On A Date With Tom

Rated teen and up, no ao3 warnings apply at the time of sharing this.

Aziraphale closed his notebook and looked up, glass of wine in his hand. He watched as the handsome red haired man slithered -there was no other way to put it- into the pub and swayed his hips all the way towards his table, holding a few sheets of paper. For a brief, glorious moment, he thought he would have to drop to his knees, thank Anathema and apologise profusely for ever doubting her advice; but all too soon the dream was shattered by the rational part of his brain. There was simply no way this was the same man as the one in the photograph on the dating application his friend had insisted he use to *get out there and meet someone*.
He felt a surge of irritation towards the gorgeous man: how dare he not be the man Aziraphale was waiting for?
The stranger came to a halt in front of his table, hesitated, tossed the sheets of paper on the neighbouring table, and finally turned to Aziraphale, who returned his gaze with parted lips.
Might the photograph on the dreaded application be that misleading, after all? Aziraphale wasn't an expert when it came to dating websites, but he would have thought that the photographs were supposed to make a person appear more physically appealing than that person was in reality, not the other way round. Still. The man appeared to be the right age -late 40s, only a few years younger than Aziraphale himself- and was definitely looking at him with mesmerising eyes of gold. Smiling, nonetheless.
Aziraphale stood up and extended a hand. “Hello, um, Tom?”
The stranger frowned, but still shook his hand, the grip of his long fingers smooth and steady. “Huh?”
Not Tom, then. Of course not. Also not particularly articulated, judging by the reply he had grunted. Well, good job he wasn't Tom, all things considered. Look at the smug smirk. Inarticulate and arrogant. And, *good Lord*, that snake tattoo just under his right temple. Honestly. So utterly… ostentatious. Needlessly provocative. *Magnificently tempting*, a voice from somewhere between his tastebuds and his lower belly provided, but Aziraphale decided to ignore it and focus on the inarticulate and arrogant parts instead. He was lucky this wasn't the man he was going on a first date with. *So very incredibly lucky*, he thought with a sigh.
“My apologies. I thought you were someone else,” Aziraphale smiled through gritted teeth, mentally cursing Anathema.
“Oh, right,” the stranger said, releasing Aziraphale’s hand and cocking his hip. *Good Lord.* “I hope you’re not too disappointed.”
Aziraphale hummed, aiming for a nonchalant sound, and landing face down on a low whine. “Not at a-” he shrilled, before clearing his throat and starting again as he watched the man’s features growing more amused by the second. “Not at all.”
The man’s hypnotic eyes ran down Aziraphale’s figure, and when they came up again they fixed on Aziraphale’s own eyes. His smile looked genuine now, and when he shifted his weight from one food to the other his movement was so fluid that Aziraphale felt like a tap of hot, honey-like substance had been opened in his chest. The stranger was wearing black clothes, so tight that they looked as if they’d been painted on him, and Aziraphale had to chase away all the horribly inappropriate thoughts that were leaving his mouth dry.

“I’m Crowley.“ The man’s slightly raspy voice interrupted Aziraphale’s poor attempt at self discipline. “Nina is on her way. This whole thing-” he waved the slim stack of paper he was holding, “-is for her.”
Aziraphale tilted his head and scrunched his eyebrows while Crowley taped some of the sheets of paper on the other table. “What thing?”
“You’re here for the breakup meeting, yeah?”
“Certainly not!” He straightened his back to reach his full height. “I’m here for a date!”
“Oh,” the stranger -Crowley- said, and did he sound disappointed?
“Um, what- what is a breakup meeting, exactly, if I may ask?”
Crowley perked up. “My friend was dumped in the most shameful way,” he said, a little too excitedly, given what he was relaying, Aziraphale thought. He took one of the sheets of paper from where they lay half scattered on the table next to them and shoved it towards Aziraphale. It was a flyer. It read:

SEEKING
people to competitively tell
me their worst breakup story
until mine seems insignificant

winner gets my ex’s netflix
password. must make me feel
genuinely better about my
situation

Thursday 9th 7PM
@ the Garden of Eden pub

“I see,” Aziraphale said. “Well, I suppose sharing one’s misfortunes is as good a way as any other to find solace.”
“Solace, yeah. That’s what I told her.” There was a certain playful tone in the man’s voice, and when Aziraphale looked up he found crinkles surrounding his eyes. Was this unrefined, uneducated brute making fun of his choice of vocabulary?
“Oh, I am ever so sorry.” Aziraphale shook his head, looking contrite. “How inconsiderate of me to use such big words. It means comfort or consolation in a time of distress. Hope that clears things up. Now, if you’ll excuse me.” Aziraphale pushed the flyer back along the table towards Crowley and sat back down. Crowley didn’t move, his expression still amused. He was biting his lips, and *good Lord*, that was irritatingly rude. Infuriatingly dismissive. *Unfairly sexy*, that voice that was getting dangerously close to his groin offered, but, once again, Aziraphale ignored it.
“Thank you for illuminating my humble mind with your superior knowledge.”
“I’m magnanimous like that,” Aziraphale smiled innocently, his fingers waving in the air.
Crowley cackled. “A real angel! Complete with curly little… and neat tartan…”
Aziraphale frowned. He brought a hand to his hair. “What’s wrong with my hair? And my outfit is very stylish, I’ll have you know. Not that I would expect you to understand.”

