



CHAPTER SIXTEEN

AFTER THANKSGIVING WITH Jess's parents and Big Schmidt, Elise was drained, mostly mentally. She needed her alone time, her peace and quiet, but living with so many people and keeping up a shop didn't exactly bring her the break she needed once in a while — but once Thanksgiving was over, and everyone went back to work, Elise happened to have a day-off due to Comic Planet being closed for the day, and she was going to enjoy the freedom she had to herself as well as only possible. Yes, she was a fan of peace and spending the day under several blankets with her laptop by her side, but there was that flipside of her, which enjoyed rock music profoundly.

And in Elise's opinion, there was no better way to kick off the morning she got to spend by herself than making some breakfast while dancing and lip syncing to her favorite rock songs, using her hairbrush as a microphone, and that was exactly what she did. At 10 AM, she was fully awake and with her fluffy socks sliding her across the floor, she brought her laptop to the kitchen counter and started to blast Eye of the Tiger while the water for her tea boiled in the electric kettle. It was a routine she was beyond familiar with, just like the lyrics were, and she pretended to be a professional singer while dancing to the beat and waiting for her toast to pop up.

By the second verse, Elise had her tea in a Moomin mug she had bought recently to celebrate the money she was earning with her store, and her toast ready and half-eaten, too. She would have never had the courage to put on such a show if someone was home, but since she had the place all to herself, she made sure to dance on the couches and slide across the floor until she tripped, only to get up and pick up the fun where it left off. Once the tea was no longer hot, Elise could take a long sip whilst swaying her shoulders along the music, which changed from the Survivor song to the well-known Queens of the Stone Age hit.

Elise was so happy, so confident in her peace, but much to her shock, that peace was disturbed and the image of being alone in the place came shattering down as the door of Schmidt's bedroom opened. The worst part, she didn't even notice the man appearing at the doorway, from where he followed the woman's swaying from side to side, hair moving wildly in the air as she performed for no one but herself — or so she thought. She was standing on the couch, a wide smile on her lips until she turned around and saw Schmidt grinning at her, which startled her so terribly she lost her balance and with a shriek, poor Elise collapsed from the couch and fell onto the floor with a thud.

"Goodness— Elise, are you okay?", Schmidt panicked and rushed to the woman, who rose from the floor with a groan and held her head in pain. Schmidt instantly, with no hesitation at all, pulled Elise to her arms and snapped his fingers in front of her eyes to earn her attention before proceeding to test her well-being, only to come to the conclusion that she was more than fine, though utterly mortified for being caught dancing and singing like that. And of all people, it had to be Schmidt who discovered her at her most embarrassing moment. She was usually shy and innocent and oh, so careful, but whenever she was alone and listened to music, it was quite different.

"I'm okay. My dignity, however...", Elise muttered, and looked up into Schmidt's eyes, which caught her off-guard and caused her to shiver as their gazes met. She blushed faintly whilst looking into Schmidt's beautifully green eyes and understood that she was still on his arms, like a damsel in distress and her arms had ended up around his neck. Schmidt broke into a smile, and helped the woman to her feet before offering her the tea mug she had completely forgotten, along with her own name during the intense eye contact she could never get enough of.

"Ah, c'mon, Ellie. That was adorable. Next time, make sure to invite me to this dance party with you", Schmidt winked, making Elise blush heavily and in order to hide her face, she took a big gulp of the warm tea and pretended like she wasn't an awkward mess. Which she, with no shadow of a doubt, was.

Elise sighed and after walking over to the counter where she lowered the mug and removed some of the volume of the music, she led an eyebrow at Schmidt. "Shouldn't you be at work?", Elise asked once she realized that she had indeed believed that she was home alone, only to be proven wrong in the most embarrassing possible way she could think of. Schmidt shook his head and walked to the counter as well, where they ended up quite near each other again which was something they did almost out of habit by now, yet it stole Elise's breath each time. His presence hadn't lost its effect on her, the magic still remained and each second she got to spend with him she considered her favorite.

