

Give My Regards to Broadway

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Give My Regards to Broadway

by [volunteerfd](#)

Summary

Five decades of Aziraphale and Crowley's relationship, as told through the Broadway shows they attended.

Notes

Upon canon confirmation that Aziraphale is a Sondheim fan, I had to write this.

In this chapter: West Side Story, She Loves Me, Jesus Christ Superstar, Assassins, Rent

Chapter 1

1. West Side Story (1957)

Aziraphale liked New York, even though it was the other side's greatest achievement, city-wise--maybe their greatest achievement, period. If Hell had to vacate, the demons would swarm Manhattan, the lower-ranks would be pushed out into Brooklyn or up to the Bronx. Queens and Staten Island would remain human, where no demon would deign to go.

Consequently, it was also a place where angels feared to tread--or not so much feared as crinkled their noses, like a human being asked to plunge naked into a swamp or a sewer. In many ways, this was good for Aziraphale, who cherished the privacy of his Greenwich Village apartment, but it also meant a dearth of theatre companions. When *The Black Crook* first premiered in 1866, he'd scrambled to explain the premise to his fellow angels, and been shot down for one reason or another:

"It's like a play, but with songs."

"There's usually music in plays."

"Yes, but this is different."

"Different how?"

"I don't know yet."

"A play? Like *Antigone*?"

"Yes!"

"I hated *Antigone*."

"It's in New York and--"

"No."

"No, not Newark, New York. Why would it be in Newark?"

“Hello, it’s Aziraphale, I was wondering if...Hello? Hello?”

Angels weren’t cultural connoisseurs and besides, they had no compulsion to try anything new. Art and music and dancing were human indulgences, and the fact that Aziraphale was keen to indulge made him a bit of an oddball. There was no shame in going to the theater by oneself, and when he thought about it honestly, Aziraphale knew it was preferable than going with any of his colleagues.

Still, it would have been nice to have someone to talk to afterwards without arousing suspicion that he was otherworldly. And there was only one non-human creature Aziraphale knew who enjoyed human indulgences as much as he did, if not more.

So when he invited Crowley, he didn’t need to invent excuses (“It would be nice to see what our wards are up to,” “The Almighty might give us a surprise test. You know how fond She is of those...”) He just needed to say when and where and pray the demon abided by theatre etiquette.

From then on, Crowley was Aziraphale’s reliable theatre date, and an enjoyable one, Aziraphale dared say, even if Crowley hated half of the shows and Aziraphale loathed the other half, even if Crowley had an irritating habit of walking out of the theater singing loud, intentionally off-key snippets of songs. Aziraphale assumed it was payback for his preference of a leisurely post-theatre stroll instead of a mad ride in the Bentley.

Currently, Crowley was singing “*I feel pretty and witty and gaaaay!*” Aziraphale bristled at passers-bys’ glances, and Crowley waved his fingers at them.

“Such insipid lyrics, don’t you think?” Crowley said. “I bet he’ll regret writing them.”

“I liked them.” Aziraphale was stunned. He’d found the song--music and lyrics both--utterly delightful. The word “insipid” never crossed his mind.

“Nah. He can do better, and he will.”

“You know him?” Aziraphale raised his voice in surprise but then he remembered Crowley knew all great artists. Intimately, in many cases. “Of course you do.”

“I’m familiar with him. Not as an artist.”

“Right, then,” Aziraphale said with a slight sharpness to indicate he did not want to know more.

“And not in the light.”

“Got it.”

“Biblically, as you would say it.”

“*Okay.*”

Aziraphale walked quietly, not sure how to respond, and let Crowley sing a few bars about how he liked to be in America.

Eventually, Crowley stopped singing and asked, “So, why *West Side Story*?”

“There’s been quite a bit of hype surrounding it. I thought we should see it.”

“Oh?” Crowley raised an eyebrow and smirked and Aziraphale knew, despite the darkness and sunglasses, that there was a mischievous glint in Crowley’s eyes--an unreadable glint, or semi-readable, like water-smudged words that Aziraphale could sort of make out.

“Yes,” Aziraphale said, feathers metaphorically ruffled. “You didn’t think it was good?”

“I thought it was good. A little on the nose on your part, don’t you think?”

“I don’t know what you’re getting at.” Aziraphale’s feathers were now literally ruffled.

“Two warring families, two unlikely partners in the midst of it all...” Crowley snapped his fingers below his waist in a way that could only be described as “campy-threatening.”

“So you fancy us star-crossed lovers, then?”

“No. I fancy myself Riff. *Got a rocket in your pocket, keep coolly cool boy.*” He walked down the street fight-snapping, which, out of the context of the stage seemed ridiculous and, in the context of the stage, seemed slightly less ridiculous. More glancing, glaring passers-by. Soon enough, not even half a decade, they’d know the reference. Until then, Crowley seemed like a loon. Aziraphale kept his face carefully arranged to say *I don’t know him*.

“It’s the same premise as *Romeo and Juliet*.” He should have accepted Crowley’s topic change--should have been effusively grateful for it--but he found himself being stubborn for no reason at all.

“Yes, it is,” Crowley agreed. “So?”

“That’s a more accurate comparison than we are.”

“I obviously don’t think they based it on *us*. ”

“It has nothing to do with us.”

Crowley slipped his fingers under his sunglasses and pressed his eyes. “Forget I said anything. What would you say to a drink?”

“No.” Aziraphale said. Something in the night had soured.

“Dinner? Cabaret show? *There’s a place for us, somewhere a place for us...*”

Aziraphale didn’t say anything. Crowley sighed.

“Fine. I’ll meet up with Art, Steve, and Lenny at the after party. You can join me. It’ll be *fun*.
” Mockery dripped from Crowley’s voice. Aziraphale couldn’t identify the exact target.

“I think I’ve had enough fun tonight.”

“Of course. See you at the next opening, I guess.” Crowley vanished before Aziraphale could say good-bye.

2. Gypsy (1959)

"Is Ethel one of yours?" Aziraphale asked.

"Obviously."

3. She Loves Me (1963)

Aziraphale couldn’t remember the last time he’d been so enchanted. It was a sweet little show--a simple story and a soaring score and a cast that could sing like nobody’s business. As he walked out of the theater, Aziraphale’s mind was torn in two places: reflecting on what he’d just seen, and making plans to see it again.

“I thought it was twee,” Crowley scowled.

“I thought it was delightful.”

“Of course *you* did. You want some ice cream?”

“Yes, but--you never crave sweets.”

“They had a whole bloody song about it. Of course I want some.”

“It’s past eleven. I don’t know any shops that are open.”

“It’s New York, and we’re an angel and a demon. We’ll manage.”

As much as he wanted ice cream, Aziraphale hoped neither of them would have to use their powers for something so minor and selfish. They didn’t, though, because New York itself was a miracle of 24/7 anything if you were willing to search. Crowley griped about not having his car, and, secretly, Aziraphale wished for the Bentley, too, but eventually they found a little shop that happened to be open and happened to serve ice cream.

The ice cream was good, given the extenuating circumstances, even though Flake bars were sadly not an option. They ate their vanilla ice cream in the brisk April air, in a small park near Aziraphale’s flat.

“So, aren’t you going to say something?” Aziraphale asked.

“About?”

“You know. The show. About how it was about two people who were supposed to hate each other, but they were really in love with each other.”

“Hmm, no, what do you mean?” Crowley said, too airily.

“Nothing. It’s just you’re always quick to point out that recurring theme. In shows. The shows we see. Even though it’s a common plot.”

Crowley shoved his empty cup on top of Aziraphale’s empty cone. Crowley seemed awkward about littering in front of Aziraphale, but also, understandably, felt awkward about *not* littering, so it became his habit to give Aziraphale his trash and let the angel do two good deeds for the price of one. “I’m not sure what there is to say.”

4. Jesus Christ Superstar (1970)

“They were quite nice to Judas, I think. Gave him the best songs. I always thought,” Aziraphale glanced around quickly before continuing, even though the odds of angels lurking in Crowley’s Bentley were zero, “I always thought he was given an unfair shake.”

“Your side? Unfair? *Naaah.*”

Aziraphale harrumphed. Crowley always managed to make harsh truths sound harsher, unlike Aziraphale, who managed to make harsh truths sound gentle and diplomatic and untrue.

Driving in New York wasn’t as stressful as it looked, provided you were in the passenger seat and the driver was a demon magicking away other cars. To be clear, it was still somewhat stressful, especially with the driver going 90 and not checking his rearviews, just not *as* stressful as Aziraphale imagined while a pedestrian.

