'd find a way past it. They were moving past the days of talking around and through each other, or just not talking at all. They were working their way through all the difficult conversations they spent so very long avoiding.

"I know you said to leave it," he murmured, "but I saw your face, Anthony. I saw what you weren't telling me."

He forced his hand steady as he turned the doorknob, pushing open the door into the sunlight-drenched room they'd turned into a veritable indoor garden, complete with a small, freestanding pond full of koi fish and a bench much like their bench in Saint James's Park. And now, it also contained Aziraphale's gift to Crowley -- he had it commissioned by a local stone sculptor who had promised to work the old stone without cleaning away the traces of burn marks, smoke, and dust while creating exactly the image Aziraphale drew for her.

He felt the hard clench of Crowley's grip on his hand and winced, but forced himself to look at his demon, his love, the other half of his heart. He looked, even expecting anger, or fear, or...

"It's the statue from the church, Anthony. At least, that's what it started out as."

Crowley was staring at the statue, but his expression was none of the things Aziraphale feared. His expression was slack in the same kind of awe Aziraphale was used to seeing from humans who experienced the grace of the Divine. His golden eyes were wide, and his face was damp with tears.

"Angel. Aziraphale... What... what did you *do*?"

"I took something believed to be wretched and broken," he whispered, afraid if he spoke too loudly, it would shatter the moment, "and showed it just how loved, and beautiful, it really was, all along."

Before he could move or say anything else, he found himself enveloped in Crowley's hard embrace, his demon's face burrowed against his neck as Crowley wept tears. Aziraphale was certain he'd never let himself cry, in entire lifetimes of being a demon. The angel wrapped his arms around this beloved, beautiful creature who had *never*, no matter his protestations otherwise, been anything less than cherished and worthy, and let Crowley cry. Whispering soft words of love and healing, Aziraphale smiled at the stone statue of a smudged, tarnished angel with pitch-black wings, cupping his palms around a small nightingale in mid-song, while his dark, soot-stained wings lovingly sheltered three seated children holding baby goats.

"You asked me yesterday how long I've loved you. The answer, my love, is forever," he whispered against Crowley's ear, planting a soft kiss there. "That's how long I've loved you. Angel. Demon. The trappings never mattered because it was always you. Underneath it all, I only saw *you*, Crowley."

THE END