

"Under Cover of Night"

A Fan Fiction by Esther Mitchell Inspired by Good Omens, by Neil Gaiman and Terry Pratchett

Part I: I, Spy

Crowley's Flat, Mayfair, London -- 1941

There was something endlessly entertaining about being a spy. He supposed he *could* say he'd been a spy for going on six thousand years, in the strictest sense of the word. Eden was supposed to be an act of sabotage, after all. But he hadn't really got a taste for *calling* himself a spy until 1914. Despite technically being older than enlistment allowances -- no matter how liberally one stretched them -- for His Majesty's Army, Crowley had found a way to make himself useful, while simultaneously keeping an eye on a certain angel who seemed -- to pardon the pun -- hellbent on getting himself disincorporated on the Western Front, tending to the wounded. Crowley'd become a spy. And he fancied himself rather good at it, as spies went. Wasn't hard to be when one had a natural talent for tempting people into doing things. Like giving up secrets. Or sabotaging their own battle plans.

It'd been fun while it lasted, and then he -- like everyone else in the world -- breathed a sigh of relief the "war to end all wars" was finally over.

Until he got a firsthand look at those camps the Nazi party created when an assignment from Hell to tempt a commander at Dachau landed in his lap in '39. The things he saw done to innocent people -- especially the children -- turned his stomach and made up his mind for him. Moment his feet hit the pavement back in Blighty, he went looking for the nearest way to get in on the spy game and send those sick fucking Nazis to Hell. When humanity decided they couldn't let atrocity stand unchallenged, either, he got his chance. He tacked an extra "J." to his name to keep the government men from looking too hard at his papers and went to offer his services as a spy with the Special Operations Executive.

He learned something, in the process. Namely, that spying was infinitely more satisfying when he had a cause. Nazis were evil fucks, and he was determined to send as many of them to Hell as he possibly could. The faster, the better. That was cause enough for him. He regretted ever sending that self-praising memo to Home Office about starting this whole mess. No way did he actually want to claim any responsibility for those fuckers in Germany, right now.

Hell didn't need to know that, though. Or that he wasn't going along with them, this time. Though he imagined even *Hell* thought the Nazis were a little extreme.

The black Bakelite phone on his desk rang, startling Crowley from his thoughts. Hopefully, this would be about those three Nazi thugs running around London. SOE brass had uncovered a mole in Military Intelligence, and they'd tapped Crowley to deal with her and her compatriots, next time they met. He'd already figured out the where and when but was waiting on his human compatriots to catch up. Never looked good to have information you couldn't explain *too* soon -- especially not in a war.

Looked like it was finally time. Picking up the phone, he put it to his ear with a simple, "Yeah?"

"Montgomery's got herself a pawn. She's set him up to meet with her Nazi co-conspirators. Tonight. St. Mary Adermanbury Church. Six-thirty, sharp."

"Got it. We know anything about the pawn?" He hadn't known that, and he'd rather keep any innocent civilians out of this. Made his job a lot easier, considering what he had planned. SOE didn't need to know that part, or they'd want to know how he knew the Luftwaffe bombing schedule.

"Not much. As you know, Hitler is obsessed with the occult, and prophecies."

As the words washed over him, a sick feeling started churning in Crowley's gut. He ignored it. "So, what? A fortuneteller? Some kind of modern-day prophet?"

His controller at SOE laughed. "Not even close. Some bookseller over in Soho. One of those old-fashioned names that's hard to pronounce. Ezekiel or Archimedes or some such. Deals in first editions and has access to most of Hitler's wishlist."

The churn became a full-on assault, and the plans he'd already set in motion just came back around to bite him solidly in the arse. *Aziraphale*. *Now what have you done?*

"On it," he barked at the controller, slammed the phone down, and glanced out at the already-darkening sky. *Shit*. If he was lucky, he'd have just enough time to get to the bookshop and stop the angel from getting himself inconveniently disincorporated.

Part II: The Webs We Weave

The Bentley was just screeching 'round the corner toward the bookshop when the radio he optioned for his car -- at a whopping thirty-five quid -- kicked on by itself. Only, the silky voice pouring from it was no jazz crooner.

"*Crowleeeey*," it cajoled, and his blood ran cold at the sound. His hands trembled on the steering wheel, and he told himself he was safe. The owner of that voice couldn't actually reach him, inside the Bentley. They had a deal. "*Crowley, are you listening to me?*"

Can't bloody not. "Course I am. What can I do for you?" The words were acid, even as they dripped smoothly off his tongue. If he hated anything more about his Fall than losing his stars, it was this. He *loathed* being beholden to Hell, hated the burn of the chain of his sins around his neck, searing his skin from time-to-time with the reminder he was as much a slave to Satan's whims as he'd been a puppet to God's.

"*Got a job for you. Sssomething sssimple, lovely. The kind of thing you like to do.*"

"Right. Kinda busy." Couldn't tell Satan what he was up to, but he didn't have time for any more jobs, right now. He wasn't about to scoot off to no doubt the middle of the warzone chasing some stupid temptation because Satan was hard up for some jollies--

"*I will be most grateful for your ssservice in this. A favor you can call in anytime, no questions assked, Crowley.*"

His heart twisted. Why did that promised favor instantly bring Aziraphale to mind? *If I don't make it in time...*

"Urg. Fine. What is it?"

"*Go to Soho. Find the Dirty Donkey. Ask for Arnie. He'll have a valise for you to deliver.*"

"Do I get to know what's in it?" He didn't mention he knew precisely where the *Dirty Donkey* was, or that he just pulled up outside the very establishment.

"*Whiskey. It must get to the Windmill Theatre, in the West End, tonight. It musst be there by eight o'clock.*"

His eyebrows lifted. Never really pegged Satan for a bootlegger, as the Americans called them. "Whiskey. Windmill Theatre. Tonight by eight. Right."

"And, Crowley? It *musst* get there intact. There's a special guest due in the theatre, tonight. An American colonel. If he makes it to the front lines, he will be a tool of good, and we cannot have that, can we, Crowley?"

"Nah, 'course not," Crowley muttered, hoping his tone came out sounding like the idea of Good gaining an upper hand irritated him, rather than utter sarcasm. And he could easily read through the lines, here. The whiskey he was supposed to collect was laced -- at very least with a sleeping draught, but more likely with poison. Satan wanted him to poison the whole theatre, just to stop one bloody Yank from reaching the front lines.

Crowley's brain froze on how *he* was supposed to be the hand that poisoned an entire theatre full of people, thus adding more links to his chain of sin, more debt to Hell. Something Crowley *actively* avoided. Normally, he just tempted people into making the necessary bad decisions for themselves, leaving himself out of the whole ordeal. His stomach lurched at the idea of poisoning a whole theatre full of unsuspecting people. Still, he'd sort that out, later. Right now, he had bigger problems. Like stopping Aziraphale from walking into a trap.

"On it." He turned the radio off and slid from the Bentley, plunking his hat on his head as he made his way into the pub. At least from inside the pub, he could keep an eye out for when the angel left his bookshop, and stop him.