“I’m sure he finds all the trouble he went through worthwhile now,” Crowley said, before unleashing a throat-tearing rock-riffed “*Jeeeesuuuuuus!*”

“*He* was quite petulant,” Aziraphale said. “In the show, I mean.”

“Wouldn’t you be, in that situation? Speaking of unfair shakes.”

“I guess. If I were human. Angels don’t have it in us to be petulant.”

Crowley looked at Aziraphale, both eyebrows raised, and laughed.

“What? Are you saying *I’m* petulant? Oh, do watch the road,” Aziraphale begged. The Bentley barely managed to avoid scraping a cab.

“It was bold of them to make Judas and Jesus so, ah, well, you know.”

“So what?”

“You know. Such good pals.”

A squirrel darted in front of the car and Aziraphale, in a fit of quick instincts, made the car skip in the air and land gently.

“Are you serious? For a squirrel?” Crowley said.

“It’s a living thing!”

They arrived at Crowley’s apartment in a building called the Dakota, stepped into the elevator, pressed no button, and appeared in Crowley’s penthouse apartment. Aziraphale, as a general rule, didn’t drink, but, as an exception to the rule, it was hard *not* to drink in Crowley’s apartment. It was very stylish and shiny, a lot of sharply-angled furniture, woefully modern--in other words, conducive to nothing except alcohol.

“Your plants look healthy,” Aziraphale said. More than healthy, actually. The greenery had almost overtaken the sleek monochrome but, rather than making the place seem homier, gave it the unsettling appearance of a break in space-time: a cold, clinical environment that could not cultivate life had sprouted a small forest. He’d never say so, but there was something disturbing about it.

“I’ve been talking to them.” Crowley gravitated towards his well-stocked bar while Aziraphale took a seat on the couch, his head brushing a large palm hovering above.

“Talking to them? What do you say?” He needed that drink, now. Crowley enjoyed preparing drinks by hand, and his concoctions were always strange and strong and delicious--if a bit darker and less fruity than Aziraphale usually preferred, on the rare-but-increasingly-less-rare occasions when he drank without Crowley. He suspected Crowley added a little extra *oomph* because Aziraphale always got giddier than usual, faster than usual, with drinks in Crowley’s apartment. Regardless, Crowley always stuck a little umbrella and cherry in them, which was nice.

“Oh,” Crowley airily waved his hand and set a cocktail in front of Aziraphale. “Just pep talks, mostly.”

There was an undertone to Crowley’s voice that invited--begged for--more questions, and compelled Aziraphale to change the subject immediately. “I have to ask--that musical, was that one of yours or one of theirs?”

“Honestly, I’ve no idea.” Crowley settled next to him with his own drink and put his feet on the coffee table, a habit that made Aziraphale wince. “Could it be a joint collaboration?”

“Imagine. A collaboration between Heaven and Hell.”

“Are you saying we should write a musical?”

“No, not at all.”

“Oh, come on. We’ve seen so many. We’re practically experts. How hard could it be? I’ll start. *Da da daaa, da da daaa.*”

“You’re just singing the song from the show.”

“What? No, that was a Crowley original. *Da da daa, da da daa.*”

“No, listen. *Jesus Chriiist. Superstaaar.* That’s what you were singing.”

Crowley frowned. “Oh. So it was. Well, let’s not let that stop us.” He cheerily snapped his fingers and conjured a grand piano, just as large and just as shiny and just as, well, grand, as the rest of the decor. Somehow, the room did not seem smaller.

“Oh, oh no, I couldn’t possibly...” Aziraphale waited one second and one self-effacing smile, then pushed himself off the couch and to the piano bench. “Ridiculous, conjuring a piano... I’m not at all prepared... Wasn’t at all expecting...” He unbuttoned his cufflinks and played a quick warm-up. “*I don’t know how to love him, what to do, how to move him.*” Crowley settled next to him, carrying both their drinks, and Aziraphale abruptly cleared his throat. “Right, then. Where should we start?”

“I think the show should be about a broad of a certain age.”

“A broad? No, no, the show should star a dame.”

Crowley leaned back, impressed. “Was that a joke? Did you just make a joke?”

“A dame. Of a certain age.” Aziraphale played a few show-offy flourishes, then settled into a light, catchy tune.

The sun rose, and then fell again, and then rose and fell a couple of more times. The floor was littered with papers and empty cups, the products of exhilaration that matched a dozen humans on a bucket of cocaine.

“Well? Have we produced something brilliant? Something timeless? Something extraordinary?” Crowley said. His nose twitched, rabbit-y, for some reason.

“I should say so,” Aziraphale rifled through sheafs of paper, humming a few bars, his red-rimmed eyes skimming through lines. “We’ve written *Hello Dolly.*”

5. Assassins (1990)

After the show, they went to Aziraphale’s apartment down in Greenwich Village. Aziraphale had not had a good time. Didn’t like it at all. In retrospect, he didn’t know what he’d been thinking, with a name like *Assassins*. Then again, hindsight was 20/20. Then again, it was right there in the title. Too late now. He needed his familiar surroundings and his books and a good sulk.

Crowley had loved it and, unbeknownst to Aziraphale, was already making plans to see it again. Alone.

At the apartment, Crowley busied himself with the tea kettle, giving Aziraphale space and, eventually, cocoa. “*All you have to do is pull your little...*” He shut up when Aziraphale glared at him. “Weren’t a fan, I take it.”

“And you were, I take it.”

“Different strokes. If it’s any consolation, I don’t expect it will run long.” Crowley had a brilliant mind for that sort of thing--predicting how long things would run, how much money they’d made. At first, Aziraphale suspected hellish interference but, as time went on, he realized Crowley just had a knack, a keen industry brain and, if he ever needed to, could make a large fortune on investments.

Then again, it didn’t take a genius to figure out that a subversive concept musical about men and women who killed or tried to kill presidents would not fare well.

It was right there in the title.

“No, I don’t want people to be out of work. It does make you think, doesn’t it,” Aziraphale mused over the mug of cocoa, “about what if you think you’re doing the right thing, but it turns out to be wrong.”

“Not really, no,” Crowley said, with the confidence of someone who knew he always did the wrong thing with style and panache.

“Not me, either, obviously,” Aziraphale added hastily, “I’m serving Heaven. But a human, say. The ambiguity of it all. The uncertainty.” He hoped Crowley didn’t notice the slight tremble of his mug.

“Oh, this always happens. It’s *Into the Woods* all over again. Can’t you watch a fun, light-hearted musical about murder and the ideological dismantling of America through gun violence without getting maudlin about it?”

The shaking mug was now unignorable, as it was splashing cocoa over Aziraphale’s pale pants. Crowley magicked the stain away before Aziraphale had the presence of mind to do so.

“I’m sorry,” Crowley said, which meant a lot coming from a demon, even if it was accompanied by a dramatic eyeroll and sagging shoulders.

“No,” Aziraphale sighed from his chest and flung his head back against the couch, “I guess some might call me maudlin.”

“I knew the Booth family. All of them. A bunch of drunks,” Crowley said, taking a swig of liquor from the bottle and detecting no irony. He poured a dark stream into Aziraphale’s mug. Aziraphale appreciated not having to ask. Drinking was one thing, asking for a drink was

another, and somehow, Crowley always anticipated the request. Aziraphale straightened up and took a large, grateful swallow.

“Well,” Aziraphale attempted a smile and a joke, “they *were* actors.”

“They were certainly...” Crowley inhaled through his nostrils for emphasis, not for breath. “...performers.”

“Edwin became a good Hamlet. Eventually.” Aziraphale sipped his cocoa-splashed whiskey.

“Pfft. Every actor becomes a good Hamlet *eventually*.”

“That’s not true. Ben Wishaw was born a good Hamlet,” Aziraphale said, wistfully, recalling the captivating 23-year-old actor who took the reins of that iconic role.

“One of yours,” Crowley ceded.

Crowley’s diversion almost worked. Almost. But it was too easy, and inevitable, to go back to the situation at hand, and Aziraphale sidestepped back to the original topic: “Did you...have anything to do...with, er, any of those?” Referring, of course, to the real-life murders and attempted murders from the night’s musical.

Aziraphale hoped for the answer he usually got: that the most egregious terrors were either a glitch of humanity--often understandable, the poor, flawed creatures--or the machinations of a more malevolent demon. But Crowley’s mouth was in a crooked grimace, and he shook his head from side to side as if weighing his words.

“I might have given the Italian a stomachache.”

“*No!*”

“I didn’t know he would try to kill the president! President elect. And *try to kill* are the operative words here. Nothing bad actually happened. Except to the, uh, well, the mayor of Chicago.”