“You kind of pull it off, I’ll give you that.”
Aziraphale fought the smile that threatened to betray how much he was… detesting this exchange. Loathing it. *Enjoying it*, the voice chimed in.
“So, um, what did you say your name was?” Crowley asked with the air of someone who knew exactly how much Aziraphale was enjoying this encounter.
Aziraphale considered a snarky retort, but was distracted by Crowley pulling his hair in a bun while tilting his head, and exposing his very biteable and kissable long neck. What is a man on a first date with someone else supposed to do?
“Aziraphale.”
“Aziraphale,” Crowley drawled, and the way he dragged the syllables in his mouth sent shivers running up and down Aziraphale’s spine. “I see now why you lean into the whole-” he gestured vaguely at Aziraphale’s face. “Angel imagery.”
Aziraphale shifted uncomfortably in his seat and cleared his throat. “I rather think I don’t lean into any imagery.”
One of Crowley’s eyebrows shot up to almost touch his hairline. He pulled a chair and sprawled on it, long legs, *good Lord,* spread open in front of him. He *had* to be doing it on purpose.
Crowley nodded to the notebook resting in front of Aziraphale. Aziraphale followed his gaze.
“Oh.” The white notebook with a fuzzy cover and imprinted unmistakable angel wings lay there, helpless and incriminating. *Bother.*
“Anyway, Angel-”
“Really,” Aziraphale huffed, fighting the warmth that was spreading over his cheeks.
“Would you like to join us?”
Aziraphale blinked. “I am not sure what would make you think that I would fit in a… *Breakup Meeting*, your words-”
“*I* didn’t pronounce the capital letters-”
“Firstly, I can pay for my own subscriptions to streaming platforms, not that I watch mindless TV all that often-”
“Course you don’t.”
“And secondly, my love life is not as sad as you might imagine. I am waiting for a date right now, in fact.”
“A date with someone you haven’t met. You thought I was him,” Crowley grinned, leaned his elbow on the table, and his chin on his hand. And *good Lord*, that grin was so infuriating. Maddening. *Alluring*, the treacherous voice suggested.
“I fail to see your point.”
“My point- my point is, it’s a first date.”
Aziraphale clasped his hands in front of him. “You really should make an effort to verbalize your thoughts in a clearer, more eloquent manner, my dear.”
Crowley rolled his eyes. For all the exasperation he was faking, Aziraphale could tell he was enjoying this as much as he himself was, *and wasn’t that nice*? Asked the voice inside himself.
No. No, it wasn’t, he replied decidedly. He shouldn’t flirt with a random stranger when he had a perfectly suitable man joining him on their date soon. Absolutely not.
“It’s your first date!” Crowley chuckled. “You’re both single! You must have gone through a breakup recently!”
“Ah- Well…” Aziraphale, again, shifted in his chair.