"Get you somethin'?" The lumbering, heavily-bearded barman probably had more in common with an African gorilla than a man, but whatever.

Crowley kept his gaze fixed out the windows facing Aziraphale's bookshop as he muttered, "Here to see Arnie."

"Oh. You're one-a Mrs. H's lads. Right."

As the barman turned to call for Arnie -- who was going to be spending his afterlife wishing he'd never got involved in his current trade -- Crowley ignored everything but his focus on the bookshop, looking for signs of light in the windows or anything to indicate the angel was in there.

Come on, Aziraphale! Show yourself. The anxiety clenching away in his gut always warned him something wasn't right. Right now, it was screaming like a blessed air raid siren.

A loud sound startled him, and Crowley nearly jumped out of his own skin as he swung 'round, hissing in fury, to find a portly chap with a pock-marked face and beady eyes smirking at him. A dark-colored valise sat on the bar between them.

"You look like you've got someplace else to be," the man -- *oh, shit, it's not a man at all* -- sneered at him. Beady, rat-like eyes hinted he'd happily report back to Hell that Crowley wasn't interested in doing his job.

Like that should fucking come as a surprise to anyone down there. Still, he didn't want to call any attention to Aziraphale -- not if this demon worked practically on his doorstep. *Not for long, you git.*

"Nah," he allowed with a negligent shrug. "Just the theatre."

Pulling the valise from the top of the bar -- blessed thing was heavier than it looked! -- Crowley sketched an irreverent salute and sauntered his way back out to the Bentley, who was none too happy to have poisoned contraband shoved in its boot. Then, with a nervous glance back into the pub to make sure he wasn't being observed, Crowley crossed the street and pounded a fist on the bookshop door.

"I know you're in there, angel. We need to talk."

Dead silence answered him. Not even the slightest scuffle of sound.

The knot in Crowley's gut grew. He glanced at his watch and swore. "Shit, angel. Would it kill you to be running behind for *once* in your bleedin' life, you idiot?"

Kill. Panic zipped through Crowley. He was back across the street, in the Bentley, and peeling away from the curb in the space of a quickly indrawn gasp. His foot practically stomped the accelerator through the floor, and a single word he didn't even realize he was muttering left his mouth in a constant stream. "Pleasepleasepleasepleaseplease..."

He didn't even know who he was begging. The Bentley, to go faster than its already pegged out speed? The German bomber he'd already miracled to get lost and drop its payload on a church full of Nazis, to be delayed? Aziraphale, to not be an idiot and get himself hurt, or worse? Fucking *God*, to have enough compassion on one angel, if nothing else, to keep Aziraphale safe?

He didn't even know. All he knew was, his mind kept conjuring images of a world with no more Aziraphale, and whenever it did, he tasted bile rising up his throat, and felt the edges of a darkness that terrified him opening up in his chest.

I'm not going to make it. Shit. Shit. I'm so sorry, angel, I'm not going to make it. Forgi--

A chill washed through Crowley as he realized what he'd been about to ask. The one thing he'd never asked of *anyone* since he Fell. Demons were unforgivable. He shouldn't want it. Shouldn't *need* it. Shouldn't crave the chance to look into soft blue eyes, or hear

the soothing melody of those words in the only voice that'd ever soothed the hellfire in his soul.

He shouldn't. But he *did*. More than anything else in all his miserable existence, he wanted to hear Aziraphale whispering that it was okay, that *he* was all right just as he was. That he was forgiven for driving the angel away with a lie.

Crowley's stomach heaved and his eyes stung. He *couldn't* lose Aziraphale. He just couldn't. This wasn't about sides, or any bloody Arrangement, anymore. If anything happened to Aziraphale, he would... would...

His foot jammed down on the brake as a reality he never expected crashed over him. Was this... *love*?

Shit. It was, wasn't it?

"I'm in love... with Aziraphale?" Even whispered as a question, the words rang with a truth he couldn't deny anymore.

His gaze dropped to his watch, and he swore. Six-thirty-four. In less than two minutes, that bomb would be dropping, no matter what. If he didn't get a wiggle on, he was going to lose the angel he was still coming to grips with loving -- *love*. *Huh. Funny ol' world.* -- before he had a chance to do anything about it.

Bounding out of the Bentley, he drew a deep breath, and realized he was absolutely certain he was in love as he charged up the steps of a *church*, of all places, feeling the first burning sting of consecrated ground through his shoes. Didn't matter. He could handle it.

For Aziraphale, he was pretty sure he could handle almost anything -- even if there was a full-on exorcism or baptism going on inside those doors, which he was fairly certain there wasn't.

He pulled open one of the large outer doors just in time to hear a voice he'd recognize anywhere complain, "You can't kill me. There'll be paperwork!"

Without a second thought, Crowley charged inside, letting the door close behind him with a dramatic *bang* and sucking in a sharp breath as he made his way into the sanctuary as fast as -- well, as fast as he could be expected to move with his feet smoldering away in his shoes.

The things I do for you, angel.

Part III: Practice to Deceive

A.Z. Fell and Co Bookshop, Soho, London -- Later that Night

Crowley was trying not to come out of his skin, between the revelation of his feelings, the harrowing events of the evening, and the impending terror of being hauled off to Hell and away from the angel he'd only just come to understand his feelings for.

While he waited for Aziraphale to return from putting up his cloak and other magician's trappings, upstairs, Crowley danced anxious fingertips along the spines of several special editions -- first printings of some of the oldest printed bibles in the world -- and swallowed back a sardonic grin. Your average priest thought waving a bible around would strike fear in the heart of a demon.

Little did humans know, most lower-level demons didn't even *have* hearts -- not in anything but the strictest corporeal sense. Bibles only intimidated the ones who couldn't read and thought there was something in there they didn't already know.

Crowley knew the Bible front to back, and back to front. In 1918, just after the Great War, he'd decided on one drunken night -- bored out of his mind in some fleabag motel in Kansas -- to read the entire thing backward, just for something to pass the time. He found the whole thing amusing, instead of intimidating. Maybe a little annoying, even, that despite his hand in so much of it, no one even *once* thought to refer to him by name. It was all "demon" this and "demonic force" that. Like he was entirely indistinguishable from any other demon out there.

Now, he worried it might, at least for Aziraphale, *be* true. But the angel had called him a friend -- *twice* -- tonight. And he'd asked Crowley to trust him, while simultaneously trusting his corporation to Crowley. That *had* to mean something, right?

Or was he reading too much into it all, hoping for some sign his own feelings might be reciprocated?

His fingers stopped on one old, leather-bound book right between Aziraphale's copy of the Gutenberg Bible and the Buggre Alle This Bible. Crowley's heart jumped in a blend of surprise and recognition.

It wasn't a large tome, being less than half the size of the bibles around it, and definitely not of the ecclesiastical nature of the other books, either.