Aziraphale crossed his arms and squished his back against the couch. “That could have been FDR. Franklin Delano Roosevelt. They could’ve wound up with, with, one of the other blokes.” He couldn’t remember any of the other candidates. One stomach ache and there’d be no New Deal, no Social Security...”Someone less socialist. It would have been a travesty!”

“It was just a stomach ache! How was I supposed to know it would lead to murder?”

“Isn’t that what you wanted? Isn’t that a 1,000-point hole in Skee-ball?”

“What the Heaven is Skee-ball?”

“*It’s a game* ! A thousand for murder! Ten thousand for mass murder! A million for war!”

“*That’s* Skee-ball?”

Aziraphale groaned in frustration.

“Aziraphale,” Crowley said, in a strange, serious voice, “you know I have too much finesse for murder. Traffic jams, phone line tie-ups, cold-callers... *That’s* my game. Murder is not my style. Never has been.”

“M sorry.” Aziraphale stared into his empty mug. A bottle appeared in front of his face and his eyes trailed up to Crowley’s arm and Crowley’s face. Crowley shook the bottle, and whatever liquid was left splashed around in mostly-emptiness. Aziraphale accepted the offering. “Times are just very turbulent.”

“I know.”

“And I can’t help but feel they’re going to get worse.”

6. RENT (1996)

It was an historical opening. The show had been buzzed-about off-Broadway, but Aziraphale never got the chance to see it and now, finally, he had. Aziraphale first intended to cap of the occasion with a good restaurant dinner--and, for Crowley, good drinks--but by the end of the show, the dinner was to ruminate, not celebrate.

Aziraphale buttered some bread as Crowley wafted a glass of the most expensive wine in the restaurant. At least the meal would be nice even if the show wasn’t.

Crowley spoke first: “I loved it.”

“You did not!”

“I did.”

“They were *awful*! The stripper breaks into the musician’s apartment and begs him for sex and debauchery, the performance artist is terrible to her sexual partners, and the cameraman’s so *whingy*. And I did not appreciate the moniker ‘Angel’ being given to a dog-killer.” Out of the primary cast of eight struggling bohemians and bohemian-adjacents, Aziraphale only really liked Joanne and had no qualms with Tom.

Crowley shrugged and took a satisfied sip of wine. “What can I say? I love a group of chaotic evil ne’er-do-wells, even if the love message is gooey. But ‘no day but today’ is a mantra of selfishness if I ever heard one. Almost makes up for all that love business.”

“‘Measure in love.’ As if calendars weren’t invented for a reason.”

“The show will run for years.”

“And how long is that in truths that she learned? Or in times that she cried? Or bridges she burned? Or--”

“It’s going to be huge, angel. I predict a, oh,” Crowley ticked off his fingers, “ten year run, maybe a little more, oodles of awards, a movie, legions and legions of fans.”

“Tosh.” Aziraphale pouted and reached for another bread roll.

“The wunderkind writer died. On opening night. The crowds’ll eat it up.”

“Died?” Aziraphale frowned. That did change things. No, he mentally shook himself, it didn’t. Still, it was a shame he died.

“Excuse me,” a well-dressed woman in a fashionable cream pantsuit and matching clutch said, tapping Crowley on the shoulder. “Are you talking about RENT?”

“Yes, we are!” Crowley smiled. It was off-putting how charming and affable he was around humans, how readily they engaged him and how easily he returned their attention--confidently and helpfully giving out (wrong) directions and genuine compliments, sharing complaints about everyday inconveniences which had no effect on him and some of which he’d caused. Heaven was lucky Crowley did not have the ambition to become a politician.

“Oh, did you see it? What did you think? I’ve heard *so* much about it!”

“I. Loved. It.”

It didn’t matter that they were, at this point, old friends--er, comfortable acquaintances: earnestness from a demon’s voice (and a human in the mix) made Aziraphale shiver. He looked up to two sets of eyes, one obscured by sunglasses, waiting for his opinion.

“It was quite good,” Aziraphale said, because if a demon could be earnest, an angel could tell a white lie. And if he sensed a slight tremor down Crowley’s spine, Aziraphale didn’t say anything.

Chapter 2

Chapter Notes

So my 666 plan is NOT working, so here are three shows Crowley and Aziraphale saw together.

Most of you might not be familiar with them, which isn't that important, but I did include a list of songs mentioned in this fic because they are good songs and I'd like to believe they ~enhance the reading experience.~ I chose them all because they were very Crowley/Aziraphale. I usually don't like songfic but I make an exception for myself and my own taste.

In this chapter: Anyone Can Whistle, Merrily We Roll Along, Chess

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Anyone Can Whistle (1964)

After the show, Aziraphale insisted on going to Nippon, a new restaurant that served sushi. When Crowley pointed out that Aziraphale had sushi before, Aziraphale countered that it had been ages ago, and he'd never had it in New York. Somehow, this difference made it more exciting.

"Itadakimasu!" Aziraphale exclaimed, arranging the chopsticks in his hands. Crowley sighed to ensure Aziraphale knew that, under his sunglasses, he rolled his eyes.

"It's delicious. Try it." Aziraphale proffered a cube of rice balanced between two chopsticks.

"I don't understand it. They have fire. They can cook nice, hot fish. Who cuts open a wet, slippery protein monster and thinks 'Mm, I think I'll eat this raw?' *And* charge a premium, to boot." Crowley twisted in his body away and sneered, as he often did when Aziraphale offered him food. He had specific complaints about all food, despite the fact that Aziraphale had never seen him eat anything. Aziraphale didn't mention that Crowley had issues with cooked fish, too, and that Crowley had even suggested the microwave for the sole purpose of reheating it. The microwave had yet to take off, but Crowley swore that they'd be in every home and office in the world by the turn of the century.

Aziraphale tilted the sushi into his mouth and hummed. "Melts in your mouth."

"Fish shouldn't melt."

Aziraphale shrugged and went for another piece. More for him, then. At the exact same time, Crowley was thinking the same thing about alcohol and teetotallers--more for him, then--and swallowed Aziraphale's theretofore untouched sake.

“What did you think of the show?”

“An absolute mess.”

“I rather liked it.”

“Did you?” Crowley said with utter incredulity.

“Yes. I thought the charlatan was charming, and I liked when all the townspeople got mixed up and didn’t know which side was which.”

“So you *liked* that stuff. In the show.” Crowley folded his arms and leaned back in his chair, so far back that the top legs lifted off the ground and sent him momentarily off-kilter, ruining his cool insouciance. He quickly restored his balance and leaned forward instead, elbows crossed defiantly on the table. “Just to get it straight: you liked it when the rogue waltzed into town, messed up the previously established groups, and made the uptight rule-stickler question her allegiances.”

“The songs were quite jaunty, too. *Make just a ripple, come on be brave, this time a ripple, next time a wave...*”

“And you liked the anthem to disobedience. May I also ask what you thought about the, oh, the whole thing about the so-called miracle being orchestrated by a corrupt leader to keep the town fawning and submissive.”

Aziraphale blinked innocently, and then brightened. “Ooh, I liked that Angela Lansbury woman. She was delightful.”

Crowley drummed his fingers on the table. “Can you see why this might be frustrating to me?”

“You’re in a mood today.”

“I’m a demon.”

“Maybe you’re hungry.”

“We don’t *get* hungry. *Neither* of us do.”

“But we get thirsty, I see,” Aziraphale muttered at the table, raising his eyebrows, as Crowley gestured for more sake.

Silence settled over the table except the clicking of chopsticks and the clink of glass. Right now, Crowley was not the dinner companion Aziraphale wanted, mood-wise, but the food was as good as Aziraphale hoped, and there was no reason to let his enjoyment sour. After a while, Aziraphale picked up conversation again.

“I liked that last duet. *‘With so little to be sure of, if there’s anything at all... Crazy business is this life we live in, can’t complain about the time we’re given, with so little to be sure of in this world...’*”

Aziraphale looked down and busied himself with the menu. He sensed, rather than saw, Crowley's fond, begrudging smirk. Toro, hime...

"What about eel? Would you try some eel?"

"*Eel?*" Crowley yelped, almost falling backward in his chair again.

Aziraphale looked up at him quizzically. "That's a rather visceral reaction."

"Eels are like...sea snakes. It would practically be cannibalism." He sounded abashed to be confessing that he had a visceral reaction to cannibalism.

"Oh, of course. I should have been more sensitive."

Merrily We Roll Along (1981)

"*Not a day goes by, not a single day...*" Crowley sang, his voice soft and pleasant in a rare deviation from his boisterous yowling. He didn't seem to realize he was singing in earnest, almost respectful appreciation. Aziraphale felt like an intruder.