“In the last… year, maybe?”
Aziraphale rolled his shoulders in resolve. “I really don’t see how this is any of your business. If you could leave me alone now, I believe Tom will be here soon.”
“Bit late, is he?” Crowley asked, leaning back. “Bit rude, if you ask me, but what do I know?”
“He’s not late,” Aziraphale mumbled while wringing his hands.
Crowley tilted his head, a twinkle appearing in the corner of his eyes. “Ooohh, someone is eager. This *Tom* must be a real catch. How early are you exactly?”
“I am not that early,” Aziraphale waved a hand to stress the fact that he was, indeed, *not* that early.
“How long have you been sitting here?” Crowley insisted.
“Like I said, it’s none of your business, but if you must know, I just came early to have some time to myself. And write a little.”
Crowley’s gaze shot to the notebook. “Diary?”
Aziraphale squared his shoulders and tilted his chin up, readying himself to the familiar task of taking the mockery other people threw at him and turning into his strength. He had learnt to wear his quirkinesses and vulnerabilities as the badge of honour they were, with pride and joy.
“Poems, actually.”
The mockery never came. Instead Crowley’s golden eyes did something that was impossible to name. He looked wistful and lost and longing, all at the same time. “Your Tom likes poetry, does he?”
“I wouldn’t say he’s *my* Tom, but yes, he does.”
“I think Tom is a very lucky man.”
Aziraphale held his breath as heat crept up his neck. He willed the voice inside himself to keep quiet and watched as Crowley slowly rose from the vaguely sitting position he’d inflicted on the poor, blameless piece of furniture.
A few people started wandering close to their table and the one next to it, eyeing the flyers.
“Is this the breakup thingy?” someone asked in a murmur.
“Looks like it,” someone else replied, and, “the flyers are there,” someone else said, among shrugs and hands being pushed into pockets.
“Yep,” Crowley’s voice sounded loud compared to the mumbling of the newcomers, most of which were young people. “It’s here. We’re going to start in a few minutes. Feel free to grab a drink and get yourself a seat.”
“You’re the one who got dumped?” A man who stood out for being roughly the same age as Aziraphale and Crowley asked with wide eyes and parted lips. Aziraphale disliked him immediately. For no obvious reason, of course.
“Mmmnot this time. Why don’t you take a seat, we’ll talk more later?” When Crowley fluttered his eyelashes and smiled sweetly at the man, a ferocious beast awoke in Aziraphale’s chest, its claws digging into his flesh from the inside. As the new stranger and Crowley were still staring at each other smiling like utter idiots unable to behave like adults in a public place, Aziraphale got up and took two steps around the table. He cleared his throat. And then again, more loudly.
Finally, and excruciatingly slowly, Crowley turned back towards him. “Mmm?”
“Ah, yes,” Aziraphale smiled a smile he knew didn’t reach his eyes. “If you could please just free this space in front of the table, so that *my date* can see me, that would be lovely.”

“Yeah… About that. Do you mind moving to that table over there?” Crowley pointed to an unoccupied table tucked in the far corner of the pub.
Aziraphale blinked. He drew himself to his full height -which wasn’t that much shorter than Crowley, thank you very much- and rotated his neck to look at the other table in disbelief. “I beg your pardon?”
“Silly me. I am ever so sorry,” Crowley mocked. “How inconsiderate. It means, would you mind terribly elevating your angelic behind and promenading at a leisurely pace to the furthest corner of the land? If it’s not too much trouble, of course.”
Aziraphale stared daggers at him. This was war. “It *is* too much trouble. This is my table.”
“But we need it.”
“But it is my table.”
“But that table is just the same.”
“Then why don’t *you* go and get that table?”
“We need to push two tables together as we’re expecting lots of people. These two are already close to each other, that one is all by itself. Isn’t that better for your *romantic date*?” he spat the words *romantic date* while wiggling his head in a frankly affronting move against adulthood. That was another item to add to the list of reasons why he was so incredibly lucky that this… this… fiend wasn’t his date. Inarticulate, arrogant, and childish.
“This table is by the window with a lovely view of the garden.”
“Oh, I thought you would be looking into each other’s eyes,” Crowley pouted, and Aziraphale knew he was mocking, but *good Lord* those lips.
“That table is by the toilets.”
“So?”
“What do you mean *so*? I don’t want to sit by the toilet on a first date. Or ever, to be quite honest!”
“Oh, Of course not. An Angel like you wouldn’t sully himself by sitting *by the toilets*. You probably don't even *use* the toilets like the rest of us! I bet when you need to go, you frown really really hard until you expel little peach smelling clouds from your ears and there! You're done!
Aziraphale gasped. “I’m- I’m-” he spluttered, then sighed and recomposed himself. “This is my table and I’m keeping it. This conversation is over.” He turned on his heels and went to reclaim his seat in a decisive and swift move.
“Fine!” Crowley snarled.
“Fine!” Aziraphale echoed, head held high.
“Fine!” Crowley repeated again, because apparently his vocabulary was quite limited.
Crowley started to arrange the chairs around the other table and to chat with the growing number of people joining him, and Aziraphale resolved to stop paying him any attention. He took a sip of wine and glanced at his pocket watch. It was 4:55. If Tom was punctual, and his profile on the dating application assured that he was, he would be here in 5 minutes. Not wanting to look at Crowley and at what was going on on the other table, he pulled his book -The Trouble With HELL- out of his leather bag and started reading where he had left off earlier. After only a few seconds he had to concede that the noise and movement around him made it impossible for him to concentrate. He stopped reading, but kept his eye resolutely on the book until he felt something bumping on his table repeatedly. He looked up, glowering.

