

First Date

“Julie, I will see you Saturday morning. How does eleven sound?”

Jonathan’s voice was deep and mellow, and I liked it immediately.

“Sounds great. See you there.”

As soon as the call ended, I did a little happy dance. Saturday couldn’t come fast enough.

I usually hate first dates.

The idle chit-chat. The subtle checking each other out when you think the other person isn’t looking. The silent questions hovering between sips and smiles. Do I want to see him again? Does he want to see me?

But Jonathan seemed different.

He was funny in our conversations, laid-back but somehow confident. We met online and, against my sister’s advice, I agreed to meet him in person.

The weather was perfect for a picnic. Not so hot it made your skin sticky, but warm enough that I could wear a crop top and shorts, showing off the hours I had spent at the gym. I packed a box with fruit, cheese, and my homemade sourdough bread. Jonathan volunteered to bring the wine.

We agreed to meet at a rest stop thirty-five minutes from his place and twenty from mine. The shoreline was another thirty-minute drive, which would give us plenty of time to talk and get to know each other.

When I pulled into the parking lot, Jonathan was already there, standing beside his truck. I immediately checked him out and, by the look on his face, he had done the same and liked what he saw.

“Hi. It’s great to finally see you face to face.” He leaned in and gave me a confident hug.

“Same here. I wasn’t expecting you to be so tall.” I tilted my head back, looking up at his six-foot-three frame towering over my five-foot-two.

“Here, let me get that.” He took the box holding our lunch and placed it in the backseat of the extended cab, then opened my door like all men do on the first few dates.

“I’ve got a killer place picked out,” he said as we drove. “A buddy of mine owns some property away from the crowds. I think you’ll love it.”

He sounded excited. I, on the other hand, didn’t mind crowds. I had always enjoyed people-watching more than most dates. Maybe this one would be different.

Jonathan was right.

It was secluded. Four-wheel drive was needed to make it down the narrow lane, followed by a steep descent on foot before we reached a small private cove.

“Wow. This is amazing,” I said, watching the waves roll in and out. “Do we need to worry about high tide? We won’t get flooded out, will we?”

He laughed. “I’ve spent entire days here. The tide’s never covered the beach. That’s the one thing you don’t need to worry about.”

I spread out the blanket he had remembered to bring while he unpacked lunch. Along with the wine and two glasses, he pulled out a pen and a piece of paper.

“What’s this for?” I asked, grinning. “Are you writing me a love letter already?”

“After we finish the wine, I thought you might want to put a note in the bottle,” he said.

“Maybe someone finds it one day. Don’t worry, I’ll help you write it.”

“That sounds like fun.”

It was a great date. Jonathan really had thought of everything.

After lunch, I realized I needed the restroom. Since that was out of the question, I looked for another option.

“I’m going to go around those rocks,” I said. “I’ll be right back.”

“I’ll pack everything up,” he replied. “Take your time.”

The rocks completely blocked his view of me. I had just reached for the zipper on my pants when something caught my eye.

A bottle.

A wine bottle, just like the one Jonathan had brought.

I smiled, a little amused, as I realized I wasn’t the first girl he had brought to the cove.

It seemed Jonathan was a player.

Curious to see what Casanova had the other girls write, I uncorked the bottle and pulled out the rolled-up paper inside.

A big X marked a place on a crudely drawn map. The handwriting was shaky.

My name is Chloe Sanders.

Today I am saying goodbye to my family and friends.

If anyone finds this message, I am buried down a lane five miles off Cliff View Road.

Please take my remains back to my family.

Tell them I love them...

“Ashley, you ready to write your note?”