"Such a shame, isn't it," Aziraphale sighed. "How long do you give it?"

Crowley gave a mirthless laugh. Aziraphale did not press the issue. At least Central Park was lovely and blessed with a staying power that no stage production, fleeting by their very nature, possessed. All things were ephemeral, but some things were more ephemeral than others, so it was his unspoken habit to walk through Central Park whenever a flop broke his heart. And they'd caught the matinee, too, so it was still sunny and bright, and squirrels skittered across the grass instead of rats.

"Poor kids. Dreams dashed so early."

"Eh, they'll get over it." He dismissed the human tragedy with a wave of his hand and moved onto the next topic. "I'm having a little soiree at my place. Good conversation, interesting people...A lot of artists, art thieves, environmentalists, corporate lobbyists, struggling but satisfied musicians and resentful business people who foreclosed on their artistic pursuits."

That didn't sound pleasant at all. Aziraphale declined diplomatically.

"Come on. Have a little fun. You can play the piano." Crowley gently elbowed him in the ribs.

"Don't be silly. I can't play piano in front of all those people..."

"All right, then."

"Wait. When is it, exactly?" Aziraphale asked. Perhaps his presence--and a little music--could have a pacifying effect on the volatile combination of personalities. How could he save

souls from the temptation of a demon if he was ensconced in his bookstore alone, reading Wilde's *De Profundis* for the umpteenth time, away from the thick of it?

"Tonight at eleven until I decide I want people to leave," Crowley said.

"Hmm," Aziraphale hummed noncommittally. It crept him out to think about an apartment full of people swarming out the door at the exact same time, unknowingly compelled by demonic influence. But there were worse things demons could do, and it wasn't that different than Aziraphale repelling unwanted patrons from his bookshop. The only thing that differed, really, was the size of the crowd.

Plus, he needed to be there to make sure things didn't get out of control. Needed to provide some steady entertainment. "It would be a pleasure."

"Wear something black. Everyone'll be wearing something black, I expect."

"Black? It'll wash me out."

"Artists wear black because it's chic. Businessmen wear black because they're depressed. I wear black because I'm a demon. Everyone else wears because it's New York."

Aziraphale let out a little whimpery whine. It was hard to imagine that *everyone* would be wearing black. A majority, maybe, but *everyone*? Surely he could get away with a light pastel color.

It turned out that, other than Aziraphale's white button-up shirt and crisp beige pants, adorned with yellow suspenders and a matching bowtie, the lightest suit was charcoal.

But it was a fairly successful party, as far as parties went. It helped to have a drink in his hand. It helped even more to drink it. The alcohol relaxed Aziraphale and he even partook in a reefer cigarette. He managed to talk several lobbyists into quitting their jobs--not just think about quitting their jobs, or talk about quitting their jobs, but quitting right then and there, taking out their brick-like cellular phones and leaving messages for their bosses after the beep.

As far as he could tell, Aziraphale was the only one working the souls. Crowley was working the room, regaling a crowd with stories about Caligula. Neither angels nor demons were good storytellers. They tended to be stiff and stilted and sparing of details, with no flair for the dramatic. One would think demons would be better, but no, they were just as matter-of-fact and literal.

But Crowley seemed to have picked up a few rhetorical tricks. Crowley stood on a chair in the center of the room, a crowd gathered around him, and told a humorous story about a fist, a goat, and some olive oil, told--again, as far as Aziraphale could tell--only for entertainment and not suggestion or corruption. His voice, usually a raspy drawl, rose and fell with excitement. He altered it for various characters and imitated a goat's bleat with astonishing

accuracy. For a moment, the demon's resemblance to a human prophet chilled Aziraphale, but prophets did not tend to speak with a whiskey glass sloshing around for emphasis.

Across the room, Crowley looked in Aziraphale's direction a second too long, as if searching for his specific reaction. Aziraphale gave him an encouraging smile, and once Crowley turned away, Aziraphale went up to the roof.

If he were a human, he'd attribute his decision to go to the roof to some sort of otherworldly pull, an inexplicable message from the universe that he was meant to be there. In reality, he just wanted to go on the roof, and when he arrived, someone was already there, sobbing.

As an angel, he was supposed to be good at comforting people, but he spent the majority of his time around Englishmen and, well... His consolatory skills had been reduced to throat-clearing, handkerchief-handing, and tea-brewing. But there were no teapots on the roof, not even a hot plate, so he cleared his throat and sat next to the person.

She immediately stopped crying and wiped her eyes. "Oh, I'm sorry."

"No need to apologize," Aziraphale said, handing her a handkerchief which, he hoped she wouldn't notice, materialized out of nowhere. "Having a good cry, then?"

It was the wrong thing to say. She burst into fresh tears, but also laughter. Humans were peculiar. "Are *any* cries good?"

"If they're cathartic." Aziraphale actually wasn't sure. He'd never done it before.

"It's just..." And then she was sobbing about how she was a "corporate douchebag" even though she'd always wanted to make sculptures of dolphins, and then she was crying on his shoulder while he patted her back and said "there, there," and soon she was horizontal in Aziraphale's lap as he patted her shoulder and repeated "there, there."

He must have done something right because at last she stopped crying and hugged him and thanked him for being a good listener.

"Well, if you're interested, there's a lovely little show about the spiritual merits of pursuing your artistic passion over wealth and fame. I highly recommend it..." He began, but she was already heading back to the party.

Crowley spotted Aziraphale the instant he returned to the living room and made an immediate beeline for him. "Here he is!" Crowley said, putting one arm around him and raising his glass with the other. "Oy! Everyone shut up and listen to my friend, Mr. Fell. He's got the voice of an angel, an actual angel, and the fingers to match."

"Oh, you want me to sing, too? Don't make me sing..." Aziraphale blushed an unangelic shade of hellfire and, before Crowley could give him the option to decline, sat at the piano. The show had been messy, bordering on bad, even to Aziraphale's more forgiving eye, and he didn't need Crowley's preternatural abilities to predict that it wouldn't last long. The cast consisted entirely of kids, barely teenagers who, bless them, were talented, but not yet skilled enough to portray the sweeping decades of a lifetime. And whose idea was it to use a big

sheet of paper as a pool? And T-shirts as costumes? It's not like they didn't have the money for proper theatrical decadence. And the book--an utter mess.

But the score had been beautiful, the music like tragic jewels decorating a rusty crown, and it was an honor to place his fingers on the keys and begin. *"It started out like a song, it started quiet and slow with no surprise, and then one moment I woke to realize, we had a good thing going..."*

The room was eerily quiet as if cursed. Aziraphale would not put it past Crowley to magic the room into respectful silence, a thought that should have filled him indignant horror instead of guilty smugness. He glanced quickly at the crowd to make sure their mouths weren't zipped shut. They weren't cursed. They were rapt.

Looking up had been a mistake. Rather than calming Aziraphale's nerves, the audience's blissful expressions quickened Aziraphale's heart. He instinctively looked at Crowley to steady him.

"It's not that nothing went wrong, some angry moments, of course, but just a few, and only moments, no more, because we knew, we had this good thing going..."

He held Crowley's gaze--his sunglasses, but Aziraphale had no trouble imagining the clever eyes beneath them--seconds too long and quickly returned his eyes to his fingers, moving flawlessly across the piano. He did not look up again until the song was finished.

Somehow, after three minutes that seemed longer than actual eternity and were over in a moment, Aziraphale finished the song. He fought the impulse to sag in relief and instead did the opposite: straightened up, preening under the applause. Pride was a sin, but what was a little self-satisfaction after a job well done? He allowed himself another look at Crowley, still beaming, clapping his hands above his head.

"Isn't he incredible? Absolutely incredible."

"True greatness," Aziraphale proclaimed, rising to his feet, "is knowing when to leave." It was a quote from the show, a show that most of them would sadly never see.

Point made, Aziraphale sat back down and began the jauntier *Old Friends*.

Chess (1986) - West End Interlude

It was true that St. James Park was great for clandestine meetings, but it was also great for just being a park, and when he wasn't cooped up in his bookstore or on a mission abroad, Aziraphale sat on a bench feeding ducks.

Crowley knew this. He knew that the second-best place to look for Aziraphale, if his store was empty, was St. James Park. He knew that the third best place was a restaurant, but no specific restaurant, so really, if the park and the bookshop failed, then the third best option was to wait at the shop.

He was in luck today because Aziraphale was, in fact, feeding birds.

“Would you like to see a show?” Crowley asked.

“Ooh, that does sound nice. I’ve been meaning to see *Phantom*, or there’s a *Forum* revival--”

“I want to see *Chess* .”

“*Chess*?”