"Not today. And apparently, you have a day-off too. Which is wonderful, because, uh, I actually had something I wanted to ask you", Schmidt chuckled nervously, and fiddled with the hem of his blouse whilst glancing down, only to then look up at Elise in a way that weakened the woman instantly. Somehow, she managed to not swoon however, partly because she was more than intrigued, but also nervous to find out what Schmidt had in mind. Concluding from his suddenly nervous behavior, it wasn't a light matter to discuss and that caused Elise's stomach to do flips and her heartbeat to increase until it felt like there was a race horse stuck in her chest.

Elise nodded to confirm she was willing to listen, and as Schmidt exhaled heavily, she did the same and prayed that it wouldn't be something unpleasant or terrible, like asking if she could move out, or something. Because even if she did have more money now, she hadn't made a proper plan regarding the rest of the year or the beginning of the next one for that matter, and she hated doing anything without planning ahead.

"I think... Since we have, well, we have kissed a couple of times now and we obviously seem to like each other... I was thinking, now that neither of us are at work, we could go on a date tonight?", Schmidt suggested then, and it came so out of the blue, Elise almost choked on the remains of her tea. Still, despite being surprised for sure, the idea didn't sound so bad, and therefore once she had caught her breath and collected the shreds of her dignity, she nodded her head and let the genuinely overjoyed smile take over her light pink lips.

"Schmidt", Elise breathed out with admiration shining brightly in her eyes, "I would love to."

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It wasn't until the evening when Elise realized that saying yes wasn't such a simple thing, after all. Surely she did want to go on a date with Schmidt, and backing out was the last of her desires but as she stood in front of her side of the closet in Jess' room and thought about the pressure and anxiety the upcoming event caused for her, she couldn't help but acknowledge the slight pang of regret knocking at her heart. Truthfully speaking, Elise had thought about what it would be like to go on an official date with Schmidt, but she had never expected the day to actually arrive, yet the moment was nearing with each passing minute and she wasn't any closer to being ready.

If Jess had been there, she would have told Elise that she was in a state of shock which she needed to shake off, and take a grip on the situation but the woman was out herself. Winston had been gone for the entire day, and Nick was at the bar naturally, leaving Elise alone with Schmidt and therefore, in the lack of a friend to lean on, she was falling into panic. However, then she remembered one more person she could confide in, and as soon as her feet obeyed and she found the strength to move from the closet to her phone, she picked the device up and dialed Cece.

Usually, Elise would have been hesitant about calling someone, especially when she didn't know Cece very well yet, but the situation called drastic measures and she had assured Elise that she could give her a call whenever. And whenever seemed to be now. Not only did Elise need help with her outfit, but convincing that going on the date was the right thing to do and worth the initial discomfort with the thought, and she believed that Cece was able to do both. Therefore, she phoned the woman and in a surprisingly short amount of time, the model had already found her way to the door and sneaked into Jess' room.

"Oh my god, you're going on a date with Schmidt!", was Cece's first words to Elise as she quietly shut the door and broke into a wide smile. "This is amazing. I'm more than happy to help, you know. I think you two are perfect for each other", she continued as she wandered to the closet, and started to dig through Elise's clothes — with her permission to do so, of course.

"I mean— Yeah, I guess", Elise shivered, visibly shaking and unable to relax and calm down. She and Schmidt had went out together previously, but they either had other people with them, or were in a pretentious relationship and that did not count. Now, they were going on an actual date, where it was just the two of them talking and smiling and enjoying each other's company but frankly, Elise was uncertain if she would be able to enjoy at all. Since Thomas and this certainly did, but she hadn't been on a date since Thomas and this wasn't some random guy, it was Schmidt.

Cece was able to tell, from Elise's shaky voice only, that she was nervous as hell, but didn't wonder or judge. "Ellie, it's okay to be nervous. But this is what you want, right? So come on, let's find you a pretty dress and make sure Schmidt will be amazed by you — which he always is, though. Besides, I'm sure he's freaking out even more than you, honey. Don't worry", Cece assured, and Elise had to admit, she had the ability to choose the right words. With a simple explanation and assurance, Cece managed to calm Elise down and the slightly shorter woman exhaled and nodded to confirm that she was more or less fine. Obviously, she was still freaking out, but as soon as she realized that Schmidt was most likely dealing with the same, she didn't feel so pathetic and hopeless.

