



CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO

DESPITE ELISE'S STRONG fear of water due to the inability to swim, she had always liked boats, mostly because when she was younger, her father often took her fishing all over the country. But she also really liked cruises, even if there was some kind of a fear living in her heart and growing with time, and although she couldn't swim and hated water, she was rather happy when Nick and Jess came into the living room on one lovely morning, informing their friends that they would have to join them on a cruise.

Elise had learned that Jess and Nick were dating, but apparently, they had now broken up and the cruise they had reserved couldn't be taken back and therefore, they had to take part in the experience. However, they could take their friends with them, and that was exactly what Jess and Nick were planning on doing in order to avoid the romantic, intimate moments alone — along with a relationship package Schmidt offered to take care of with Elise. Frankly, Elise was nervous about taking up all the romantic couple activities with Schmidt, even if he was her boyfriend, but she agreed nonetheless and tried to convince herself that it was going to be fun.

"I love this", Elise admitted as she stood by the side of the ship with Jess and Schmidt by her sides, looking over to the sea and the strong waves. Everyone else seemed to agree, except for Coach, who turned out to be scared of water as well and therefore, ended up clutching onto the railing in utter panic and praying for a quick death. In a way, it saddened Elise, but she was also somewhat glad since for once, she wasn't the one with a fear she struggled to get over. However, she did promise to help Coach if necessary, because she knew the feeling of raging fear inside her.

"I love you", Schmidt replied with a smile on his face, taking Elise's hand and placing a soft kiss on the back of it. Elise thought she was going to swoon, so to avoid such fate, she left Schmidt's side to go to Coach and attempt to calm him down — though not before she had returned the three special words, and given Schmidt a careful, shy kiss on the lips.

Whilst Elise glanced at the waves as she knelt beside Coach and smiled fondly at him, Jessica ended up changing company from Schmidt to Cece. As the two women conversated, Nick was searching for the bar and Winston approached Schmidt, because even if Winston knew how to stay out of other people's business, he didn't carry enough control to stop himself from questioning his friend about something he had seen. Because perhaps Schmidt thought he was being sneaky, but Winston had definitely noticed him fiddling with a small box in his pocket, and there was no way in hell Winston was going to let that slide.

"Wanna tell me what you're up to?", Winston asked quietly, looking around as if to not bring any attention to them, but the way the two men were avoiding eye contact with each other and trying to have a conversation on the side, didn't work. If anything, it only made them look suspicious, but at least none of their friends approached them about it and they could be left in peace. With a thick gulp, Schmidt shrugged and looked around, pretending like he didn't know what Winston was talking about, but it was foolish of him to lie because they were both aware he had something in mind.

"Fine!", Schmidt spat, cracking under the pressure but the stern look on his features soon faded into a proud grin. "Well, Winston, you see... I've been thinking lately, and I realized that I am, in fact, completely in love with Ellie. I think I have been ever since I first saw her, really. And let's not lie to ourselves — I am no longer the young fella I once used to be, and therefore I consider myself ready and mature enough for the next big step, right?", he began explaining, finally looking over to Winston, who was growing mixed feelings, because in one way, he was totally supporting the thought of Schmelise, but on the other hand, he wasn't sure if he was ready for so many big changes.

"So, a few Elise's dad visited and I asked for his blessing, which he granted, I went downtown and, well, I bought Elise this ring", Schmidt breathed out in excitement, taking out the small velvet box he had been twirling around his pocket and smacking the breath out of Winston by opening the box and revealing a glimmering, gorgeous diamond ring. Eyes widening, Winston took a step back and his jaw downright dropped as he engaged in a staring competition with the classy ring that definitely earned all of his attention.

"Holy donut hole, dude!", was all Winston was able to stutter out, completely touched by the sight he was certain Schmidt had wasted most of his savings on. He was known to be quite wealthy, and it seemed he had no problem with spending that money on Elise, who according to Schmidt himself, deserved only the best and well — it wasn't like Winston could argue with that.