Crowley rarely suggested shows. The last time, if Aziraphale recalled correctly, had been *Sweeney Todd* , seven years ago. The musical seemed deliciously dark and grand, and particularly unangelic, and Aziraphale had wanted nothing more than to go without making the decision himself. When Crowley mentioned seeing it, Aziraphale felt much the same thrill as when Crowley poured him a drink without his needing to ask.

Crowley loved *Sweeney Todd* , of course, and Aziraphale hid how much *he* loved it, because it wasn’t the sort of thing an angel ought to like.

“It’s a musical by ABBA. You love ABBA.”

“Which one is ABBA again?”

“The Swedes who do ‘Dancing Queen.’”

“Oh, I *do* like ABBA. And it’s a musical about chess?”

“Of sorts.”

Aziraphale sighed. “First a musical about cats, now a musical about chess...What *is* the world coming to?” The subject matter didn’t matter, though. Aziraphale dragged a (mostly) uncomplaining Crowley to so many shows; he was happy to return the favor and get dragged in return.

It was no *Sweeney Todd*, Aziraphale could tell within the first ten minutes. And the songs were no “Dancing Queen,” or, for that matter, “Fernando” or “Waterloo” or “Mamma Mia.” Like most shows, it was a bit of a mess, book-wise. It was about an American and a Russian chess champion playing a big chess game in the midst of the Cold War. The important thing wasn’t whether the show was good or even enjoyable, however; the important thing was that Crowley wanted to see it, so he settled into his seat and thought, might as well make the most of it.

The first act was winding down, and Aziraphale was finally enjoying a song.

“ *Everybody's playing the game*

But nobody's rules are the same

Nobody's on nobody's side--”

Then Aziraphale found himself taken out of the show, not in a metaphorical sense--it was, in fact, one of the most engrossing songs so far--but literally transported into the great abyssal conference room that was Heaven. His body was still on Earth, but his consciousness was here...in front of Gabriel.

“Aziraphale! How is our most dedicated earth angel?”

Aziraphale returned Gabriel’s affably condescending smile with one of his own. “Er, quite well. Is there some trouble?”

“Just catching up on some paperwork. Needed...you...to...verify...some...information,”
Between each word, Gabriel skimmed through some papers and made marks with his pen, which extended the time by tenfold. Time moved differently in Heaven than on Earth, but still, Aziraphale wanted to get back down into the theater.

“Right, then.” Aziraphale bounced once on his heels and then settled, his hands behind his back.

“Have a seat.” Gabriel gestured to a chair that appeared at the exact moment he gestured. Aziraphale frowned and sat primly.

“I’m going over the files from 1906...Do you have a moment? You seem...impatient.”

“Never too busy for the Heavenly host,” Aziraphale chirped.

“Don’t be a suck up. Now, can you tell me about Laurence Culiver?”

Aziraphale’s mind blanked. Laurence Culiver...Aziraphale had given him a shilling around Christmas time over a hundred years ago.

It was going to be an agonizingly long time.

By the 1940’s, Aziraphale ruefully thought that the show would be over by the time he got back. It turned out it was still going on, but he had no idea how much time had passed. Aziraphale glanced at Crowley, then back at the stage.

“No man, no madness

Though their sad power may prevail

Can possess, conquer, my country's heart... ”

Aziraphale found himself settling back into his seat and enjoying the song. There was nothing he liked more than a rich, deep baritone.

“She is eternal

Long before nations' lines were drawn

When no flags flew, when no armies stood

My land was born

“And you wonder will I leave her -- but how?

I cross over borders but I'm still there now.”

Aziraphale closed his eyes and inhaled. It was the first act closer, and he could use intermission to regroup.

The second act opener, “One Night in Bangkok,” was what Crowley would describe as “a rager.” Aziraphale could tell that, behind his smirk, Crowley was taking mental notes about fashion, attitude, and magnetism. Aziraphale had not been to Bangkok in centuries. Based on the song, it seemed more like Crowley’s scene.

Then there was a lovely solo, more Aziraphale’s speed, sung by--at this point, he wasn’t sure who, or what, or how she figured into the plot, but it was a sweet song, nonetheless.

“If it were love

I would give that love

Every second I had

And I do

Do I know where he'll lead me to?

“Did I plan doing all of this

For the love of a man?

Well, I let it happen anyhow

And what I'm feeling now

Has no easy explanation

Reason plays no part

Heaven help my heart"

"Oh *brother*," Aziraphale scoffed, unbidden. He garnered a couple of glares from surrounding audience members, and a surprised-kind-of-impressed eyebrow raise from Crowley. They were the only two words Aziraphale ever uttered during a show, and he shifted in his seat, flushed with embarrassment and guilt. His outburst hadn't been for the reason they thought, but they could never know why: the words *Heaven help my heart* had struck him, is all.

And then Heaven struck him again, and he found himself surrounded by expansive whiteness.

"Aziraphale! So it turns out there was a smudge, and we're actually going over our records from 1606, not 1906."

Aziraphale smiled tightly and sat.

When he returned, the solo was over, and the two female leads were singing a duet.

"Nothing is so good it lasts eternally

Perfect situations must go wrong

But this has never yet prevented me

Wanting far too much for far too long.

At this point, the context was lost to him, but given the show up until now, that seemed for the better. The timing was lost to him, too. It could have been the bloody finale, for all he knew.

And then the theater brightened and the stage disappeared.

"*WHAT?!*" Aziraphale shouted.

"Ooh, touchy. We just need your signature. Here...and here...and here."

Aziraphale scratched his name where Gabriel indicated, then returned.

“No one in your life is with you constantly

No one is completely on your side

And though I move my world to be with him

Still the gap between us is too wide.”

He spent the rest of the show sulking. There was no time or hope to regroup, and the constant zapping back and forth made him queasy. If he'd been alone, he'd disappear discreetly, so as not to be rude.

“So, what did you think?”

He considered lying to Crowley-- *white-* lying-- and faking a smile and saying it was great. His smile was in place, and the words were ready, but then he faltered.

“Oh, Crowley, I kept getting summoned up to Heaven to do some tedious clerical work and sign my name on papers, and I caught maybe half of the songs and an eighth of what the plot was supposed to be.”

“An eighth of the plot is more than I got,” Crowley said.

“Maybe we could...see it again?” He wasn't sure he'd like it much more the second time around. Certainly, he couldn't it less. The constant interruptions soured his mood, and he owed the show a fair shake.

“Hmm, sure. The Bangkok song was a rager.”

Chapter End Notes

Anyone Can Whistle

Everybody Says Don't: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=V9I_s74APgw

Merrily We Roll Along

Not A Day Goes By: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TSb4DJGZqzY>

Good Thing Going: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YleZi9Vxp8A>

Old Friends: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=J5U_C668gS8

Chess

Nobody's Side: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=72Eu-oYjb3c>

Anthem: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=61DiWi00d2w>

One Night in Bangkok: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mnqj31VPNoE>

Heaven Help My Heart: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NI1Jluu1n0w>

I Know Him So Well: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=s2SDInk6voA>

Chapter 3

Chapter Summary

We're in the 21st century now. Featuring The Producers, Book of Mormon, Hamilton, and The Great Comet.

Chapter Notes

The Producers segment gets a bit weird, so if at any point you want to stop reading it (or not read it at all), that's fine to do so. It has no impact on the rest of the story.

There's discussion about theatre bootlegs. The views of the characters are not necessarily the views shared by the author. In other words, please don't discourse me.

I know Neil Gaiman said Aziraphale would "probably like Hamilton," but I don't think it's Aziraphale's taste at all.

I took certain liberties with the timing for The Great Comet incident. You'll see.

Always thanks to heyjupiter!

The Producers (2001)

"Brilliant, wasn't it?" Crowley said at their post-theatre dinner at Sardi's. The restaurant was on a steady decline, unfortunately, but it fit the mood of the night--an old-timey show biz mainstay, name-dropped in "I Wanna Be a Producer." Besides, no matter how touristy it got, it still beat Olive Garden.

It wasn't surprising that Crowley loved *The Producers*. The original 1967 movie was one of his favorites, and he adored Mel Brooks and Nathan Lane. Plus, there was the exclusivity factor--procuring the hottest, hardest ticket of the season was always a thrill of its own. No matter how frequently their opinions differed, Crowley and Aziraphale both appreciated their ethereal perks.

"I found the Hitler jokes in rather poor taste," Aziraphale said.

"That was the point! It was hilarious!"

“Well,” Aziraphale muttered, a mischievous smile gracing his lips, “I never said it wasn’t funny.”