Crowley tapped one finger lightly against the old -- but immaculate -- leather-bound but unmarked spine for a long moment, staring at his own hand. He still felt the warm slide of thick, silken fingers over his skin there, the memory imprinted on his flesh still every bit as electric as the touch itself had been as their fingers brushed while exchanging the valise of books. A trembling, aching need went through Crowley at the memory, and his breath stuttered as his knees weakened.

He slammed his eyes closed behind his dark glasses, fighting for composure. It didn't help. Against the inside of his eyelids, all he saw were cerulean eyes, swimming with adoration and hope he was terrified to answer at the time. He'd been an idiot. When Aziraphale thanked him, he panicked and barked at him to shut up.

He hadn't meant to do that. What he'd wanted -- *still* wanted -- to do was rip off his shades, get right up in the angel's space, and bask in the feel of Aziraphale's touch and the soft wonder in those angelic eyes. He'd wanted to touch back... the hand at Crowley's side clenched in a trembling fist with the aching desire to know the warmth of that slight flush on Aziraphale's cheeks as he offered his thanks. He wanted to know the softness of those white-blond curls sliding between his fingers, and...

"*Fuck.*" Crowley let his head fall forward, his forehead resting on the books in front of him as he fought his heaving breaths and wayward thoughts back under control. He'd never known cravings like this. He was the Great Tempter, the Serpent of Eden. He'd led countless humans down the path of desperate, carnal want and clawing, aching need, over the millennia. But he'd never known what it *felt* like, before.

Hadn't he?

Crowley swallowed hard and realized the bitter taste of his own lie. He'd spent millennia -- ever since that afternoon on the wall of Eden -- manufacturing reasons to get close to Aziraphale. And maybe he hadn't felt *this* kind of desire, before, but he knew the hunger all the same. The desire to look, to hear, and the hope... ah, the reckless, damning *hope* of a touch. He'd ignored them all, before. Told himself demons didn't feel love or desire. Told himself whatever it took to make the Arrangement, and their little flirtations over the millennia.

He couldn't ignore it, anymore. The truth was eating him alive.

But he'd have to. Wouldn't he? There was no way Aziraphale would ever see him as anything more than a friend. After all, it took them six thousand years to get *this* far.

Crowley started from his thoughts as he heard Aziraphale's tread on the stairs, then the unmistakable clinking of wine bottle and glasses from the table in the back. Crowley plucked the thin, leather-bound book from among the others, and turned, leaning his

shoulders up against the bookshelves as he turned it over a few times in his hands and did his best to pretend he'd been studying it curiously all along, even as he heard the scrape of a match, and caught the whiff of sulfur before light bloomed to his right.

Careful to keep his voice at a near-bored level of nonchalance, he commented, "I'm surprised you kept it."

"Hmm?" Aziraphale glanced his way, before the angel's attention dropped to the book in Crowley's hands and he smiled. "Why wouldn't I? It's a lovely book -- especially in its original Italian."

Crowley uttered a short laugh, shaking his head. Only his angel would think *The Divine Comedy* was a 'lovely book.' "Angel, it's complete rubbish, written by an idiot."

Aziraphale lifted one eyebrow. "You're the one who gave it to me. Did I ever thank you for those first edition printings?"

Crowley shrugged uncomfortably, turning to replace the book on the shelf before sauntering over to the table and lounging in one of the chairs. He didn't want to think about his motives in having Johannes Gutenberg print the fourteenth century Italian poetic narrative, along with a copy of the entirety of Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*. At the time, he'd passed it off as a "test run" for their newly crafted printing press. He'd let Gutenberg take all the credit for the machine, and even claim that the Bible was its first print. Didn't matter to him. He got what he wanted out of it.

Still, he'd kept the books he had printed safely tucked away until Aziraphale finally gathered all his books in one place and opened the bookshop in 1800. Not that Crowley ever admitted where the two books came from. And he wasn't about to, now, either. No matter what he realized tonight, being that vulnerable wouldn't help him out any.

"Stumbled across them," he muttered as Aziraphale poured them both wine. "Thought you might like 'em, is all."

His angel flashed a small, bashful smile his way that nearly dragged a groan out of Crowley. Before he did something stupid and cost himself his only *real* friend, Crowley lifted the glass Aziraphale slid his way and took a fortifying gulp of wine.

How he was going to keep his feelings under wraps for the rest of however long they might have before Armageddon, he hadn't a bloody clue. He would, though. Even if it meant keeping how far he'd been willing to go just to see Aziraphale smile to himself for the rest of time, he'd manage it, somehow.

Part IV: Against Tomorrow

Trying to martial control of himself in the face of not only Aziraphale's revelation he'd actually got a magic trick to work -- nicking the damning photograph in the process -- but also the angel's admittance he might open to something more than Heaven's black-and-white thinking, Crowley studied the wine sloshing in his glass as he swirled it around. It was a good year, but he couldn't get the color -- like blood -- out of his mind, tonight. Knowing his angel risked exposure to help the likes of *him* tonight made getting control of himself difficult. Knowing how close Aziraphale came to dying -- combined with the wine in his glass reminding him of blood -- he couldn't help thinking about the war out there, around them. That brought to mind the *last* world war. The humans had called it the war to end all wars. Yet, far too soon, they found new and terrible ways to kill one another.

Shades of grey, indeed.

"Can you believe we're back here, again?" He muttered to Aziraphale, not looking up from his wine.

The angel made a small sound of confusion. "We always drink here. It's safer."

"Not the bookshop," Crowley hissed, shaking his head before taking a drink. The alcohol had a familiar burn going down. He was so used to it, he barely felt it, anymore. "War. You'd think they got all that killing out of their system, last time. Instead, they just keep finding newer, more horrific ways to kill each other."

"Crowley..."

He glanced up, letting his gaze burrow into the beautiful blue eyes of his angel. They were so calm right now. But he could still remember a time they'd been filled with tears, making him want to burn down the whole fucking world for making the angel cry. *Guess that should have been a hint how I felt.* He took another, larger drink, trying to burn away the memory. It wouldn't go. Finally, he rasped, "Remember Christmas, 1914?"

Aziraphale's smile faltered for just a second. "The Christmas Truce. Yes."

"You blew up your halo for that. Risky, angel. That's what it was." He'd nearly disincorporated on the spot when he realized what Aziraphale intended. Of course, he'd *thought* the angel was blowing up No Man's Land, maybe to prove a point to the humans that they were a bunch of idiots for running around doing their best to off each other, or just generally declaring war on Hell. He hadn't known a halo could be used to create peace, too.

Crowley shuddered at the familiar taste of fear, and chided, "You could have set off a war between Heaven and Hell, you know."

Aziraphale smiled indulgently at him. "Don't be silly. I knew *exactly* what I was doing. Besides, you were the only demon there, and you weren't going to tell anyone."

Crowley chuckled in truth, warmth flowing through him in a heady rush at the absolute trust in his angel's voice. The humans didn't have it half right.

Some things really *were* worth dying for.

The thought made him want to throw caution to the wind. They spent so long dancing around the truth, and he was tired of always speaking in code. If this was his last night on Earth, he didn't want to live it as a spy.