“Sorry, Angel,” Crowley smirked, shrugging innocently as he squeezed more chairs than physics determined was possible in the space between the two tables. “We’re a bit short on space to sit all these people because *someone* didn’t want to swap tables.”
“This is ridiculous,” Aziraphale scoffed under his breath as he watched the activity surrounding the other table and the people taking their seats. He inhaled deeply and splayed his fingers on the table in front of him. Losing his temper wouldn’t do. Unlike other people, he had *manners*. “Would you be so kind as to arrange some of these chairs on the *other* side of *your* table, perhaps?”
Crowley stopped, a chair held mid-air, and looked at him with wide eyes. “Nope,” he said, popping the *P*, before resuming the impossible task of adding one more chair to the non-existent space.
Aziraphale propped his head on his hand fighting his… rage. Fury. *Giggles*, the unrepentant voice offered. When he looked up again, he could see that the corners of Crowley’s mouth too were fighting to stay down when something was clearly pulling them up.
Incredibly lucky that that impossibly ill-mannered man was not his date, Aziraphale reminded himself.
He shook his head pretending not to look at the way the muscles in Crowley's legs flexed when he bent to place a chair a little distance away from himself, or the way, *good Lord*, the man’s perfectly shaped bottom fell into his eyeline as if he did it on purpose.
Right then a woman came to Crowley, a bit out of breath. She wore her dark hair in dreadlocks, her gaze was intense and her features arranged in a frown.
“Nina, there you are!” Crowley greeted her with a one-arm hug as even more people sat down.
“Are we really doing this?” the woman -Nina- asked, brusquely.
“I’ll send them all home if you say the word. But I think hearing about other people’s breakups will help get your mind off things. Plus it never hurts to send some mischief Lindsay way,” Crowley replied, barely audible to Aziraphale over the background noise.
“And you’re a master of mischief,” Nina said with a fond smile.
Crowley tapped a fist to his chest proudly. “That, I am!”
As Aziraphale observed their exchange, he found that he liked Nina, despite her questionable friendship choices. The kind of intimacy she and Crowley seemed to share was not unlike the one he himself shared with Anathema or Maggie. He would do anything to make them feel better if they were to be heartbroken. Suddenly he felt a wave of… something difficult to name…for Crowley. Not complete disdain. Not utter contempt. *Fully fond admiration*. That voice really needed a strong-worded talking to.
Nina glanced at the chairs tucked between the two tables and the people squeezing to sit on them. “That looks uncomfortable,” she remarked, furrowing her eyebrows.
“They’ll be fine,” Crowley hurried to reply as he directed her to take her seat at the head of the table, sending Aziraphale a pointed look over his shoulder.
Aziraphale found himself smiling his *I-told-you-so* smile and waving his fingers in reply. Again, Crowley’s lips twitched, but he quickly looked away from Aziraphale and busied himself by placing a flyer on each chair.
Aziraphale's cheeks felt rather warm all of a sudden, but he didn’t have time to contemplate the reason why, because a voice chirped from across his table.

“Aziraphale? Is that you?” The man was tall and not bad-looking. His hair was combed neatly back and he was sporting a moustache that seemed to tickle his upper lips. His posture was straight and yet relaxed, and his smile was expectant.
“Ah,” Aziraphale smiled back while a mixture of relief and disappointment washed over him. He was happy his date was here, of course he was. Only, he had rather been enjoying the little game he’d been playing with the man who was not his date. The man that *luckily* was not his date. He heard the voice from somewhere inside himself roll its eyes, but at least it kept quiet.
“Tom! It’s so very nice to meet you!” he said, warmly.
Tom frowned and shifted on his feet, his air of self confidence giving way to uneasiness. “Um. It’s actually Tim.”
Aziraphale froze. Out of the corner of his eye he saw Crowley, well within earshot, going still, then slowly turning towards him, his eyes as wide as tennis balls and his lips trembling with unlaughed giggles.
Aziraphale shot him a chastising glare, then refocused all his attention on Tom. Tim! “Oh,” he said, feeling an embarrassed blush cover his cheeks and reach his ears. “I am so sorry! Of course! Tim! That’s what I thought I said!” He saw Crowley cross his arms, raise an eyebrow, and cock a hip. “Please,” he said to Tim, gesturing towards the chair opposite him, that had been pushed a bit on the side by Crowley’s rearranging of the furniture in this half of the pub. “What can I get you?”
“Oh, that’s very kind of you. I’ll have a glass of port, thank you,” Tim replied as he took a seat, pushing slightly on the back of the chair that Crowley had placed so close to his. “This is, um, nice,” he said as Crowley moved the chair back with a grunt. Tim looked at Aziraphale, uncertain and gestured vaguely to the room that spread behind him. “Uh, maybe could we-”
“No,” Aziraphale cut him off. “I’ll be right back,” he said over his shoulder, already walking towards the bar.
As he was waiting to be served at the bar, he felt more than saw a presence by his side. He turned to see Crowley’s smug face grinning at him.
“So. How’s *Tom*?” Crowley asked, his ever so slightly long canines digging gently, *good Lord* into his lower lip.
“Oh, hush,” Aziraphale sighed, his shoulders sagging.
“Oh, come on. ‘T was an honest mistake. I’m sure he doesn’t mind.”
The bartender came, and as Crowley placed his order for a few of the people at the Breakup table, he moved closer to Aziraphale by a fraction of an inch. Aziraphale didn’t know why he did it, but he did it. He shifted his own weight to the side so that his left arm touched Crowley’s right arm. He blamed the voice from somewhere inside himself. Without missing a beat, Crowley leaned into the touch while playing with the coaster on the counter. Aziraphale held his breath as the warmth from Crowley’s body transferred into his own and a surge of electricity shot up his spine. *Good Lord.*
All too soon the bartender came back with a glass of port for Aziraphale. Reluctantly, he took it and stepped back. “Well,” nodded to Crowley. “I hope your Breakup Meeting goes well, and that your friend can find a way to process it and move past it.”
“Thanks,” Crowley replied as Aziraphale was already moving away. “Hey, Angel?”