Ten years ago, he might have turned his nose up at it (or felt obligated to), but now, he was able to sit back and enjoy an irreverent musical romp. The guilty pleasures were piling up lately. After averting the Apocalypse and shacking up with a demon, though, his capacity for guilt had shrunk to the size of an almond. It was nice to begin the new millennium unburdened by heavenly burdens and will-they-won’t-they tension with a demon.

“You know what they say about comedy,” Crowley said, and Aziraphale gave him a pleasantly vacant look to indicate that no, he had no idea what they said about comedy. “It’s tragedy plus time.”

“Is that what they say? That’s rather grim.”

“Give it a moment and you’ll find it amusing.”

Aziraphale smiled wryly. He’d never been an accountant, but Leo Bloom’s dreary office job hit close to what had once been his home--his timid adherence to a stern authority figure, the unhappiness. He didn’t understand Leo’s secret desire for the louche life of a Broadway producer, but he related to the urge to call his boss a certified public asshole. Based on the level of applause, most of the audience did, too.

And, of course, he had a soft spot for buddy musicals. Despite the tribulations and sacrifices and ultimate imprisonment, both men learned that they were happiest when they were together, and it culminated in a touching love song between them, and the implication of a lifelong partnership.

It occurred to him that he and Crowley never made something together. They shared their lives, of course, and saved the world and raised a child together (although they never spoke about Warlock) but they had nothing they could point to and say “We made that,” like a baby or a soufflé.

“We should write a musical,” Aziraphale said.

“We tried that already, remember? After *Jesus Christ Superstar* .”

“Of course I remember,” Aziraphale said. He didn’t. “But that was before. We were still somewhat resistant to the ways of humanity.”

Part of Aziraphale’s new unburdening was an unfettered identification with humanity. Whereas before, no matter how many fine meals he’d eaten and how many needless haircuts he’d indulged in, he’d kept a clear demarcation separating himself from the other species. Now, he viewed himself as more earthly than heavenly.

“Hmm,” Crowley said. “I know the irony of me saying this, but it sounds like dark magic—a demon and angel meddling in human creation.”

“We stopped the Apocalypse. At *your* behest, might I add. We tempted the fury of both Heaven and Hell with no one on our side but each other.”

“Writing a musical sounds worse.”

“We’re not Doctor Frankenstein reanimating the dead. What could go wrong? We have a few drinks, we write a few songs, some witty repartee. You’re being silly.”

Of all the things he could be called, Crowley particularly detested “silly.” It was a secret weapon that Aziraphale took out of his arsenal sparingly, detonated in an off-hand manner so as not to reveal that Aziraphale knew its true power. Sometimes, Aziraphale couldn’t believe its power. Crowley acquiesced even more easily than Aziraphale expected.

“To collaboration,” Crowley said.

Aziraphale clinked his glass. “To collaboration.”

Aziraphale flipped through the pages. His hands trembled.

“We can’t let anyone see this.”

They’d worked through the night, liquor flowing as smoothly and heavily as ideas. It was nice at first: Aziraphale helmed the piano, Crowley would come up behind Aziraphale and drape his arms over Aziraphale’s shoulders, murmuring snippets of snappy dialogue and lyrics so dense and sharp they’d make Sondheim stumble.

They enjoyed acting as the characters, becoming the characters: fights were staged, glasses were thrown in fits of theatrical pique, lovemaking scenes were enacted—needlessly, since obviously the sex scenes would not be so graphic, but they were a fun dramatic exercise. It was good.

Until it wasn’t.

Aziraphale couldn’t remember the point he forgot. The alcohol stopped pouring and his hands were bound to the piano, no more than a machine for the notes that the keys demanded to play. Crowley scribbled lines manically before his brain could keep up. They’d produced something--but they had no idea what. And now, in the light of day, Aziraphale wished they hadn’t.

Crowley looked ashen against the mantle, “I told you,” he said in a haunted voice, “I told you we shouldn’t have...”

“We couldn’t have known. We couldn’t have possibly known.” He flipped through the pages again, eyes not daring to linger on a complete phrase or measure for too long.

“The cost of knowledge. Ah, how we pay in spades...”

They stood still and silent, as if movement would bring their creation to life.

“We must burn it,” Aziraphale said abruptly, standing with the papers in his hand. The piano bench slid behind him with a fatalistic groan.

“What? No!” Crowley sprang to action and blocked Aziraphale’s path to the fireplace. Aziraphale stood before him, knuckles white around their work.

“If anyone sees it, it will grind human creativity to a halt. It will--it will--” Aziraphale clutched the papers tighter as if possessed by the tree pulp’s survival instinct to avoid the flames.

“No one’s going to see it, angel. No one. But we can’t destroy it. We can store it somewhere safe. You can lock it in your basement, and no one will know.”

“I can’t have it in my basement.” Aziraphale shuddered, thinking about his floorboards pounding with the thick mass of papers beneath. “It’s too great. Too great and terrible and powerful to keep here.”

“I never pegged you for a book burner.”

Aziraphale gasped. He took a moment, just one moment, to let the verbal slap redden his cheeks, then rearranged his features into a determined scowl. “If you’re so keen on preserving it, then you take it.” Aziraphale thrust their abominable creation at Crowley, who threw his hands up and jumped back. “Point proven.”

“It’s our responsibility--”

“Our responsibility is to the world and to ourselves! Not to this!” Aziraphale wanted to throw the loose sheafs in the air, but then he’d have to go around collecting each one on his hands and knees. He might miss one, and one day when he’d finally cast this incident to a dark recess of his mind, he’d stumble upon a reminder and it would flood back to him.

“We might one day be able to face it. We might one day *need* to face it,” Crowley said. “But there’s one thing for certain: if we forsake our creation, we will not be able to live with ourselves.”

The only dispute left was who would go to the store and get a lockbox-- *don’t leave me alone with it, don’t bring it outside, not in the bookshop, not in the Bentley*. Crowley wound up demonic-miracling an ugly utilitarian lockbox. It clashed with the aesthetic of handsome wood chests but there would be no mistaking it for some delightful forgotten treasure trove.

Aziraphale did not breathe until the papers were locked in the box like a coffin for his hubris. Crowley tucked it away on a tall, cobwebby shelf.

“We’re doing the right thing,” Crowley assured him.

The floorboards only thudded on some nights.

Book of Mormon (2010)

It was rare that Crowley enthused about a show, and even rarer to see him leave the theater elated. Sure, he liked comedies, and if the play had been fun, he'd leave in a good mood, and if the play had been bawdy, he'd leave raucous. But Aziraphale couldn't remember him ever being downright jubilant, and he didn't want to comment, lest it make Crowley self-conscious and damper his mood.

He also didn't want to comment because he didn't like the show.

It wasn't the risqué humor, although Aziraphale's jaw dropped at the first "Fuck you, God" and remained open until curtain call. He almost walked out--theatre was quite godless, but this was a new limit.

Then the shock wore off, and Crowley's laughter kept Aziraphale in his seat. As much as Aziraphale seemed like a prude, he'd been around humans enough not to clutch his pearls at rampant swearing, and the tunes were catchy, and the actors were charming. It even played out like a traditional musical, despite the untraditional themes and repeated intercourse with frogs. It was simply uncomfortable for reasons Aziraphale couldn't--or refused to--pinpoint. It was a shame, too: he found the first ten minutes delightful, the golden-child Mormon boy paired up with a misfit and then sent to a faraway land. He did love an odd couple.

As they traversed Central Park, it was hard to ignore Crowley's good mood. It became impossible after a family of tourists approached Crowley and asked for directions.

"You *really* liked the show," Aziraphale said.

"It was alright," Crowley conceded.

"You've got a skip in your step."

"Comes from having a rock in my shoe."

"You've been smiling nonstop."

"The wind is pulling my mouth up."

"You just gave those tourists directions. Correct directions."

"Well," Crowley relented, "it's a nice idea. Making Earth an in-between place. No one to hold you accountable 'cept yourself--and, er, each other. The good parts of Heaven and the good parts of Hell."

"*You* were the sole good part of Hell."

If Crowley could blush, he would have. He stammered something about that not being true, that Hell had loads of good composers and artists--the epicenter of culture, it was.

“But they really outdid themselves,” Crowley said, going back to the show. “American humor is better than British, nine times out of ten, but could you believe Yanks wrote something so clever and incisive?”

Aziraphale could, in fact, believe that Americans wrote something that used the punchline “maggots in my scrotum” not once, not twice, but four times.

“They could’ve had sharper fangs about religion, no one appreciates antitheism more than I, but actually I think that would have been the easy way out and not nearly as marketable.”

“Hmm.”

“And the songs. Catchy. *Turn it off, turn it off*-- You didn’t like it!” Crowley realized. Aziraphale protested, but then Crowley said, “No, you didn’t! You’ve got arm worms!”