He watched Aziraphale set aside his wine and get up from the table, moving to turn on the old radio in the corner he claimed, before they'd gone to the theatre, was for monitoring the air raids. Only, Crowley was well-aware the bookshop would still be standing even if the Blitzkrieg completely levelled Soho.

Soft music flowed out of the radio -- Glen Miller, from the sound of it -- and Aziraphale returned to the table with a smile.

"That's better, now, isn't it?"

Not really. Because now Crowley was imagining pulling Aziraphale back up from his seat and teaching him how to dance very slowly, and very, *very* close together.

Fuck. His hand tightened around his wine glass as he shrugged and muttered, "'S okay."

Yeah, he wanted done with the spy shit in the worst way. Especially the coded speech, where everything meant something else, and they could never quite be sure the other meant what they *thought* they meant. For Crowley, there was no more Arrangement. No more games of saying one thing and meaning another. Setting foot on consecrated ground to rescue this angel didn't promote any agenda of Hell's. It furthered no demonic plot. If anything, doing so worked against Hell's plans, and he had no doubt he'd be paying for that, too, when his arse landed back in Hell, tomorrow.

He'd deliberately destroyed the laced whiskey. Hell would no doubt think he'd done it for Aziraphale, even without that photograph whatshisname took. Never mind breaking those bottles was the *one* part of tonight he'd have done whether Aziraphale was there or not. That move had been strictly a *fuck you* to Hell and the Nazis.

Didn't matter -- he wouldn't be hiding from the truth, this time, and the truth was, in his mad dash to get to the church before *his* angel got disincorporated by a bunch of Nazi arseholes, he realized an even more maddening truth. He was in love.

Hell was going to go bonkers over *that* revelation.

He wasn't supposed to love. He wasn't supposed to be *able* to love. Especially not an angel, of all people. But he *did*. And if the world stopped spinning tomorrow, he'd *still* want to spend this last night right here, with his angel. Aziraphale.

And if he hadn't made it to the church in time, *his* entire world *would* have been over. The thought of finding Aziraphale's corporeal body on the sanctuary floor, a bullet hole between those beautiful cerulean eyes and that clever brain of his spread all over the floor *still* lurched through Crowley every time he thought of it, even hours later.

The irony of facing the possibility of that vision playing out in reality -- substituting the theatre stage for the sanctuary, and his own clumsy hand for the Nazi arseholes -- just bare hours ago *may* have contributed to his overindulgence in the wine. Or maybe it was just being here, in the confines of a place that smelled of old books and bergamot -- of *Aziraphale* -- that did it.

Either way, he'd miscalculated the amount of alcohol he consumed, and he was having trouble remembering what he was and wasn't supposed to be feeling. Or doing.

The flow of a woodwinds, overlaid with the warble of a flute, filled the air, and Crowley straightened with a quick, protective glance around at the sudden indrawn breath of the angel seated too far away for his liking. "Wot?"

"Shh," Aziraphale shushed him, his golden pinky ring flashing in the candlelight as he fluttered his hands in the air. "I love this song! So romantic..."

Crowley cocked his head to one side, listening as the richly feminine and familiar voice of the Forces' Sweetheart, Vera Lynn, filled the bookshop.

"That certain night... The night we met... There was magic abroad in the air. There were angels dining, at the Ritz..."

Watching the dreamy light bloom in *his* angel's eyes and knowing he'd probably never get a chance to dance with the only love he'd ever known if he didn't make a move now, Crowley surged to his feet. The motion startled Aziraphale, and he jerked backward in his seat as Crowley held out a hand to him. The angel regarded his hand, then his face, in confusion. "Crowley, what on Earth...?"

Crowley flourished a small bow, hand still held out, palm up. If Aziraphale wanted romance, he didn't have a problem in the world giving it. Let his angel remember this about him -- *Please, whoever's listening, let him remember me like this!* -- and he'd find a way to be content with whatever came in the morning. Clearing his throat, he murmured a quiet, "Dance with me."

"Wh-what?"

"Please, angel. Just once."

There was a moment's hesitance, during which panic and uncertainty chased each other around the angel's face. Then, with an indrawn breath and the tiniest of nods, Aziraphale lifted a hand trembling so violently Crowley could see it shaking in the candlelight, even before the angel's skin touched his. Then...

Oh, shit. Fuck. His hands are so soft! A tremble went through Crowley, and he barely maintained his upright stance. Every molecule of him -- corporation *and* eternal soul -- wanted to sink to his knees, wrap his arms around his angel's waist, press his face to all those beautiful curves, and beg Aziraphale to never leave his side. Only, he couldn't do that. Hell was coming for him, and he wouldn't put his angel in harm's way for anything in all of Creation.

Forcing a smirk, he wrapped his hand around Aziraphale's, drawing the angel away from the table to where there was a little room, and wrapping his other arm around the angel's waist, settling it on his lower back.

"I-I..." Aziraphale glanced around nervously. "I don't think there's enough room for this, Crowley."

That pulled a chuckle from the demon. He could only imagine what his angel -- reading all those Regency era books of his -- imagined dancing to be. It had little to do with what Crowley intended.

"Shh," he repeated back, forcing a teasing lightness to his voice he was beyond feeling with his angel's body so close he could feel the heat coming off Aziraphale. He shifted his hand a little more firmly against the angel's back, easing them together a fraction more. Still not close enough for *his* liking, but he didn't want to make Aziraphale uncomfortable, either. "Just let *me* lead, yeah?"

Aziraphale's cerulean eyes filled with worry, before it washed away and, with a visible swallow, the angel nodded.

Smiling to himself, swept up in the romance he was creating, Crowley released Aziraphale's hand just long enough to snap his fingers. The radio instantly started playing Vera Lynn's song about nightingales again. Leading his angel gently through a few swaying steps, he looked down into dreamy cerulean eyes that were focused entirely on him, and smiled, murmuring, "Easy, yeah?"

Aziraphale nodded dazedly, his gaze dropping to somewhere near Crowley's chin, and a small whimper of sound left the angel's lips. Something in Crowley -- some sense burning deep inside his eternal being -- came alive at that sound, but he had no idea what to do with it.

Like all things he had no idea what to do, he ignored it and kept moving them in a small circle, snapping his fingers behind the angel's back to restart the song every time it neared the end. He'd keep doing it for as long as Aziraphale let him get away with it, because just holding his angel like this was an experience that transcended any wonder he could remember experiencing in his entire existence.

Even creating universes paled by comparison to this moment, and the feel of this angel in his arms. His heart nearly stopped in his chest, and he barely kept himself from stumbling, when the angel leaned in of his own accord and pressed his cheek to Crowley's chest.

Oh, shit. Could Aziraphale feel how hard his heart was pounding? Or how fast? Did he know what it meant? How could he not? Aziraphale was a being made entirely of love. He sensed it whenever he encountered it. Surely, by now, he had to know how Crowley felt, even without being told.

The softest giggle shook against him, where their bodies touched, and the sound pulled an instant smile to his face, even as his heart skipped a beat. "What are you laughing about?"