Aziraphale turned with a huff of fake annoyance. Crowley's pose was as cool as it had been during their exchanges, but now there was a hint of something new in his eyes, something that hadn't been there before.
"That table over there just freed up," Crowley continued in a tone that sounded… *vulnerable*, the voice supplied swiftly, before the rational part of his brain could come up with any other useless adjective. "It overlooks the garden and everything. You might… you know. You and Tim might want to move there. If. You know. If you don't want to risk your date being… disrupted." He looked Aziraphale straight in the eye as he said that.
Aziraphale took a moment to consider. "Are you giving me a warning or asking for permission?"
The gleam was back in Crowley's eye along with his cool attitude. He leaned an elbow on the counter and smirked in that… indescribably awful. Blatantly Infuriating. *Unashamedly charming* way he had. "Do I look like I would ask for permission to cause havoc?"
Aziraphale sighed dramatically. "Like I said earlier, that's my table, and I'm not moving. If you'll excuse me," he added in his most prim tone and turned to go and rejoin Tim.
He placed the Port in front of Tim and sat down, smiling at him and hoping his earlier blunder had been forgiven. A young woman in the Breakup Meeting was telling what sounded like a sorry story of how she got cheated on and then gaslit into thinking she had imagined things. Aziraphale's heart ached for her; he wanted to reassure her that she had done nothing wrong and it wasn't her fault if her ex-partner was a horrible person.
But he directed his attention to Tim, instead. "So," he started. "Uh, did you find the place easily?"
How did people do the whole dating thing again? Was it strictly necessary to start with small talk? Anathema had assured him that online dating was great because you got to know a little bit of each other before meeting in person, so part of the awkwardness would dissipate. And yet, here he was, asking Tim if he'd found the place easily.
"Yes," Tim replied just as Crowley reappeared and distributed the drinks he was carrying among a few of the people participating in the meeting. "That was easy enough. As a matter of fact, my shop is not far from here."
"Oh?" Aziraphale asked while decidedly *not* looking at Crowley's long legs as they climbed and squeezed their way through the people sitting down and to the one vacant chair whose back was basically leaning on the side of Aziraphale's table. He noticed Crowley removing a piece of paper from the chair before sitting down with his profile to Aziraphale; he assumed it was one of the flyers, but upon further, surreptitious, inspection, he saw that it was a random piece of paper where someone had written *reserved* with a marker pen.
"Really," Aziraphale muttered under his breath.
"Yes, really! Isn't that the most amazing coincidence?" Tim exclaimed, looking very pleased with himself. Evidently, he had kept the conversation going while Aziraphale's mind was distracted with something else.
"Ah, I'm so sorry, what was that?"
Crowley shook his head and clicked his tongue audibly. Aziraphale gritted his teeth.
"The French restaurant next door?" Tim said.
"Yes," Aziraphale nodded, as if he knew what Tim was talking about.
"I made the carpets for them, and the owner loved them so much that they wrote the most flattering review on my website. Isn't it amazing that you picked this pub out of all the pubs in the area?"

