



## CHAPTER EIGHT

**ELISE WOKE UP** alone on the couch, but as soon as her eyes opened, she vividly remembered falling asleep next to Schmidt. He had offered her a comforting hug, which eventually lulled her into a nice slumber, and the thought of it caused her to smile widely. Now that she was temporarily living in 4D, and she saw more of Schmidt, she wasn't sure for how long she could keep her feelings at bay. But, as long as nothing drastic would happen, Elise believed that she would be able to control herself, even if she spent the first five minutes of her morning grinning underneath the duvet.

"Hey El, want some le over pizza and tea?", Winston asked from the kitchen once the woman got up from the couch, and covered her gray top with a red sweater she pulled from the suitcase resting against the coffee table. Elise nodded as she got dressed, and thanked Winston in advance, before heading towards the bathroom and running her fairly short hair along the way. Before she could reach the door of the bathroom, Jess stopped her and Elise immediately smiled at the woman, happy to see her, and feeling at home already.

"Ellie! I set a mattress in my room so you don't have to sleep on the couch anymore. Or change your clothes in front of everyone", Jess stated, and Elise thanked her as well, for the hospitality and kindness. Once they parted ways, Jess went to have breakfast and Elise headed into the bathroom, and the latter began humming along a rock song she had introduced Schmidt to, which caused her mind to wander to the man himself. She hadn't seen him yet, but expected to find him at breakfast if not bump into him in the hallway.

Elise opened the door of the bathroom, and stepped in only to be yelled at for intruding someone's personal space, and in horror, her eyes widened at the sight of Schmidt, standing in the center of the room with nothing but — well, nothing on. Elise froze entirely, and tried to look Schmidt in the eyes, while the man continued to scream like a teenage girl in the school's locker room and tried to desperately cover his bare body with both hands. Elise parted her lips to let out a sincere apology, but nothing came out except a small whimper as she looked at Schmidt, unable to not glance at the impressive muscles and the flawless skin.

"Elise!", Schmidt shrieked, and made Elise realize what had to be done, and therefore she lifted her hands in the air in defense, and repeated "I'm sorry until it sounded weird to her, and backed out of the room and into the hallway. Shutting the door of the bathroom, Elise took in a deep breath and rested against the wall, unsure how to feel about what she had witnessed. In a way, the sight was amusing, but then again, she had just seen the man of his dreams naked and that was something that caused Elise to feel dizzy.

Attempting to not overthink it, Elise exhaled heavily, and pushed herself off of the wall to walk into the kitchen, where Winston had made her tea and set out a slice of cold pizza. All three — Nick, Jess and Winston looked at Elise questioningly, but instead of giving any answers, the woman just smiled in response and when no one asked, they silently decided to ignore the fact that Schmidt had screamed like a girl and Elise was the only one who knew why. To stop any words from coming out of her mouth, Elise studied her face with the tuna pizza, avoiding conversation and causing a very awkward silence to rule the room, until Schmidt finally strided out of the bathroom with a red towel hanging low around his waist.

"Schmidt, I am so sorry—", Elise began a drawing a careful sip of her tea, and shot the man a pleading look whilst lowering the mug onto the counter. The rest of their roommates followed the situation intently, intrigued by the evident tension between the two and waiting for something exciting to happen. However, instead of igniting an argument, Schmidt just waved his hand in the air and sighed with the desire to move past the embarrassing situation they had faced merely moments earlier.

"It's fine, Elise. I'm willing to forget that you walked in on me undressed, if...". Schmidt began, and once he got the words spoken, Nick erupted into loud groans at the mention of naked Schmidt, something they had all witnessed at some point, and apparently it had been Elise's turn. "If you agree to go with me to a party at the office tonight", Schmidt finished, and scared away everyone but Elise to avoid being trapped into something they didn't want to do, leaving only Schmidt and Elise in the kitchen. Elise swallowed thickly at the suggestion, as she wasn't one for parties or social situations of any kind — yet she had ended up in one of the most embarrassing ones — but how was she supposed to say no to the charmingly smiling man, who was also wearing nothing but a towel?