Another giggle answered him, even as Aziraphale pulled back to look up at him. Crowley instantly missed the warm pressure against the center of his chest but met the cerulean eyes looking up at him with so much mirth and was instantly lost.

"Just this. Us. Who'd ever imagine it, right? An angel and a demon, dancing." Aziraphale giggled again. "I mean, angels don't even dance and--"

Crowley didn't want to hear any more about how or why they shouldn't be together. Some instinct he didn't take the time to actually question, had him leaning in to silence the words he didn't want to hear. His lips touched Aziraphale's, and a jolt like lightning -- he was very familiar with that -- winged straight through him, followed by a ravenous

craving that demanded more. He had no choice but to heed it, pressing his mouth more firmly to Aziraphale's.

He'd never kissed *anyone*. Not once in millennia of life. But he'd watched enough humans do it, tempted enough to it -- and more-- to know how it was supposed to work. Still, this was Aziraphale he was kissing -- fuck, fuck, fuck, he was *kissing Aziraphale!* -- so he went slowly, brushing his lips back and forth over the angel's, adding light pressure with each pass.

Somewhere, in the hazy recesses between *I'm kissing Aziraphale* and *Fuck, I love him so much*, Crowley realized something around them had changed. And then reality intruded. They were no longer dancing.

Panic jolted through Crowley. How was he going to explain this? He didn't even regret it, but nor did he want to get dragged off to Hell knowing Aziraphale hated him.

"Angel, I..." He opened his eyes, expecting fury and betrayal in Aziraphale's cerulean eyes. What he was unprepared for was the watery tremor of tears. *Fuck, fuck, fuck, I made him cry! No, angel, please no!* "I'm... I'm sorry, angel. I didn't mean to--"

His words died off on a flinch as Aziraphale's hands reached toward his face, and he expected to get slapped, at very least. Braced for a slap, he startled in confusion when those silky, thick fingers of Aziraphale's moved up to gently close around the temples of his shades, a small, reproachful smile on the angel's lips.

"If you're going to kiss me, Crowley," the angel's whispered words beamed like sunlight over the demon, until he could barely contain the tremor racing through his body, "don't hide your eyes from me when you do it."

A stuttering breath left Crowley as Aziraphale folded the glasses carefully and tucked them into the breast pocket of Crowley's shirt before giving it a light, stroking pat. Then, as the angel's eyes came back to his, Crowley leaned in, brushed another light kiss on Aziraphale's lips, and muttered, "I promise, angel."

Aziraphale hummed and, before Crowley could process what he was up to, wrapped one hand in the demon's bright red tie and pulled him closer, opening his mouth beneath Crowley's kiss.

Part V: In Errant Truth

After the single most spectacular moment of his existence thus far, Crowley realized just how dangerous kissing Aziraphale was. He would follow his angel almost anywhere, do almost anything, for just the *chance* of another touch, another kiss. He was completely arse over tea kettle, as the human expression went. Even after they returned to the table and their wine, he was still buzzing like an excited little bee.

Hopefully the buzz of kissing Aziraphale would last him the rest of his lonely eternity. Crowley took a drink of his wine, feeling the insidious creep of consequence growing nearer. He'd already been warned, back in 1827, what would happen if he messed up another assignment. He was supposed to make sure Elspeth MacKinnon got caught. Hell wanted her. He never asked why, but they had, and he was supposed to make sure it happened. They didn't buy his laudanum inebriation, either. They left him to dry out in one of the worst torture chambers in all of Hell -- on Dagon's suggestion -- and he'd spent the next thirty years used to train hellhounds how to hunt, just to drive the point home: *Stay away from the angels and do what you're told, or this is your lot for eternity.*

He'd never told them it was only *one* angel. Just like he didn't tell Aziraphale that nicking Whatshisname's photo probably wouldn't matter.

None of that mattered, anymore. Nothing mattered but keeping Aziraphale safe. Which meant the angel had to be ready for the inevitable. "Look, angel, when... when they come for me, you can't try to stop them. You," he swallowed hard, fear and grief clogging his throat. "You gotta let them take me, yeah?"

"Nope," Aziraphale responded in a cheerful tone that didn't match the worry, hurt, and anger in his blue eyes. He swayed a little, then propped his elbow on the table, resting his chin on his raised hand. Crowley felt the stroke of the angel's wine-hazy gaze like a physical caress over his face. "Gosh... You really are lovely, my dear."

"Angel," Crowley groaned, fighting to stay on topic and not grin like a lovesick idiot, or give in to the urge to reach out and stroke Aziraphale's face. Grief bit deep into his soul. He was going to miss his angel. His beautiful face, his soft cerulean eyes, his voice... Crowley's throat closed, and he nearly broke. The idea of spending an eternity without his angel's gentle, soothing voice...

Crowley lifted his glass in one shaking hand, drained it, refilled it, and drained it again. He had to repeat this process several times before he was able to get control of himself. Which might also have been a tactical error in his struggle to get Aziraphale to agree with him. He was already feeling light-headed. How much wine had he drunk? He couldn't remember, but it was enough his words were starting to get lost in the jumble of just wanting to get close again.

"Ngel..." His tongue tripped over words as he tried to explain to Aziraphale that having a Legion show up on his doorstep in the morning, demanding he send Crowley out, wouldn't go over too well with Upstairs.

"You don' unnerstan', 'ngel," he tried again, leaning closer than was probably advisable, considering he'd really like to just *leeeaan* the rest of the way and fuck the consequences. And maybe Aziraphale. *Nah. Nah. Definitely* Aziraphale... *Wait. Wot?*

Crowley shook himself and scowled, trying to recollect what he was supposed to be arguing as an inebriated giggle floated to him from the angel, who was currently drunkenly changing the words to the song *Green Eyes* that was playing on the radio. Something about gold eyes and dreams and thirst and morning... Right. That was it. Morning. Legion.

Fuck. "Pay 'tention, 'ngel. Ya gotta let'em have me, 'ngel. 'Kay? 'S im-por-tant. 'S right. Gotta keep safe."

"Safe... I'll prote't you," Aziraphale slurred, an expression Crowley figured the angel *meant* to be stern, but that just looked deliciously pouty, crossing his face. "Thish's 'mbasty. They... *not. Allowed...* Need per... permit? No... Permish...on. Yes. That."

Aziraphale swayed forward then, ending up with his face close enough Crowley could smell the sweet wine on his breath as he whispered, "Remind me of you."

Crowley frowned. He was sure that didn't make sense. "Wot?"

"Night... nightingales. Now they..." he drifted off, his gaze dropping, and Crowley felt the heat of it burn across his lips. "Remind me of you."

Crowley blinked, aware he needed some space, or he was going to kiss Aziraphale again, and this time he wasn't sure he could stop. He frowned, trying to figure out if his brain thought it was a better idea to lean back or forward, to make that space.

Definitely back. Right? Right. Back. He leaned back in his seat, and tried to reason with the angel. He could still do that much. *Yup.*

"Look 'ere, 'ngel. I kin't... *Can't* have ya dyin'. Ya hear me?" He reached out, laying his shaking hand -- why did his hands keep shaking? -- over his angel's. "I love you, 'ngel..."