“Carpets,” Aziraphale said.
Crowley snorted.
Aziraphale huffed.
“For the restaurant next door!” Tim said.
“Of course,” Aziraphale agreed. Then it finally hit him. “Carpets! Of course! You own a carpet shop!”
Tim looked deflated. “It’s my pride and joy. Did you forget?”
“No,” Aziraphale reassured him, shaking his head firmly.
“Noooooooo,” Crowley muttered from his seat.
“And when I went back home, he had vanished, taking the fish tank with him!” said a person from across the Breakup table. “*Including* my German blue ram!”
A few people, including Nina, offered their support.
“Anyway,” Aziraphale cleared his throat. “Why- why don’t you tell me a bit more about yourself. What… What do you like? Um, doing?”
Tim blinked. “Aside from carpets?”
Crowley made a low sound from the depth of his throat.
Aziraphale nodded. “Aside from carpets, yes.”
“Well, let me think… I love going shopping in the large supermarkets where I can find a parking spot easily.”
“Oh, sweet Satan,” Crowley mumbled from the side of the table.
“Shush!” Aziraphale barked.
“Pardon?” Tim asked.
Aziraphale raised his hands in apology. “Not you!”
Tim looked at him with a questioning look.
Crowley pinched the bridge of his nose.
“Uh, I mean, what else?” Aziraphale asked.
“Oh. Well, I have a list of organisations to which I regularly send complaints to, to make sure they don’t fall behind with their standards of service, you see.”
Aziraphale frowned, clasping his hands in front of him.
Crowley turned his head slowly and sent him an incredulous look with arched eyebrows.
Aziraphale looked back and gave the tiniest shrug.
At the Breakup table, the man Crowley had flirted with raised his hand. “My turn!”
“What about poetry? During our chats you told me you like poetry!” Aziraphale prompted, ignoring the annoyance he felt when Crowley’s head tilted towards the man who’d raised his hand.
“Oh, I love poetry!” Tim said.
“My name is Furfur,” the man at the Breakup table introduced himself.
“Wonderful!” Aziraphale remarked.
“I have several volumes of poetry scattered in my house. They are lovely to look at.”
“My ex- wife left me,” the man at the other table -Furfur- said.
“To… look at?” Aziraphale asked.
“And read, of course.” Tim replied.
“Of course,” Aziraphale agreed. “Do you write any?”
“She accused me of flirting with other people in front of her!” Furfur whinged.

“Oh, of course not,” Tim replied. “I think all the poems worth reading have already been written. What’s the point of writing more? It would be just a waste of time!”
Aziraphale tilted his head.
Crowley stiffened. Very slowly, he turned his head towards Tim. “You think all the poems worth reading have already been written?” he said in a low, almost threatening voice.
Tim looked at him with shock spread over his features. “You can’t possibly think that anyone can write better poems than the ones we already have?”
“First off, that’s really not the point of writing poetry, it’s not a contest,” Crowley hissed. “Secondly, name your three favourite poems.”
“This is really inappropriate-” Tim protested.
Crowley crossed his arms over his chest. “I’ll wait.”
“Gentlemen, please,” Aziraphale intervened without much conviction.
“Excuse me!” Furfur called from the other table. “I was telling my story!”
Aziraphale stood up and fixed him with a stare. “Are you sure your wife’s accusations were unfounded and you were not, in fact, flirting with other people? You certainly seem to like to be flirting with random people you have no business flirting with!”
Crowley’s head swivelled towards him, his hand to his chest and a twinkle in his eye. “Aw,” he said simply.
Aziraphale replied with a small shrug.
“I’m getting my mind off things alright,” Nina said from across the Breakup table.
Aziraphale looked contrite and meant it. “I apologise, my dear. That was terribly inconsiderate of us.”
Nina sent Crowley a knowing look. “It’s fine,” she said, seemingly addressing everyone, though Aziraphale had the feeling she was talking specifically to Crowley. “Very entertaining.”
Crowley gave an imperceptible bow with his head.
Tim got up from his seat, too. “Aziraphale,” he said and all eyes, including the ones at the Breakup table, were on them. “I think we should go somewhere else.”
Aziraphale’s eyes dropped to where Crowley was still sitting. Crowley held his gaze without saying anything, an unspoken challenge painted on his face.
“Um,” Aziraphale started.
Tim pointed at Crowley. “This… *gentleman* has been incredibly rude to us. You might not have noticed, but he’s been insulting us for the whole evening. I don’t know who he thinks he is, but I certainly know that we don’t need to stay here a minute longer. We can find somewhere else to spend the evening. We could go to the French restaurant next door!”
Aziraphale paused and swallowed. “The one you made the carpets for?” he asked in a whisper.
Crowley buried his face in his hands while everyone else frowned in confusion.
“Are you coming?” Tim asked solemnly.
“I- I’m sorry,” Aziraphale said, shaking his head.
Tim straightened his blazer. “Very well. You leave me no choice but to leave alone. Have a good night.” With that Tim turned on his heels and walked briskly towards the exit.
After a second’s hesitation, Aziraphale ran after him.
“Aziraphale!” Crowley jumped up from his seat and lunged towards him, but the ridiculous amount of chairs everywhere made it impossible for him to reach him.

