



CHAPTER THIRTEEN

TAPPING HER FINGER against the counter of her store, Elise was looking down at the notebook she was supposed to use for writing down calculations to make sure she wouldn't be broke for the rest of her life, but somehow she had ended up writing about Schmidt. Maybe it was only fair, after all, they had kissed the previous night and it would potentially take Elise her entire life to get over the intense clash of lips they shared against the kitchen counter in the dark of the night.

Soon after the kiss, they had went to sleep, but not before they had admitted that they did indeed carry feelings for each other — however, since then, they hadn't spoken and frankly, Elise wasn't sure what they were now. The love between them was clear and spoken of now, but Elise didn't know if Schmidt wanted it to be serious or not, nor if she had the courage in her to bring up the subject. So when Elise thought about the relationship she had with Schmidt currently, she decided to settle and be happy with what she had, instead of pushing the limits of their bond, which could lead into it snapping entirely.

The day at Comic Planet had been slow and casual, like every day seemed to be, and whilst Elise enjoyed the freedom, she also understood that it wasn't such a good thing. She needed more people to visit, and therefore, each single ding by the door earned her attention just to smile at the customer and make them feel welcome in the cozy shop, with Metallica playing from the speakers in the corners. When the door opened once again and someone entered, Elise had moved from behind the counter to one of the shelves where she was sorting comics that a couple of little kids had left in the wrong order. Looking up from the Fantastic Four comic she had ended up reading, Elise smiled already, but the expression only brightened when her eyes met Nick's.

"Hi, Nick!", Elise greeted happily and put away the comic book in her hands, before pushing her glasses up and walking over to Nick, who met her in the middle. Leaning behind one of the shelves, Nick greeted her as well, and after giving the space a quick but thorough look, he sighed and gave Elise a faint smile.

"Business not going very well?", Nick asked, lifting his eyebrows and once Elise shrugged, he crossed his arms over his chest and did the same. "Have you advertised enough? We could make some flyers, put them around the city and I can do something at the bar to get attention", Nick suggested, and Elise opened her mouth to say something, but then she understood how truly brilliant his idea was, and she shut her mouth, just nodding in agreement. It sounded good — Comic Planet needed the promo, and it sounded like a good way to do it.

"That sounds great, thank you Nick", Elise beamed and placed her hand on Nick's shoulder in gratitude, the expression on her face alike to the gentle touch. Unsure how to accept the compliment or how to feel about the friendly action between them, Nick forced an awkward smile and shrugged again, but Elise didn't judge. If anything, she understood and related to how he was feeling, but she considered them to be quite close already, after all they did live together and what not.

Suddenly, Nick's face lit up and his eyes started to shine with realization. "That's not what I came for, but now when I think about it, it could be. There's this Halloween party tonight and Jess is working at the Haunted House at the fair so we promised to go, and we thought you'd want to join us. We could do some advertisement there too!", Nick began explaining, and in an instant, Elise grew a liking to the idea. Her store desperately needed it, and any chance that was at her hands, she would take with no hesitation of any kind. Excitement brightened her features up, her eyes shining with happiness as she nodded in enthusiasm and agreed to do what Nick had suggested.

"Sounds amazing."

»

It was already getting late and dark when Elise and Nick arrived at the carnival, accompanied by Amelia whom Nick was sleeping with, however Elise didn't mind the additional person since she agreed to hand out flyers for Comic Planet as well. The atmosphere at the carnival was lovely, even if Nick hadn't bothered to put effort into his Halloween costume, but Elise had done the opposite and dressed up as Agent Peggy Carter, with a surprising amount of resemblance and accuracy in her appearance.

While Elise and Nick walked around to advertise the comic shop, Amelia headed in a different direction, Winston and his girlfriend went into the Haunted House and Schmidt was bothering Cece and her new boyfriend. It seemed everyone had grown relationships right under Elise's eyes yet she hadn't noticed, but then again, she and Schmidt had something going on too and she was quite positive no one knew of it.

That spark between them was possibly the reason why Elise felt a pang of jealousy in her heart when she saw Schmidt trying to intrude Cece's date, and started to doubt how much she truly meant for him and if she had read the signals all wrong. Frankly, she didn't find any other way to solve things than to talk about it to someone, and when she looked around, the only person she could confide in seemed to be Nick.

"So, uh. Is Amelia nice?", Elise began awkwardly as the two of them continued to stroll around the carnival with hands full of flyers they had successfully given to people, who seemed rather interested, much to Elise's delight. Nick shrugged slightly, a somewhat guilty look on his face as he brought his gaze from the people around them, to Elise. The woman gladly locked eyes with him, to think about him, and him only instead of the overwhelming amount of people in the carnival. His presence brought the calming effect she had needed, causing her to smile only for it to fade away at the sight of Nick's frown.