Silence dropped, a reverberating mallet of sobriety, over the room. Aziraphale blinked rapidly, shooting bolt-upright in his seat and yanking his hand from Crowley's touch with a stumbled, "W-wh-what?"

Shit, shit, shit. "I... I mean... It's like.... *urghk!*" Crowley cut himself off, trying to think how to explain his way out of this. They'd barely agreed they were friends, earlier. Yeah, they kissed, but... kissing could be played off as the wine, or fear of what was coming. Even simple curiosity, after all these millennia. But the *words*... Shit, why had he said the *words*?

Worst part was, he didn't even *want* to take them back. His insides were clawing like a rabid, feral thing for Aziraphale to say them back. *Just once.* He knew they were in there. He'd seen the way his angel looked at him. He'd come to the sudden realization back in Job's courtyard that Aziraphale felt *something* for him. Back at the church, tonight, there'd been no avoiding the truth. It was written all over the angel's face, and Crowley had fought himself over just declaring himself right then and there, on the rubble of that church.

Even now, he knew he could take whatever Hell dished out if he could hear those words from his angel just once.

Which, of course, Aziraphale would never do. It was too dangerous. Crowley could already see the fear creeping over Aziraphale's expression, even before the angel rose hurriedly from his seat, took stumbling steps away from the table, looking back from the shadows just beyond the candlelight.

"You can stay until we're sure they're not coming for you, in the morning. Then I think it's best you go, don't you, Crowley?"

Crowley nodded, dropping his gaze to where his own hands shook on the tabletop, and flinched as he heard the snap of the radio turning off, heard the echo of silence pulse through his soul, shattering so many dreams he never realized he had, before tonight.

Well, he'd fucked the shit out of *that* one, hadn't he? What did it matter if a Legion showed up for him in the morning? Wasn't anything Hell could do to him his own bloody mouth hadn't just done, after all.

Bless it all. He shouldn't have let the words out. He knew it was too soon. He was moving too fast. Yet, as he staggered his way to his feet, stumbling and swaying his way through the shop until he collapsed on the settee, he couldn't resist one more glance toward the upstairs, where he could hear Aziraphale moving around amidst the books up there, since the angel didn't sleep. Nor could he halt one more confession, before he flopped over and passed out.

"I'll miss you more'n my stars, angel."

Part VI: In Morning's Light

"Wot the...?" Crowley lifted an arm to cover his eyes as light seared across his face, dragging him to consciousness. His first thought was confusion. Sunlight never usually made it into his bedroom. He made sure of that. Drawing a breath, he snapped the rest of the way to alertness, as the familiar scents of old books and bergamot invaded his senses, and he realized where he was.

And why.

And what he did last night.

Fuckfuckfuckfuck. Crowley launched himself up from the settee in the bookshop, where he only barely remembered passing out, pissed off his rocker, after making the world's biggest arse out of himself. Yet, deep inside, he couldn't stop the little flicker of hope. Because something was coming back to him he hadn't really clocked in his inebriated state, last night. The expression on Aziraphale's face, from the shadows outside the candlelight.

There was panic, yes. And pain -- okay, that was probably best left for another time to examine. Neither of those things fanned the steadily building hope in his chest, however. It was the familiar *softness*. Right before he told Crowley he'd need to leave in the morning, the truth Crowley saw back at the rubble of the church blazed bright in Aziraphale's eyes. The words the angel wouldn't let himself say, screaming from the depths of cerulean blue. Crowley's heart tripped over the memory.

Maybe he hadn't fucked everything up as badly as he thought.

"Angel?" His voice sounded hoarse and rusty. Yup, that'd be the alcohol he didn't think to divest himself of before passing out in the wee hours.

A faint clinking, from somewhere in the back of the shop, turned his attention that way, just before Aziraphale stepped out of the back room, looking as crisply put together as always, teacup and saucer held precisely in both hands, his face set in completely unreadable serenity, but his eyes -- those beautiful blue eyes -- full of hurt and resignation Crowley wasn't sure *what* to make of.

"I checked outside. As you can see, I'm sure, there are no Legions of Hell loitering around out there. So I suppose you'll to be off, now?"

"Angel, look, I..." But what could he say? Take back his declaration from last night? Laugh it off as a foolish, drunken statement? He cringed internally from even the thought. He hadn't willfully lied to his angel in over four millennia, and he bloody well wasn't about to start doing it again, now. Not about this.

Not with the memory of what he *knew* settling in his chest, telling him he wasn't alone in these feelings. That certainty whispered *maybe someday* in his head like the snippet of a song he'd never heard. Maybe, someday, they could see a show. Go for a picnic. Just be... an *us*.

For now, Crowley didn't say more. He just nodded, slipped his shades onto his face and his suitcoat on over his wrinkled shirt, and did the only thing he *could* do.

He left.

Part VII: Maybe, Someday

As he made his way down the morning-drenched streets of Soho away from Whickber Street and toward where he parked the Bentley last night -- he always parked a few streets over to allay suspicions of where he was, when he visited Aziraphale -- Crowley couldn't contain the optimism flooding through him. He felt almost untouchable, this morning, which he hadn't felt since at *least* 1827. Somehow, he'd avoided Hell's scrutiny on the whiskey issue with that whole photograph debacle. He wasn't sure *how*, exactly, but he was at least intelligent enough to not question his fortune. Even better, though, were the words *maybe, someday* rolling around in his head, to the tune of Vera Lynn's nightingale song, along with the memory of a heart-stopping kiss.

He lifted a hand and smoothed it over the red material of his tie, his palm tingling as if he was somehow still touching his angel's hand as it wrapped around the smooth silk, pulling him in. If he'd ever wanted for absolute *proof* his angel had feelings for him, that moment was at the top of his list. Crowley was sure if he just gave Aziraphale a little space to process everything that happened -- and maybe if they both approached the subject sober -- the angel would be more receptive, next time.

Crowley was just rounding the corner near the Bentley when the morning light glinted off something in the window of the jewelry shop on his left, drawing his eye. Turning his head, he stopped in his tracks as the sunlight winked again off a display of men's wedding bands, nestled amongst all the flashy women's engagement rings and wedding sets on display.

Something about the sight of those simple gold bands made his heart skip a funny beat in his chest. Before he could stop his imagination, it was off and running, wondering things it -- and he -- had no business wondering. Still, he saw himself, one evening, alone in the bookshop with Aziraphale. They'd be cuddled up on the settee while the angel read and Crowley lay beside him, head on his angel's thigh. He would pull the rings from his pocket and ask, and Aziraphale would blush, and stammer, and finally agree, his blue eyes full of love and excitement. They'd exchange their own vows. They didn't need anyone else...

With barely an awareness of what he was doing, Crowley turned toward the shop door, determined to be ready, whenever that day he imagined came.