Schmidt inhaled deeply as he shut the box and hid it again to avoid anyone else seeing it, including Elise. "Yes, I'm planning on proposing to Elise one day. Might be tonight, maybe in a few weeks. Now, Winston, this is supposed to be a secret, so whatever you do, swear to me, whatever you do don't tell Nick. Or so help me God, I will tear you apart", Schmidt smiled, but ended up threatening Winston, who shivered but nodded to make a promise to his friend. After all, they both knew how much Nick sucked at keeping secrets and Schmidt couldn't take any risks — everything needed to be perfect.

And if so, then perhaps one day, that gorgeous, kind, amazing woman he had fallen in love with, would be his wife.

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"You know, I'm kind of disappointed we didn't get the lovers' experience", Elise giggled at Schmidt whilst the two were sunbathing on the deck and enjoying the calmness they could reach each other. Schmidt chuckled but agreed — indeed, apparently the romantic couples' activities were reserved for Nick and Jess and no one else could take their place, which was a defeat in every possible way. However, at least now, Schmidt and Elise could relax and do whatever they wanted to.

"As long as I get to be with you, it's enough of an experience for me", Schmidt smiled fondly at his girlfriend, but ruined the moment with something additional. "Especially when you're in that bikini!", he added with a teasing grin on his lips, and that earned a shove on the arm whilst Elise laughed and attempted to hide the obvious blush creeping up to her cheeks. But even then, she managed to be the most beautiful thing Schmidt had ever seen, just beyond adorable with the hint of pink covering her fair skin.

Sighing, Elise sank lower in her seat and looked down at her body, a slight concern forcing its way into her heart and mind, poisoning her thoughts with insecurity. "Well, if it wasn't for you, I wouldn't be anywhere near this thing", Elise admitted, although it wasn't completely traditional — yes, she was wearing a bikini top but she had insisted on having a bit of Elise Stevens in the outfit, and had put on her Marvel swimming trunks. Which she had found from the men's side, that much she was willing to confess, but she could still pull them off. In fact, in Schmidt's opinion, she looked surprisingly hot in them.

"You look... incredible, Elise. But keep in mind, whatever you wear, and no matter how much skin you're showing, you're always gorgeous. There's not a single thing you should worry about, baby. You look flawless, okay?", Schmidt assured and placed his hand on top of hers, silently promising to always be there to make her see how truly beautiful she was. He hated to know that Elise felt insecure at times, when in his opinion, there was nothing to dislike or worry about, she was perfect all around, from inside to outside. Yet she didn't think so, and that deeply frustrated but also saddened Schmidt.

Schmidt wasn't the only one deeply in love, however. As soon as the man's gaze left Elise to look around the surroundings on the slowly drifting cruise, Elise fell into deep thoughts about how undeniable lucky she was to have him. When necessary, he boosted her self-esteem, and since the beginning he had been absolutely dreamy and still continued to show her endless affection and love. And it made Elise truly happy, because she had never experienced such love or devotion, not towards anyone, not from anyone. Truthfully, she was believed she was right to assume it was true love, not just mind love, but the kind of love that lasted until the very end. The kind of love that led into marriage and family. Constant happiness and unconditional love.

And of course, there was the fact that he looked fine as hell, especially when he had left his shirt in their room.

"What are you thinking about?", Schmidt nudged Elise when he turned to face her again and caught her staring, but he couldn't exactly blame her for doing so. Shrugging slightly, Elise broke into a smile which Schmidt quickly mirrored, and gently, the woman took his hand and interlocked their fingers whilst sighing happily and leaning closer to him.

"How lucky I am to have you. How much I love you", Elise blushed and bit on her bottom lip while glancing down to avoid eye contact, since it always made her feel even more awkward and shy. But Schmidt didn't mind, and he most definitely wasn't going to pressure or push her into anything she was uncomfortable with, and therefore just smiled as the woman looked down at their entwined fingers. Nevertheless, he felt the same way, equal luck and love towards Elise, who was quite positively the woman of his dreams, the one he wished to spend the rest of his days with.

And he could almost feel the ring burning his skin through the shorts he had changed into, with utmost desire to just pull it out and propose to her right there and then. But he fought the temptation, and promised not only himself, but Elise — silently, of course — to make it one hell of a proposal, something legendary and impossible to forget, and therefore instead of getting down on one knee right away, he just chuckled fondly and caressed Elise's hand.