“Arm wo--Oh.” Aziraphale looked down. His arms were fidgeting, as they often did when he was uncomfortable. “I don’t mean to ‘harsh your mellow,’ as they say.”

“You don’t have to like it. We rarely agree on anything, anyway,” Crowley said, perfectly reasonably.

“I suppose.”

He wanted to like it. It frustrated him that he couldn’t. It was, on a technical level, perfect, and Crowley was right: despite the vulgarity, the ultimate message was uplifting, even heartwarming. Aziraphale had liked *The Producers*, which had many of the same vices and virtues as *The Book of Mormon*.

Another set of tourists approached, wanting to know how to get to 56th and 8th, and Aziraphale exploded.

“It’s a bloody numerical grid system! You find the difference between where you are and where you want to go and walk that number of blocks!” Aziraphale snapped. The tourists gasped and walked off muttering about how they thought Brits were supposed to be polite.

“Is this going to be that thing where you over-identify with a character or themes and make things weird?”

“What are you talking about? I’ve never done that.” Maybe a few times, but not enough for it to be referred to as “that thing,” and Crowley had done “that thing” an equal number of times, if not more. Anyway, what was the point of art if not to make people unduly upset and prickly?

“Oh, come on. Ambitious lord-loving do-gooder sent on a mission, finds out the world isn’t what he thought it was, has a little hissy fit.” Crowley waved his fingers behind him, towards the spot where the poor tourists had been.

“I’ve never been ambitious,” Aziraphale huffed. “Anyway, if I’m Elder Price, then that makes you Cunningham. The weird one.”

He waited for Crowley to take offense. Instead, Crowley responded with, “Hmm. I suppose so. He did fix everything in the end, didn’t he?”

“Hardly. He fed them a lie to give a slight, temporary reprieve without repairing the historical, political, and economic conditions that blight them.”

“Well, he’s only human. That’s what humans do. That’s all they *can* do, or choose to do. It’s what makes the show potent, that’s its final bite.”

“You know, I always wondered,” Aziraphale said, veering from the topic of theatre to the less controversial topic of organized religion, “about the angel Moroni. In all my years in Heaven, I never once heard of an angel named Moroni or anything close. I checked all the departments. Was he one of yours?”

“No,” Crowley said.

“So it’s wholecloth human fabrication?”

“Yes. You didn’t know that?”

“I suspected...” Aziraphale said. “But a part of me always thought maybe he’d misheard the angel’s name, or it was a demonic prank...”

“No. Impressive, isn’t it?”

Hamilton (2015)

Aziraphale hated missing out on things. For the obvious celestial reasons, he rarely missed out on things that he cared about, so he often forgot how annoyed it made him.

It also meant he had a habit of putting things off. Humans procrastinated even though they suffered consequences for doing so; as a creature with all the time in the world and no pressing deadlines, Aziraphale was, by nature, especially languid.

So when Aziraphale missed the off-Broadway run of *Hamilton* and several weeks into the Broadway run passed by, he was irked, but not worried. It hadn’t been something he wanted to see. Some bebop musical about the colonies. Then, buzz spread out of the New York theatre scene and caused some rumblings in London, and soon New Jerseyans would be talking about it, and Aziraphale couldn’t bare the thought of missing out.

“Crowley, dear, I think it’s about time we saw Hamilton.”

Speaking of languidity, Crowley lay flat on his back on the couch, staring at the ceiling, the fingertips of one hand brushing the carpet, the other on his stomach.

“Ehh,” Crowley said. He was a bit sour that Aziraphale refused to see *American Psycho*, both in London with Matt Smith and in New York. It was Aziraphale’s first absolute veto, and

hopefully the last. Aziraphale didn't like saying no to Crowley, but he could and he would if he needed.

"You'll like it. It's very hip." Aziraphale actually had no idea whether Crowley would like it. "You'll have great bragging rights." Adequate bragging rights, at any rate.

"Feh."

Aziraphale smiled placidly. "I'll get us a couple of seats now." Aziraphale put his fingers on his temples and thought for just the briefest moment. Getting seats--reservations, concerts, shows--was hardly an exertion. But this time, he didn't get confirmation or closure. He concentrated harder, but there will still nothing.

"I seem to be having some difficulties. I shall try for a different day." He tried to get seats for the day after, and the day after that, and he kept going until he was a month out. "That's strange. I can't get a seat."

"Ooooh nooo," Crowley deadpanned. For a second, Aziraphale thought Crowley was interfering, but the demon didn't seem to care enough to act either way.

Aziraphale frowned and wracked his brain. How did humans get seats under normal circumstances? Going to the box office was out of the question. Telephones...oh, the Internet! The blasted Internet. The thought of using a computer was barely slightly more appealing than heading to the box office, waiting in line, fussing with a credit card. Crowley was far more adept with technology, but asking him to get tickets would give him leverage, and Aziraphale already felt disempowered.

Crowley owned a sleek laptop, as black as onyx and reflective as a mirror. It was preternaturally fast and seemed to respond to Crowley's thoughts rather than his typing. Its abilities were endless--it was a mall and a movie theater and a library and television and a typewriter and a microfilm all crammed into a paper-thin metal sheet.

Aziraphale had a chunky desktop tucked away in some corner of the bookshop, gathering dust. It responded to neither his thoughts nor his typing. Ostensibly, the keyboard was in English, but it occasionally produced letters in Aramaic accidentally. He hadn't touched it in decades, and he dreaded trying to remember how to turn it on.

"Use my laptop," Crowley said as if reading Aziraphale's thoughts.

"If you insist."

He ventured into the kitchen, where Crowley's laptop lay conspicuously on the table. The first step was getting the computer open--turns out, you had to lift the lid. Getting the computer on--press a bunch of buttons. One of them worked eventually. Once the screen was on, Aziraphale let out a soft whine. There were so many different icons and buttons. Aziraphale didn't know where to begin. He didn't see Internet Explorer anywhere.

Asking Crowley for help was not an option. He closed his eyes and clicked.

Through some miracle of fate, he opened Google and not Minecraft, and from there, it was easy. It was strange, the more advanced technology got, the easier it was to use. Seeing the blastedly efficient technology was almost worse than struggling with an outdated trash heap. It almost made Aziraphale contemplate getting one of his own and embracing the wonders of the Internet.

Nah.

He typed in “Hamilton tickets,” and though there were many websites that sold and resold tickets, none listed *Hamilton* tickets currently available . Some had joke postings for \$5,000 tickets, but clearly those were fake. Aziraphale returned to the living room, defeated.

“Any luck?” Crowley drawled.

“No, no one’s selling tickets.

“You could always bribe someone.”

“Oh, no, I’d feel skuzzy.”

“ *I* could bribe them.”

“It’s not worth it. I heard the music’s all bebop, anyway.”

“What do you think bebop *is* ?” Crowley cried despairingly, sitting upright.

“I thought you didn’t want to see it.”

But Aziraphale knew: the second greatest temptation, after “You shouldn’t do this,” was “You *can*’t do this.”

“I like a challenge,” Crowley said. He got off the couch and headed towards his laptop. An hour later, Crowley ventured out, his laptop tucked under his arm.

“I found it. I found a copy of *Hamilton*.”

“What do you mean?”

“Apparently, there is an underground network of recorded shows.”

“Bootlegs! No, I would never!”

“Why not?”

“It’s wrong. You’re taking money away from hard-working actors and artists and....”

“They are at full financial saturation! You saw the websites--they’re sold out for years.”

“The recordings are blurry,” Aziraphale huffed. His social circles from the 60’s and 70’s had included theatregoers who’d rigged elaborate set-ups in the mezzanines or, worse, the balconies. They bought entire rows of seats so that they would be flanked by friends and

protectors, shielding them from watchful ushers. Afterwards, they seemed pleased with their ill-gotten gains, despite the quality never coming close to professional film or live theatre.

“So it’s not the ethics you have a problem with, it’s the quality.”

It sounded so ignoble when Crowley phrased it like that. “Isn’t appreciation of quality a type of ethics?”

“No. You’re just fussy.”

“I’m not fussy,” Aziraphale fussed.

“*I’m* not fussy, so I’m going to watch it, and if you want to protect your unsullied eyes, I’d recommend curling up with a book somewhere.”

“I don’t suppose the cast and crew are starving,” Aziraphale muttered, sitting next to Crowley.

The quality of illicit recordings improved massively since Aziraphale had squinted at a foggy black-and-white capture of *A Chorus Line*. This recording was in crisp color. Even the actors’ eyes were distinguishable. It was impressive--the comfort of his own couch was a nice bonus, making an almost fair trade-off for the experience of live theater in an uncomfortable seat.