It didn't matter now, anyway. Aziraphale caught up with Tim just outside the pub and placed an arm over his shoulder.
"Tim," he started and waited for the other man to look at him before continuing. "I am very sorry. That must have not been fun at all. I sincerely apologise."
Tim sighed. "Well, I don't think it could have worked out, anyway," he shrugged.
"No," Aziraphale agreed. "I don't think so either."
They shook hands, then Tim went his way and Aziraphale went back to the pub, passing Furfur who was on his way out, and sat down back in his seat. When Crowley looked at him the twinkle in eye was gone and the corners of his lips were turned upside down. He made to stand up, but Aziraphale lifted his hand to stop him.
At the Breakup table a man in his 30s, wearing glasses, a stripy tie and an air of being out of place was finishing telling a story of how he was dumped because his partner was tired of communicating via post-its stuck on the wall, since any technological device he touched stopped working, which made it impossible for them to even talk on the phone or text. "That was a bit harsh, I thought," the man said.
That seemed to prompt Nina to tell her own story. "Funny that," she said bitterly.
Crowley sat up looking intently at his friend and something tugged at Aziraphale's heartstrings. He wanted to be the recipient of that protective gaze too, wanted to know all of Crowley's different gazes, different postures, different tones of voice. Had he really only just met the man? Something about him was pulling Aziraphale in like a magnet. Crowley must have felt Aziraphale's eyes on him because he turned, a shadow worrying his stunning eyes. Aziraphale smiled reassuringly and turned his attention back to Nina.
"All in all, a post-it would have probably been better than being dumped by text!"
A chorus of, "Noooo," rose from the small crowd sitting around the table.
"Yes!" Nina exclaimed. "Several texts, in fact! I was stuck in my shop during a power outage and my phone was dead. When the electricity came back on I immediately plugged my phone in and a long streak of texts appeared on the screen. They packed and left because I was late, didn't even give me a chance to explain!" She looked more angry than sad when she recounted her story.
"You dodged a bullet!" someone said.
"Much better off without them," someone else agreed.
"That's not love, that's control!" A third person put in.
Aziraphale observed as Crowley relaxed on his seat once again, and his expression changed from fiercely protective to affectionately smug. He must have told her all of this before. Though it was hardly ever as easy as to tell someone whatever it is they don't want to hear. Sometimes all your friends need is to be allowed to feel awful.
"That's terrible, my dear," Aziraphale heard himself say. "Your ex-partner's behaviour is appalling, and I can see that you're hurt and angry. It is perfectly acceptable to let yourself feel negative emotions while dealing with the pain. They might not be the right person for you, like the others said, but that doesn't mean that however much time you spent with them suddenly loses any significance. Give yourself time to heal, my dear, there is no shame in grieving a relationship, even if it was with the wrong person. At least you seem to have friends you can call upon in your time of need," he added, glancing at Crowley.

“Right,” Crowley nodded, among everyone mumbling their approval. “‘M always happy to offer solace, me,” he said with little wink directed at Aziraphale.
“And now, my dear,” Aziraphale went on, “I think you should give me your ex-partner’s Netflix password.”
Protests spread among the presents.
“Really?” Crowley smirked, sprawling further over the poor chair, and *good Lord*, those *Limbs*. They seemed to reach everywhere.
“Excuse me,” said a bespectacled young man. “Actually, I don’t think that that man walking out on you was worse than any of our breakups.”
“It was just a date!” someone agreed.
“You didn’t even seem to know him that well!”
Aziraphale waved a hand towards the exit. “Oh. Oh, no. Not at all,” he said lightly, then he addressed Nina. “I was just thinking, if you give the password to someone else they’ll have time to watch one, maybe two shows, before your partner changes it. But if you give it to me, I will make sure to fill their… viewing history, I believe it’s called with all of my favourite documentaries on Victorian fashion, bodysnatching and shepherding, and with what i can almost assure you will turn out to be the television series that are as far from your ex-partners tastes as possible. Then the algorithm will do its magic and your ex-partner will be stuck with those kinds of suggestions for a while,” he concluded, clasping his hands, a serene smile on his face.
Crowley looked at him with what could only be described as admiration, and *good Lord* those eyes. And that mouth slightly agape.
“You know about algorithms and stuff?” he asked.
Aziraphale huffed. “Did you think I was just a pretty face?” He watched the other man's Adam’s apple bob up and down as he swallowed, seemingly flustered. *Good Lord.*
Crowley recovered quickly, however. “You said you didn’t watch TV!”
“I said I didn’t watch *mindless* TV,” Aziraphale corrected him while pulling at the cuffs of his sleeves.
Nina got up and handed him one of the flyers folded in two. “Here’s the password. Please do that,” she said curtly, then joined the others as they all got up, took the glasses back to the bar and chatted while getting ready to go.
Aziraphale sat back at his table and started gathering his book and notebook while finishing his glass of wine.
Crowley came to sit opposite him, hunching his shoulders. “Sorry I ruined your date,” he said, not sounding sorry in the least.
“Oh, you can’t take *all* the credit! I think that without my own contribution my date could have gone quite well, if boringly so.”
“Still,” Crowley tapped his fingers on the table and held his gaze. “I feel like I owe you a date.”
Aziraphale tilted his head. “Do you, now?”
“Yeah. Yeah, I do. So, I know this guy, right? You’d like him. Mind you, bit unsophisticated for an angel like you, maybe. Bit of a menace that one,” he let out a soft laugh when Aziraphale nodded in agreement. “But! He’s got a wicked sense of humour. He’s clever. His command of the English language is actually better than he lets on. And he doesn’t look down on unpublished poets. That sort of stuff. What do you say?”

