
THE FIRST DATE

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 stare at myself in the mirror, looking at the dress I've just put on. It's my fifth attempt at choosing a dress to wear tonight, trying to find the right style. Daniel hasn't said where we're going, and he hadn't left a number with his information packet, so I haven't been able to text to ask him for more information.

I'm sure this dress will be fine. It's what I like to refer to as my all-rounder. It's good for interviews, first dates, funerals, and important appointments because it's so easy to dress up or down. Add a

jacket and it's perfect for work. A cute little cardigan and it's gold first date material. It's a light fabric in a dark blue colour, falling to the middle of my calf, and covering my breasts enough so they're not a distraction or entirely on display, but enough to show they're there.

I slip on a pair of black sandals, grab my cardigan, and then walk down the stairs so I can wait for Daniel to arrive for our date.

At exactly six, there is a soft tap on the front door. Somehow, I knew he would be on time. He doesn't strike me as the type of man who would be late, but also sensible enough not to arrive early in case his date is still getting ready.

I open the door, and it takes me a second to catch my breath. He's smartly dressed, dark trousers and shirt, the kind of style I'd expect of somebody wearing to an evening function at work. Smart with a hint of sexy. The bunch of white lilies in his hand makes my stomach dip. God, I hate lilies. Even the smell of them is enough to get on my nerves. They remind me of funerals, probably because the sight of them reminds me so much of my mother's.

"You look so beautiful." His smile is wide and genuine looking, like he believes I'm the most beautiful woman he's ever seen. With his free hand, he reaches for my hair, tucking some free strands behind my ear. "Is your hair naturally curly?" he asks.

"Yep, I got them from my mother's side of the family, they were all curly haired," I explain.

"Do you ever straighten it? You'd look stunning with straight hair," he muses, and then his expression falters, like he thinks he's made a critical error. "You already look stunning."

"Thanks," I reply, waiting for him to take his hand from my face. I clear my throat. "You look very handsome tonight," I add, and then he drops his hand, raising the other arm instead, thrusting the flowers towards me.

“These are for you. I hope you like them.”

I wonder how best to respond. It’s awkward to admit that I don’t like the flowers, because the gesture itself is lovely, it isn’t his fault I don’t like these types of flowers. I could just ignore it, but in the week, I’ve been wondering how everything could unfold with Daniel, and there’s a part of me excited that this could be something more than just a first date. Not telling him about the lilies could mean he buys more if we have a second date, and I wouldn’t want to start something on a lie. I’m not imagining that we’ll be skipping off into the sunset and living happily ever after, but regardless of how long we connect for, lying about flowers isn’t something I want to sign up to.

“I personally usually go for something with a bit more colour, but let me put these in some water,” I suggest, taking them from his hands. “Come in,” I add, and I listen to him walking down the hallway behind me as I head towards the kitchen.

“You’ve settled in,” he comments, looking around when we get to the kitchen. Everything in here looks perfectly tidy, a contrast to my bedroom which I’ll need to tidy later for the strewn clothes. It doesn’t matter that the bedroom is a mess, it isn’t a room Daniel is going to see any time soon.

“It didn’t take too long, once I got started.” I reach into the cupboard for a vase. It’s only small because the bigger vase I use is already filled with bright, colourful gerbera flowers that my dad gave me as a moving in present. Those, and a fancy coffee maker. I’ve no doubt Dad will have organised something else, he’s generous like that and I’m his only child so he doesn’t like to pay attention when I tell him I’m fine paying for my own things. I’ve long learnt to just accept his gifts and advice, knowing they come from a place of love. It’s been me and Dad for years since Mum died.

“So, where were you moving from?” Daniel asks as I rearrange the flowers.

“I’d been living with my friend, Fiona. We moved in together when we were studying at university, and we stayed after we finished. We both got to the point that we felt we’d outgrown the house, that student life, so I put a deposit on this, and she’s moved in across town,” I explain. I put the vase of flowers into the windowsill.

“How old are you?”

“Twenty-four. Well, I’m actually turning twenty-five next week, on the Friday.”

“Well, maybe if tonight goes well, we can celebrate your birthday together,” he says, that charming smile on his face again.

“I have plans for my birthday, I’m going out with a few friends, but you’d be welcome to join us, depending on how well tonight goes,” I tease.

“Are you ready? Let me see if I can wow you enough for a birthday invite,” he jokes.

I smile and walk with him through the house to the front door, ready for our date and where this might take us. When he reaches for my hand to walk me towards the car, I can’t help but notice the little flutter of butterflies in my stomach, and I cross my fingers that this date goes well, as I like the way he makes me feel.