"Yeah", Schmidt sighed happily, "Me too."

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The night went quite quickly, especially when it turned out the time Elise and Schmidt held in their hands was limited, due to the need to keep Jess and Nick an intervention regarding their relationship, whether it was merely friendly or possibly romantic. They didn't mind helping their friends though, and so, they ended up in the small room they all unfortunately had to share. The door was locked, and although Elise wasn't sure if it was her preferred method, she supported her roommates as they insisted on getting rid of the weird, awkward atmosphere and helping Nick and Jess become friends again. Things needed to be talked through, and with that, Elise agreed greatly.

The plan didn't exactly work as well as it was supposed to, though. Once everything was settled and it seemed the tension was put behind them, and Coach had opened up about his immense fear of boats, the friends were ready to leave the room but the attempt was shot down instantly when the door refused to open. Clearing her throat, Elise turned to face the others as she tried to yank it open, but it seemed it wouldn't open and they were stuck.

"Is this a part of the plan?"

Once Cece had shaken her head, Elise's eyes widened and her chest began to tighten as the shock spread out in her and she realized they were indeed stuck, locked and forced to stay in the small room until someone would come to their rescue. Unable to stay positive, Elise felt herself sink and succumb underneath the horror that was controlling her thoughts and causing her to shut down entirely, shrinking away from the door and stumbling towards the beds — because even if Elise wasn't afraid of water, or boats like Coach, Elise was definitely, completely afraid of small spaces and being locked in one made her feel truly at discomfort.

"Oh, don't worry, I'll take care of you!", Schmidt exclaimed and wrapped his arms tightly around Elise, closing her into a hug that somehow wasn't as succumbing, but rather calming and along with the gentle hold, his familiar scent lulled her into a more peaceful state of mind, though she was still wary. Elise leaned closer to Schmidt and rested her head on his chest, but she was unable to close her eyes, and the sight of her shaking and falling apart right there caused their friends to grow worried too.

"I'm sure someone will let us out eventually!", Jess tried to comfort Elise and the others, but boy, was she wrong.

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Five days. It took five days for someone to actually open the door and free the friends from the place they had grown to consider the worst of nightmares. They were a mess, every single one of them shaken by the terrible experience, but at least they made it out. Elise was somewhere between getting over her fear of small spaces or breaking apart due to being forced to face the horror, but still, she tried to focus on the positive and that was being somewhat okay. And for what it's worth, at least they were on the news.

"I am so glad we framed this. What a proud moment!", Cece pointed out, as they were all in the 4D, staring at a photo cut from the paper, now hanging on the wall. Elise giggled lightly and nudged the woman, who flashed a fond smile at her friend and then proceeded to look at the picture again while Coach began explaining how a part of him died on the boat, and how he'd never be the same again.

Frankly, it wasn't a very flattering picture on anyone's behalf, but Elise agreed with Jess who noted how nice it was to have a family portrait. Elise had never been a social person, and she still wasn't, but she had great friends and a total of two group pictures with them, which just made her beyond happy. She had to admit, her hair was a mess and there was a visible hint of pain in her eyes due to the excessive fear of confined spaces, but there was no else she would have preferred looking like a nightmare with. She was happy, thanks to these people, and the silent gratitude in her caused her to take Schmidt's hand gently and hold it, earning smiles from both.

"Dude, what's that in Schmidt's pants?", Nick yelled out then, pointing his finger at the slight bump around Schmidt's pocket, making Elise blush and Schmidt scoff at the unnecessary comment.

"I don't even want to know! Why do you want to know?", Winston shouted back at Nick, and the two soon enough wandered off as the argument escalated, and Cece and Jess followed behind, leaving only Elise and Schmidt by the picture. Still holding hands, the lovers leaned on each other and sighed happily, deciding to just enjoy the peace that fell on them quickly and to not comment on the discovery Nick had made.

Little did Elise know, it wasn't anything dirty, however. It was a little box, with a beautiful engagement ring in it, and Schmidt clearly hoped that one day, it would be shining on Elise's finger.

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OHMYGOD I'M SO EXCITED

schmelise w!!!

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