Ten minutes -- and a brief argument with the proprietor, who didn't understand why he wanted two different sizes of the same ring -- later, Crowley climbed into the Bentley, patting the pocket of his suitcoat where the small, brown jeweler's envelope was tucked. In that moment, the enormity of what he'd just done sank over him. If anyone from Hell ever found the rings, he was sunk. There was no way he'd cheapen his feelings, or tarnish

the sanctity he already placed on the rings, by lying about what they were or who they were for. Which meant no one in Hell could *ever* learn they existed.

Panic descended over Crowley. He couldn't take them to the bookshop and hide them. While they'd be safe from Hell, there, they would put Aziraphale in an awkward position if Heaven ever found out. Besides, it's not like Aziraphale would know anything about them. If he found them, he would probably assume someone lost them, and who knows what the angel would do with them, then. No, whatever he did, Crowley couldn't take them to the bookshop. Which left...

He frowned, thinking, as he started the Bentley and roared off toward his flat in Mayfair. The whole way back to the flat, he stewed over the problem, until, just as he screeched to a halt outside, the only possible solution dawned on him. The *Icarus and Apollo* statue he nicked back in Rome.

When he was finally allowed to return to Earth in 1862, he'd very quickly taken the statue to a metalsmith and given them the designs he spent thirty years playing hellhound chew toy dreaming up, to create a hidden compartment inside the sculpture, accessible only by turning the statue over and depressing a very specific spot on the underside. The space inside was just big enough to hold a wad of cash and travel papers under an alias even Aziraphale didn't know. Both were part of his exit strategy, if he had to get away quick and without Hell being able to track him. At the time, he'd been so sure he'd do *anything* not to get dragged back to Hell. That's why he'd asked Aziraphale for the Holy Water.

His throat closed as he entered the flat. He didn't like to think about that day. He'd barely been back on Earth for a day when he'd asked for that meeting and made his request, expecting Aziraphale to understand. He'd still been too paranoid and bitter to appreciate how his request must have hurt Aziraphale. Now, with the clear light of last night's revelations shining on him, he could see his angel's perspective a little clearer. All those years after he disappeared from the cemetery in Edinburgh, Aziraphale had no idea where he was or what happened to him -- the same angel who worried about him getting in trouble and Hell destroying him for *centuries* spent decades with no news, only to have Crowley suddenly pop up in his life again, requesting something that could, quite frankly, destroy him. Crowley considered how *he* would react if the shoe were on the other foot, and Aziraphale turned up out of the blue after decades, asking for hellfire. The mere *thought* made breathing difficult.

Didn't matter, anymore. Everything changed for him, last night. He knew Aziraphale would never leave his bookshop, and the reality of it all was, Crowley couldn't imagine leaving Aziraphale. To just leave and never see his angel again... Crowley shuddered. Any such idea was sheer lunacy. Which made his safely guarded exit strategy useless.

It also meant the perfect hiding place for the rings -- and his *new* dream -- just became available.

Crowley smiled as he emptied out the compartment and placed the small jeweler's envelope inside, replaced the panel, and set the statue right side up again. No one would suspect a thing. And if he stopped to admire the sculpture and smiled as he remembered the dream -- the *future* -- it protected, well, that was a secret he was content to keep.

For however long he needed to.

Part VIII: A Sacred Secret

Crowley's Flat, Mayfair, London -- Night after Armagedidn't (2019)

"C'mon in, angel." Crowley tossed his keys and shades on the small table just inside the door to his flat and kept going into the main room, readying himself for what would be a brief tour of the mostly empty flat. "*Mi casa es su casa* and all that."

When silence answered his flippanant quip, he glanced back to find Aziraphale still paused in the doorway, looking like he expected demons to jump out at him from every corner. He'd tried to reassure the angel, on their way back from Tadfield, but apparently it wasn't enough.

He sighed, and shook his head, continuing on as he tossed back, "Well? C'mon, angel. There's nothing in here that's going to bite."

Well, maybe not *nothing*. If Aziraphale gave him a sign of interest, Crowley was all for tasting that succulent body. He'd been dying for even another kiss since 1941. As he met the angel's eyes and saw one brow lift over those cerulean eyes, he *knew* they were remembering the same night. The same dance. The meeting of lips, and then...

"You *were* a serpent, once." Aziraphale's muttered comment held an edge of suggestive humor and he seemed to have warmed up to coming in. Even from his plant room, Crowley tensed and followed the progress of his angel through the flat, monitoring the room around him protectively, just in case. "Oh, my..."

The soft, surprised tone of Aziraphale's voice brought Crowley out of the plant room, to find Aziraphale paused in front of the Mona Lisa portrait. *Shit*.

Hyper-aware of all the things in this flat that were mementos of his time with Aziraphale, Crowley's anxiety carried him across the room until he was just steps behind his angel, drawing in the comforting scent of old books and bergamot with every breath. He cleared his throat, but his voice still came out husky as he asked, "What're you looking at, angel?"

Like it wasn't bloody obvious. Still, he almost jerked backward in surprise when Aziraphale spun around to face him. "When you said you knew da Vinci, I thought you were lying!"

Fear and nausea plunged through Crowley simultaneously. How the bloody Heaven did he get out of *this*? Acting on an instinct to protect what he loved most -- that being Aziraphale -- he edged his way between the angel and the sketch. He was so afraid if

Aziraphale learned the truth, the angel would leave. This wasn't a safe time for his angel to be out roaming the London streets on his own.

"I wasn't. It's not a big thing, angel." He tried to divert the angel's attention by nodding toward the rest of the flat. "C'mon. I--"

"What are you hiding?"

Crowley nearly swore, biting back a sigh of resignation, as Aziraphale planted fisted hands on his hips with what he no doubt thought was a stern look, obviously determined to wait Crowley out. It wasn't the angel's fault Crowley took one look at that expression and wanted to shove him up against the nearest wall and just... *pounce*.

He couldn't, of course. That would *definitely* be pushing Aziraphale's boundaries further than the angel was ready to deal with, after recent events.

Marshalling control of himself, Crowley realized there was only one option open to him -- the truth. Stepping aside, Crowley muttered, "I'm not... It's not what you... Oh, for Satan's sake, go ahead, then."

He braced for the impending disaster as Aziraphale leaned closer to the sketch, then frowned over his shoulder at Crowley. "I don't understand. It's an early contour sketch of the Mona Lisa. Absolutely recognizable. I saw the finished painting in Paris, in 1804, right after it got hung in the Louvre."

Wait. Crowley froze, uncertain he believed his ears. Aziraphale really didn't know what he was looking at? "You're telling me you don't see it?"

Aziraphale's brow furrowed, before he sighed, one hand lifting to rub at his forehead in a familiar sign the angel was stressed. "It's been a long day, dear. I don't know what you're on about, but I don't have the energy for any more puzzles or games. Did you know the young lady, as well?"

He didn't believe his luck. Crowley chuckled in wry relief, even though he knew he had to tell his angel the truth, sooner or later. "In a manner of speaking."

Aziraphale's hand rubbed against the center of his chest, and Crowley froze, watching him. That was a motion he'd never seen from his angel, before. As if something Crowley said hurt his heart.