After advising Elise to channel her inner star and act like one of those women rock songs were made of, Cece walked back to the closet and in only a couple of seconds, she had found the dress she desperately needed Elise to try on. It was one of her own instead of Jess', but considering Elise rarely went anywhere, she didn't have many chances to wear her prettiest dresses and therefore it had barely been used in the past. But a first date with Schmidt was certainly an occasion worth getting fancy for, especially when it was just his style to take her somewhere glorious and expensive and completely different from what she was used to.

Elise wasn't very comfortable with wearing tight clothes that showed off her body better than she wished them to, causing the doubtful look on her face after pulling on the gorgeous red dress that hugged her body and flattered each inch of it. She was unable to see how beautiful she looked in that dress, but as soon as Cece had blown with excitement and gushed over her flawless appearance, Elise smiled a bit and grew to accept the fact that damn right, she was looking good. She rarely had moments of confidence, but after Cece had painted her lips red and helped her curl her hair a bit, she felt like a killer queen rather than a pretty princess.

"Ellie, Schmidt's jaw is going to be on the floor. Which one of us is the model again, huh?", Cece winked and made Elise blush, but she appreciated the support. She was one of those people, who needed the occasional self-esteem boost and assuring that she was beautiful and people still cared. And Cece had done that for now, and it gave Elise a feeling she wasn't familiar with, but the smirk on her face gave it all away, revealing how truly happy and badass she felt in that dress and high heels.

"Thank you, Cece. If you hadn't showed up, I'd probably be wearing my overalls right now", Elise giggled quietly, and the other woman did the same. Nudging each other lightly, they proceeded to sit on the bed and talk about other matters for the next fifteen minutes, since Elise was, once again, early. Though, she didn't mind spending the time with Cece, as the two women had grown surprisingly close in the short time they had known each other for and Elise hadn't been wrong — she was a good friend and a great person, just like she had suspected since the beginning, despite being somewhat intimidated by her unconditional beauty.

The time passed quickly, and soon enough Elise was standing in the foyer and waiting for Schmidt, who hadn't arrived yet. Cece left as well, to stay away from the date and now, it was only Elise shaking by the front door and trying to channel her inner badass like Cece encouraged her to do, although she wasn't even sure if she had a badass side, but perhaps she'd be fine. After all, it was Schmidt she was going out with — though, that was possibly why it was so scary, anyway. Eventually, the door of Schmidt's bedroom opened and he rushed out whilst tucking his tie underneath his jacket, eyes stuck on the fabric as he muttered an apology.

"My apologies, I didn't want to be late. But here I am now and—", Schmidt explained with an apologetic tone, but as soon as he looked up and his gaze landed on Elise, he became devoid of words. It was a miracle his eyes didn't turn into hearts, because the look in the green pair was definitely full of adoration and love, which caused Elise to blush. Schmidt opened his mouth, only to stutter, until a lowly exhaled, "Wow", slipped from between his soles. The woman never ceased to surprise him — just when he had thought he had seen everything, she was hiding something more and amazed him all over again. So far, she had been beautiful for now, but there was one more something cute and adorable about her. Sure, she was downright classy and stunning and breathtaking.

"I— Oh, wow, Elise, you look... Y—you look incredible", Schmidt finally managed to let out, and Elise smiled shyly while glancing down at her hands and shrugging carelessly. She could not believe the reaction she got from him, though it reminded her of the time she pretended to be her girlfriend, but this was something real and genuine and it felt so much better than faking it. It felt amazing to know that those smiles and compliments, they came straight from the heart and it wasn't just for a show.

Elise bit on her bottom lip and looked up into Schmidt's eyes with blush still painted over her cheeks. "Thank you, Schmidt. You too", she returned the compliment whilst her eyes adored the man in front of her, and she wasn't kidding, he looked gorgeous with the suit and the smile on his face. Slowly, Schmidt regained his confidence while Elise lost all of hers, but that didn't matter, she felt comfortable nonetheless as the man approached her and linked their arms.

"Shall we go?", Schmidt grinned, and more than happily, Elise nodded in agreement. And with that, they stepped out of the front door and began their very first date.