“I see.” Aziraphale leaned forward on the table. “Well, I say he sounds exactly like the sort of guy that it would be very interesting to get to know better.”
Crowley smiled coyly. “Yeah? Well, then, if you jus’... type your number in here,” he said as he slid his phone across the table towards Aziraphale, “He might… take you out tomorrow? Maybe for dinner?”
“That sounds lovely.” Aziraphale typed his number and handed the phone back to Crowley. Then he let his hand rest in the centre of the table between them, his fingers spread open. Crowley, slowly and purposefully, placed his own hand close to Aziraphale’s, as if accepting an invitation, brushing their fingerpads together and sending tingles travelling from Aziraphale’s fingertips up to his clavicle.
Then he stood abruptly. “Great! I’ll pass your number to Ligur, then!” He made as if to leave only to turn around and sit back again, an amused, *adorable* -the voice was just talking freely now- grin on his lips.
Aziraphale laughed as a bundle of butterflies was released down in his belly.
“Right,” Crowley said, more serious now, as he glanced over his shoulder. “I need to take Nina home now, but… tomorrow? If you meant it? Pick you up at 7?”
“I’d love that.”
“Text the address?”
Aziraphale arched his eyebrows, and Crowley typed something on his phone. Aziraphale’s phone beeped.
“Text the address?” Crowley repeated.
Aziraphale pulled his phone out of his pocket and read the message. “This is your personal date wrecker Crowley. I promise not to wreck your next date. Text the address?”
“OK, the way you read that with punctuation when I went to all the trouble of not inserting a single punctuation mark is… is offensive is what it is. Dismissive of one’s talent. I could hear the capital letters and everything,” Crowley commented playfully, clearly as reluctant to go as Aziraphale was to see him go.
“It’s a gift,” Aziraphale replied.
“Dismissing other people’s talents?”
“Pronouncing The Capital Letters.”
Crowley chuckled, then got up slowly, and so did Aziraphale.
“Right then,” Crowley said, looking suddenly less a menace and more like a precious fragile thing. “Till tomorrow.”
“I’ll look forward to it.”
Crowley looked hesitant for a moment, then grabbed Aziraphale’s hand in his, brought it to his lips and placed a gentle kiss on it. When he looked up at Aziraphale there was a whole new level of vulnerability in his eyes. “This OK?”
Aziraphale was breathless. “I suppose it might be deemed acceptable.”
“Good.” He gave Aziraphale’s hand a little squeeze and then lowered it with his own hand until he had to let it go.
Aziraphale mourned the feeling of safety, of being grounded that the warmth of Crowley’s hand had given him and felt heat spread out on his cheeks. “I- I think you’d better go.” he pointed at Nina waiting at the bar.

“Right,” Crowley nodded and swayed on his feet. “Right, I’d. Yeah. Tex- yeah. Bye.” With a last wave of his hand he turned and went to Nina, only to glance towards Aziraphale one last time by the door.

Aziraphale gathered his things and left as well, being careful to go the opposite direction to the French restaurant next door.

He went home, made himself some dinner and continued reading his book, all the while feeling a mix of excitement and lightheadedness settling over him. After dinner, he fought the little speck of insecurity that had pushed its way in his thoughts and texted Crowley his address.

Crowley replied within ten minutes. He had dropped Nina off at home and would Aziraphale like to chat over the phone maybe?

As he spoke with Crowley on the phone for hours, as they laughed and bantered and argued on whether oysters were delicious or abhorrent, Aziraphale made a mental note that, after all, he really would have to drop to his knees and thank Anathema for encouraging him *to get out there and meet someone.*