Oh, angel. You've got this all wrong.

"Aziraphale." He couldn't help the softness in his voice or still his desire to touch his angel. His fingertips skimmed over flesh so soft and warm he couldn't help leaning forward, until their foreheads rested together. He felt wetness against his fingers, and his heart clenched at the evidence of his angel's tears glistening on his fingers when he reluctantly drew away. He saw shame and fear in Aziraphale's cerulean eyes, and Crowley's hands fell away in trembling fists, as if he could somehow hold onto his angel's tears and keep some small part of the angel close to him forever. "Do you know why I hung it there?"

Aziraphale shrugged. "I assume to look at it."

"Yes." Crowley flicked a glance toward the sketch, tenderness sliding through him. He couldn't believe he'd never noticed how -- no matter where he lived since Leo made that sketch -- he always hung it up, and always where he could readily see it. "Do you know why?"

Aziraphale sighed, his tone exasperated. As if he didn't want to have this conversation. "To be reminded."

"Absolutely." Crowley paused, raking a gentle gaze over his angel, letting the love he felt fill him up, for once uncaring if Aziraphale saw the truth. They had no more sides except their own. This was his chance for the *us* he craved. "Of *you*, angel."

Fear froze the breath in his lungs at the flicker of anger passing across the angel's face before Aziraphale drew a deep breath and pasted on a smile he clearly didn't feel. Crowley watched the angel come to some kind of silent conclusion before the smile took on a more natural appearance, though it still didn't reach his eyes. "We have more important matters to discuss. We need to decide what to do about Agnes's last prophecy."

Crowley hummed a non-committal response, tucking his disappointment securely away as he dragged over the other chair in the room, until it sat just a foot or so away from his own. "By all means, angel. Any ideas?"

Aziraphale settled himself in the chair with a sigh somewhere between resigned and annoyed, though Crowley wasn't sure why he was either. The angel laid the charred scrap of Agnes Nutter's book on the table and turned slightly to look up at Crowley. "Only one, but I'm not even sure it's possible."

Intrigued, Crowley moved around and dropped into his own chair -- a throne-like monstrosity he bought mostly just to thumb his nose at God and Satan both. Hanging one leg over the arm closest to Aziraphale, he sank sideways onto the seat, which allowed him to continue observing his angel, even as he gave said angel a teasing nudge with the toe of his boot. "Never know until we try. What is it?"

"Just like the prophecy says -- changing faces." Aziraphale's brow furrowed, and his tone was troubled. What was he on about, to get himself so worked up?

"Obviously that. 'S right there in the ol' girl's prophecy."

"No. I mean *literally*."

Crowley's attention sharpened on his angel at that. "Wot? You mean, me become you and you become me?"

"Well, not actually, but yes, that's the general idea." The angel shifted in his seat, looking uncomfortably uncertain as he continued, "We can't just miracle a change in appearance, either, because both Heaven and Hell are no doubt monitoring us closely, right now, waiting for an excuse."

He didn't need to elaborate on what they were looking for an excuse to do, either. Crowley's blood boiled at the idea someone was even *considering* hurting Aziraphale. He didn't have time to be terrified for his own skin, or what Hell would likely do to it. He could handle it. That's what being a damned creature was all about. But the idea of anyone laying a hand on his angel in malice made him want to burn both Heaven and Hell down.

"Seems about right," he agreed, forcing his voice nonchalant as he continued to study his angel, his rage and any underlying fear brushed aside by the excited light in his angel's eyes. He always enjoyed watching Aziraphale give in to his curiosity and apply that clever brain of his to puzzle out a problem and come up with a solution. It was so different from Crowley's own make-it-up-as-he-went problem-solving skills. Aziraphale was a level of methodical Crowley found endlessly attractive. "What do you propose we do about it, angel?"

"Something subtle, that I've seen you do before. Just not on yourself."

A slow smirk crept over Crowley's face. He had a pretty good idea where this was headed, now, and he was all for a little disguise. "Do tell."

"At Job's. Correct me if I'm wrong, but that wasn't -- strictly speaking -- a miracle you used to change those goats, or Job's children. It took a lot more to counter than a simple blessing."

Crowley grinned in truth, even as his heart did a besotted little jig in his chest. Aziraphale had recognized his trick wasn't the norm, even back then. Had the angel -- who loved all sorts of magic so much he wanted to know how everything, whether illusion or real,

worked -- wondered about how a living being could be transformed, all these millennia? "Wellll... The kids needed a little miracle, since they were going from human to reptile for the first time, but I've done it loads of times on myself. It's how I get from this corporation to serpent and back."

"Can you make me *look* like you, and vice-versa?"

Crowley frowned, considering the request, before shrugging. "Don't see why not. But that means you'll have to work out how to act like me." He let a slow, lecherous grin slide over his face. "Think you know me well enough, angel?"

"Me? What about you? There's no way you can convincingly portray me. This is going to be a disaster."

Crowley snorted. He knew his angel like the back of his hand. He had no doubt he could manage it. "Really think so? Let's give it a try, then."

"Fine." Aziraphale nodded primly, then looked utterly baffled. "Uh... How, exactly, are we going to do this?"

Crowley dropped his leg from the chair and stood, holding out his hand before he realized what he'd done. A wave of *déjà vu* hit him, and his mind winged back the years, to a night very much like this one -- when his life hung in the balance of what might happen in the morning -- and he offered his hand to the angel before him.

"*Dance with me.*" The words echoed through him, and he didn't even realize he'd said them aloud until Aziraphale's response tore through the bubble of memory.

"There isn't any music, Crowley. Are you quite sure you're all right?"

Cast back into the tense present, the uncertain future looming before them, Crowley drew a breath through his teeth. He was sick of it all. All the lies, all the hiding. For tonight, just like that night seventy-eight years ago, he just wanted a pure, simple truth between them.

Snapping his fingers, he called into being the mellow strains of the old Vera Lynn song they danced to back in 1941, watching soft memory settle over Aziraphale's face and into his blue eyes as it played. Crowley had to swallow hard several times before he could manage speech, again. "There's music now. Dance with me? Just in case?"

"Oh, Crowley." His name never sounded so amazing as it did in his angel's soft, soothing voice. The feel of the hand he'd contentedly held the whole bus trip back from Tadfield settling once again into his set his heart racing in his chest, and he wondered... He

couldn't help it. He'd been holding onto a secret for nearly eighty years, and it grew harder to hold the more time went on.

Now wasn't the time, though. Even he knew that.

"...when you turned and smiled at me, a nightingale sang in Berkeley Square."

His angel wrapped up in his arms, Crowley dropped his head forward until it rested gently against Aziraphale's, and let his eyes drift closed as they swayed to the music, letting it take them away from everything that meant to harm them and the fragile new future they were creating, to a place where *maybe, someday* felt ineffably real.

**Want to know what happened to those rings?
Or where *maybe, someday* could take Crowley and Aziraphale?
Read "Born of Starlight" -- My fanfic novel up on AO3**