
THE FIRST MEETING

In One Night Only, Eloise and Theo have both had heartbreak in their previous relationships. There are no specific spoilers for One Night Only as the below takes place before the story, but this is more about Eloise and Daniel's relationship.

I haul one of the boxes out of the boot of my car, groaning at the weight of it. I grit my teeth and curse that I hadn't asked Fiona to stay and help me, except there's only so much you can ask from your best friend. Fiona spent most of the morning helping me cart things across the town to my new place, the least I can do is let her enjoy her evening. And by enjoy, I mean go out with other friends and have a few drinks, not get sore arms from hauling boxes.

I shift the weight of the box, the thud inside makes me realise it contains my books. No wonder it's so damn heavy.

"Would you like a hand with that?"

The voice that comes from slightly behind me scares the life out of me, making me jump, displacing the weight of the books. A hand juts out, steadying the box before it has chance to fall.

"Thanks," I say, looking over to the guy who is standing next to me and then notice that there are two people next to him.

"I'm Evers. This is Daniel, and Eleanor."

"I'm Eloise."

"Well, Eloise, can we give you a hand with the boxes?" Evers asks.

"I don't want to be an inconvenience," I protest, although I would love it if somebody could take this box from me.

"I insist. I'd be a terrible neighbour if I didn't. I live at number sixteen. You must be new at number twenty, right?" Evers asks. He pulls the box from my hands.

"Yep, twenty. The doors open. I'll grab another box, there aren't that many left and luckily, this is my last carload." I smile at him and then reach back into the car for another box.

"Let me," the other guy offers. Daniel. He's my height given I'm in my trainers. He's dressed casually, jeans and a tee-shirt. His hair is unruly, like he's been running his hands through it, and it's refused to fall back into place. He's good looking, one of those men who have a boyish charm to them, the type with a cheeky smile and twinkling eyes.

The woman next to him is also casually dressed, wearing yoga pants and a tight colourful tee. Her hair is in a messy bun, strands pulled out to frame her face. It is the kind of hairstyle that looks messy but probably took her an hour to put together. They look like a cute couple, I bet they spend a lot of time laughing and playfighting.

"I'll get this one for you. Can't have the men doing all the work," the woman says, laughing as she reaches for another box from the car. She's got a sing-song quality to her voice.

“Be careful, El, you’ve got a class tomorrow,” Daniel says to her.

“I teach yoga,” she explains to me. “He’s very protective at the idea I could injure myself.”

I don’t reply, just give her a smile and grab the last box from the car, the one that contains my photograph albums. I balance it on my hip and zap the keys to lock the car. I walk in the direction of my new house, following them as they walk up the path towards my front door.

“Feel free to dump everything in the living room, that’s where everything else is,” I call. The boxes are all labelled with the names of the rooms they should ultimately end up in. Fiona had suggested we put them in the correct rooms to make it easier on me later, but I like my process. One messy area to sort out feels more logical, even if she wouldn’t let me sort her moving boxes like that when I’d helped her move into her place a few weeks ago.

“Do you need any help sorting everything out?” Eleanor wonders as she puts the box she was carrying into the pile of some others.

I shake my head. “I couldn’t possibly hijack your evening like that.”

“Well, I hate the idea of my new neighbour struggling. When I moved in, Eleanor and Daniel came around to help me unpack every box, and we ate a tonne of takeout,” Evers explains.

“That’s what friends are for,” Eleanor adds, laughing.

“My friends did offer, but I told them to go have fun instead. I’m nice like that. Friday nights are for drinks, not rearranging cabinets and trying to work out the best layout of the kitchen for the plates and cups,” I joke.

“We don’t mind,” Evers says. “Do we?” he adds, looking at Eleanor and Daniel in turn. I realise Daniel has been quiet since he came into the house, and he’s staring at me with a strange expression on his face.

It's oddly unsettling given he's standing next to his girlfriend. He looks at me like he's never seen a woman before.

"It's fine, I had some help this morning, and everything is organised in the boxes so it's going to be easy to unpack. Thanks for helping with the last boxes. I appreciate it." I smile at them.

"We'll leave you to it, but if you need anything or any help, just shout. We're going to be at Evers for a few hours," Eleanor says, brightly. She stands next to Daniel who continues to stare at me, gaze roaming before he tears it away and smiles at me.

"Have a good evening, Eloise, welcome to the neighbourhood," he says, and then the three of them walk back out of my house, leaving me with my boxes to unpack, and a new home to settle into.

When the door shuts, I open the box that Eleanor had carried in. In huge writing on the box, I've written 'electronics,' so I pull out the speaker system, plugging it into the socket in the wall and then grabbing my i-pod from my handbag. Everybody else may have transitioned to streaming music, but I haven't sorted my internet connection here yet so the i-pod will need to do, as I'm not unpacking without music.

I dock the i-pod and select my favourite playlist; the one filled with upbeat tracks and power ballads. I check my watch as the first track starts to play. Right about now, Fiona and the others will be getting ready at her house, maybe having a glass of wine before they're going to get the bus, joking about the men they'll bump into tonight. I feel a pang, like I'm missing out, but I know I'm doing the best thing, trying to get myself sorted. I'm done with men in town, the ones who think they are onto a sure thing when nothing could be further than the truth. All I need is my music and making my house mine, getting myself settled.

I sing at the top of my lungs as I open my boxes, unpack things and make the space look like my own, feeling nothing but optimism about the future.