The couch might have been to comfortable, because after chuckling at “You punched the bursar?” the next scene Aziraphale was conscious of was some woman looking out at the audience and gasping. He rubbed his eyes. It took him one groggy moment to figure out what happened.

“I’ve never fallen asleep during a performance before!” As a rule, he didn’t sleep and he certainly didn’t have a habit of drifting off. He was an angel. And a lover of the arts. Aziraphale looked around for appalled witnesses or offended actors. Even in the privacy of their living room, Aziraphale couldn’t shake the feeling that people were watching, judging.

“It was terribly embarrassing. You snored and drooled.”

“I missed the show,” Aziraphale pouted.

“It was quite good. Worth every last drop of hype. In fact, I’d say the hype doesn’t even begin to capture it.”

“Are you having a go at me?” Aziraphale asked.

“A bit, yeah. You know, we can watch it again. Or, in your case, watch it at all.”

Aziraphale blinked. Of course they could. They didn’t have to wait 20 hours for the curtain to go up again. And it wasn’t like he was committing another sin...just the same one, again.

“Well. I don’t see why not. You already have it up and all. It’s not like I’m fussy,” Aziraphale said.

Natasha, Pierre & The Great Comet of 1812

Seeing a show forty-two times could only do so much to help financially. Aziraphale learned that the heart-wrenching way as he monitored the plummeting grosses for *The Great Comet*. He didn't like using trite, hyperbolic expressions, but there was nothing trite or hyperbolic about it. It was simply the most innovative, immersive, brilliant, rousing, life-affirming experience of several lifetimes. It was one of the rare shows that Crowley and Aziraphale loved in equal measure--which, oddly enough, tended not to bode well.

Crowley liked that the atmosphere encouraged conspicuous, Russian-level alcohol consumption.

"Don't you think we should help?" He asked, once it was clear there was going to be no uptick in the grosses.

"I don't interfere with the business," Crowley said, with the tone of a former mafioso who earned his retirement with gunmetal and blood.

"Please? When was the last time we both loved a show so much?"

"*Wicked* ."

"*Wicked* didn't need our help. *Wicked* didn't even need Best Musical. *Wicked's* a miracle unto itself. Please, Crowley, please. Think of the actors, think of the crew, the creative team, the theatricality of the whole experience. Please?"

The above-listed considerations were negligible compared to what would ultimately be the deciding factor: Aziraphale's pleading tone.

"Fine."

Aziraphale brightened. Time to get to planning. "It seems to me the main issue is Groban's gone."

"The main issue is there's no mainstream appeal," Crowley muttered.

"So," Aziraphale continued, ignoring Crowley, "we need an actor with comparable selling power."

"There are very few commercially appealing artists who have the range and willingness to handle such a role. Groban is exceptional."

"Groban *is* exceptional," Aziraphale sighed.

"It would probably be best to split up," Crowley said. "I'll arrange some lunches with some agents and actors, you do the same with others."

“You don’t know good restaurants,” Aziraphale said. Crowley looked at him, eyebrows raised incredulously. “I just mean that perhaps we should work as a team. Balance each other out, like we’ve been doing for six thousand years.”

“Yes, in ideal circumstances, that would make sense, but we’re crunched for time, and it might help if we went after different demographics. Me--the hip crowd, the youth, social media mavens and influencers. You--the elderly.”

“I hate influencers,” Aziraphale muttered.

“So do I, but I made them, so they’re my responsibility. Well, let’s go call some meetings.”

Aziraphale knew that he did not have a shrewd mind for business and Crowley, as a demon, did (sometimes), so he agreed to Crowley’s plan without further argument.

He did not know the first thing about “business” and “making meetings” and “*doing* lunch” (he didn’t *do* lunch, he *ate* lunch) but eventually he miracled his way to some agents. Business, he found, involved a lot of lying, not just after the initial set-up but during the meeting, too. He’d hoped that after he got to a certain point, he could be more truthful, but when you build a foundation of lies, you have to build upwards with lies, too.

It was exhausting. Much worse than running a bookshop. But there were so many livelihoods--and hours of entertainment--at stake, so he powered through. He could barely believe when he actually inked a deal. He resisted the urge to ask if they were kidding when they asked for his signature, but that did not seem like the *modus operandi* of a confident businessman, which he now was.

When he closed the office door behind him, he could scarcely believe his luck. His skill. He couldn’t wait to tell Crowley. He killed time bustling around the bookshop, waiting for Crowley to return, the excitement swelling in his chest with each minute. He was about to burst. *Wait until Crowley hears who I got*, he thought, shelving books. *I could be as big as Waterstones if I put my mind to it.*

He scrunched his nose in distaste and made sure the door was bolted against human customers.

“I got Mandy Patinkin!” Aziraphale exclaimed as soon as Crowley returned.

“Isn’t he a bit old for the part?” Crowley asked. Aziraphale deflated a bit.

“I guess,” Aziraphale said, “but he’s a *legend*. A *living legend*. *Evita*. *Sunday in the Park with George*. ”

“Yes.”

“You told me to target the elderly,” Aziraphale huffed.

“Yes, yes, and you got an absolute plum actor for it. And I had quite a grab for *my* demographic. Someone from *Hamilton*. Okieriete Onaodowan. He plays Hercules Mulligan and James Madison. I figure we could ride the wave of its popularity.”

“Hmm,” Aziraphale said. He was bitter that they still hadn’t gotten tickets and he kept falling asleep watching the bootleg. For his part, Crowley did not seem to mind watching it over and over again. “Well, if the timing is right, it can be a one-two punch. When are his dates?”

Crowley told him. Aziraphale blanched.

“Oh, dear,” Aziraphale said. “There’s some overlap between them.”

He had a moment of worry, but Crowley waved it away with a dismissive hand. “They’ll work something out, buy him out of his contract. Happens all the time in show biz.”

“I suppose.” Aziraphale felt a nagging in his stomach. Perhaps it was all the lying he had to do. Perhaps it was how exhausting theatre- and theatre-adjacent people were.

“I think we did a great job. Champagne?” Crowley asked, already pouring the drinks.

“A toast,” Aziraphale agreed, raising his glass, “to never doing that again.”

Chapter 4

Chapter Summary

An unexpected post-script.

1981

“I thought it was delightful,” Aziraphale said, resolutely. “It was a wonderful tale about redemption and community and--”

“Redemption? Community? They bullied her until they did her in.” Crowley slashed a quick finger across his throat. “Sacrificed her to the great giant trash can in the sky.”

“I’m sure they didn’t...” Aziraphale trailed off. But he couldn’t dispute that, with the repeated motifs of reincarnation and ascension, the show had ultimately been about animal sacrifice. “It’s not right to judge their culture. It was the greatest honor they could bestow. We don’t know the whole story.”

“Whole story?” Crowley shrieked, and Aziraphale wondered if Crowley was going to keep repeating words and phrases in an incredulous voice to prove a point. “You mean you want more of that? You want, what, a companion guide? I’m sorry, a catpanion guide?”

Aziraphale crossed his arms and squirmed. Normally, he was comfortable defending his tastes from Crowley’s disdain, but this was not a hill he wanted to die on. It wasn’t even a hill he wanted to picnic on. He liked it; it wasn’t in his top fifty, but he’d had a good time. But the more Crowley talked, the more Aziraphale wished he could choose not to like the show.

And yet, simultaneously, he felt compelled to take up arms. Yes, he wanted to scream, he liked it! He liked the meaningless fluff and catchy songs! What was so wrong with that?

“What did she do that was so wrong, anyway? Wander around? Explore life outside their little kitty clique? It’s not like they had it so great, living in a junkyard.”

Aziraphale pursed his lips. Perhaps their backgrounds had given them disparate perspectives on the whole thing. If they continued to pursue this line of conversation, it had the potential to get both psychologically touchier and also more ridiculous than normal.

“The songs were catchy,” Aziraphale proclaimed with finality. “I liked Skimbleshanks.”

“You would.”

2019

“Wicked!” Crowley laughed gleefully, clapping his hands as Youtube finished playing the trailer for the movie.

Aziraphale pouted. “‘Wicked’ indeed. Why would they do this to such a lovely show?”

“It’s exactly what it deserves.”

“They’ve changed things,” Aziraphale pouted.

“For the worse!” Crowley sounded ready to pop open a bottle of champagne. “What Eldritch terrors, they are. And I thought it couldn’t possibly get worse than the stage spectacle.”

“....play it again,” Aziraphale said, after a pause. It had been a lot to take in. Crowley happily obliged.

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