"To be honest with you Ellie, she's not what I expected. I know it sounds bad, but I had imagined something way different and I don't like what I've discovered", Nick admitted with a sigh, and looked down awkwardly. A part of Elise wanted to say something comforting, considering the man looked like a kicked puppy, but once the realization of how rude it was settled in, she grew mixed feelings and ended up just staring and weighing her options. She had been through the same, but instead of Nick's position, she had stood where Amelia did — not being good enough, not being the dream and for that, she could have smacked Nick but obviously she didn't, and therefore, she just stood there, unsure what to say or do.

Luckily, Nick realized that he had put her in a spot of discomfort and awkwardness, and tried to fix the atmosphere with a cough. "Anyway, how's things between you and Schmidt?", Nick then continued, breaking into a grin and nudged Elise slightly whilst the woman turned red from the cheeks, from which Nick could gather information and run into assumptions. "Oh, something has happened! Talk to me, Ellie", Nick nudged her again before they started to walk again, handing people the ads for the store, and Elise sighed heavily, but perhaps she had only achieved the goal she aimed for. She needed someone to talk to, but she was too shy to mention Schmidt herself and had sneakily directed Nick there, and it seemed her plan had been a success.

"I don't know. I mean— We maybe, uh, we might have kissed but... I don't know what happens next", Elise confessed, and Nick's immediate reaction was a loudly shouted "What?!", which made a lot of heads turn but she didn't blame him for responding that way. To be honest, it was still quite shocking for her, and she hadn't entirely coped with the fact that it had indeed happened, and she wasn't just a daydream but something real and she had felt Schmidt's lips on hers. Blushing under Nick's stare, Elise shrugged and looked over to Schmidt, who was still talking to Cece and the guy she was apparently currently dating.

"Yeah, once we got back from Phoenix, we kissed in the kitchen", Elise smiled, but it soon turned into a frown. "But he seems pretty close with Cece, don't you think? And Nick, I am no competition for her, I'm trash in comparison", she laughed dryly, by no means amused, but to hide the sadness within her she forced herself to chuckle while her gaze dropped from Schmidt to the ground, to her feet which had stopped moving once again. Nick stopped in front of her, and shook his head with disappointment, most of it aimed at Schmidt, who sometimes appeared to struggle with seeing what was good for him, and how it was often right in front of him.

"No, Elise, don't worry. He used to have a crush on her once, and a part of him still hasn't realized that it's over. But he doesn't love her, not like he loves you, anyway. I may not be very lucky in love myself, but I'm not blind, and I think it's obvious you two are in love with each other. I think you should just tell him how you feel, and that way he'd realize he does love you and he wants to be with you, because I know he does. He doesn't show it, but I'm willing to bet he's kind of scared too", Nick explained, and placed a hand on Elise's shoulder, earning a smile from her as she looked up and locked eyes with him again.

Before she had time to reply, Nick had already continued with a stern look on his face, and his grip on her shoulder tightened just a bit. "And stop comparing yourself to others, because damn it Ellie, you're great just the way you are. Cece might be a model, but you're a goddamn rock star and you own a comic book shop. And while you go talk to Schmidt, I'm gonna advertise the hell out of it and give each and every one of these flyers out and make sure you'll have a busy day at work tomorrow, okay? You're awesome, remember that", Nick ranted with a loud tone, making people stare at him with judging looks but due to the boosted light gave her self-esteem, Elise didn't really mind. She just laughed lightly, and nodded to promise to keep that in mind and feel proud and happy as herself.

After taking a deep inhale, Elise left Nick, but he wasn't alone for very long when Jess arrived in her zombie costume. Elise would have loved to stay and promise to stop by the Haunted House at some point, but her steps were confident and filled with determination and she couldn't stop, just walked over to Schmidt and smiled at the small group she soon found herself in. Cece's expression lit up at her arrival, and she pulled Elise into a quick hug, which caught her off-guard but instead of letting it bother her, she continued to smile.

"Hi...", Elise greeted but trailed off when she saw how Schmidt and Cece's costumes matched, a hint of insecurity flooding into her heart and she forgot all about the confidence Nick had brought to the surface, letting it slowly sink beneath where it was harder to find and feel. But in her presence, Schmidt seemed to no longer care about Cece's boyfriend, who introduced himself as Robby, and brought the smile back to Elise's face by gently taking her hand and holding it.

"Hey, Ellie", Schmidt smiled fondly, and Elise let out an adoring sigh, almost dropping the flyers in her other hand as their fingers interlocked. Cece noticed this, and nodded approvingly at the woman, who had apparently taken her advice and confessed her feelings to Schmidt.

Yes, perhaps some things were still unclear and unsolved between Schmidt and Elise, but as they stood there, holding hands, she realized that things weren't bad in any way, and decided to just settle and be satisfied with what she had — a great amount of affection and joy, and that was enough for now.