"Look, I understand you're not the kind of girl who parties and socializes very much, but I could really use some company, babe", Schmidt pleaded, only to be interrupted by Nick, who demanded some money in the jar for calling Elise babe and also insisted on Schmidt never doing it again. As soon as Schmidt had found his jacket and pulled out some money to stuff into the Douchebag Jar, he walked back to Elise with a begging look. "My co-worker thinks I'm unable to keep a woman by my side, so I need a girlfriend. Besides, it'll give us the chance to get to know each other better!", Schmidt reasoned, and made Elise nearly spit out her tea at the mention of a girlfriend.

Elise's eyes widened in shock, and she looked at Schmidt with utmost disbelief all over her face. "You need me to pretend I'm your girlfriend?", she questioned Schmidt's intentions, unsure if she could handle such pressure and intimacy with him, but when he nodded so damn enthusiastically and looked at her as if she was his only hope, Elise couldn't possibly refuse. Shrugging, she let out a shaky breath, but ended up nodding, which earned groans and disappointed reactions from the three sitting on the couch. They had believed Elise would be able to resist Schmidt and his charm, but they just didn't know that she had been into him ever since they first met. And now, even if it wasn't genuine, she had a chance at being his girlfriend, and there was no way in hell she was going to pass that kind of an opportunity.

Cheering, Schmidt pulled Elise into a quick hug, and she felt the air in her leave at the feeling of his warm, bare skin and the strong arms, but before she had time to squirm away, he had already leapt and hid in his room. Eyes still wide, and lips slightly parted, Elise stared at Winston, who stared right back at her whilst slowly munching on his pizza. Silence fell in the room once again, as no one really knew what to say, until Winston let out a deep sigh.

"Girl, you have no idea what you've gotten yourself into."

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Elise and Jess were in the latter's room, digging through her closet in order to find a pretty dress for Elise to wear to the party she was going to attend with Schmidt. To be honest, she struggled with so many mixed feelings, she wasn't quite sure if the butterflies in her stomach were nervous or excited. At least she wasn't going alone, nor with a stranger, but the idea of being Schmidt's girlfriend was wonderfully terrifying, though at the same time like a dream come true. Of course, she didn't admit that to anyone but herself — not even to Jess, who still had a feeling there was something between the two, and was sitting on the edge of her bed with an observing look in her eyes, as if she was trying to read Elise.

"Do you want to do this, Elise?", Jess blurted out suddenly, and the woman twirled around whilst holding up a polka dot dress with a bow on the waist, and she smiled slightly at Jess. Jess herself didn't seem too amused though, if anything she seemed to doubt Elise and her true feelings towards Schmidt, even if so far she had pluckily claimed to be his friend, but despite having bad eyesight, Jess wasn't blind. Much like Nick, she had seen the way Schmidt and Elise looked at each other, and had a hunch Elise liked him just a bit more than she admitted, and she was right to believe in that.

"Uh, sure, yeah", Elise smiled, and then turned back to the closet, handling the situation surprisingly well. She wasn't very calm or cool when it came to crushes, and she certainly had developed a massive one on Schmidt, but somehow she managed to act normal when Jess asked about it. It was unusual, and surprised even herself, but even if a part of her wanted to scream into the closet, she managed to smile and assure that she was okay with pretending to be Schmidt's girlfriend.

"No, I mean, do you really want to do this? Elise, do you like Schmidt?", Jess continued, and for a second, Elise froze. She wasn't sure if she should confess her feelings and have someone to talk to about it, or if she should continue to hide the love that coursed deep and burned bright and strong, so she began weighing the pros and cons. Swallowing thickly, Elise turned to face Jess, who had stood up from the bed and taken a dress from the closet to suggest it to Elise, and admittedly, it looked lovely. Eventually, Elise realized that having feelings for one of the people she now lived with was a risky thing, and she could ruin everything that was going so well for her, so she put on a brave smile again, and shrugged.

"I like Schmidt as much as a friend should. Besides, it's not like I have something better to do, I closed the store a few hours earlier today, so... Might as well help him out, right?", Elise shrugged, and felt the pressure within her build and pile up in ways that she wasn't able to handle, but luckily, Jess dropped the subject after nodding one last time. Sighing in relief, Elise took the dress that Jess was offering, and shyly tried to make a comment regarding the fabric of it to divert the conversation away from Schmidt. Elise wasn't a very good liar, although she had succeeded well so far, but as ever a sense of guilt and regret always kicked in.

Jess smiled as Elise put on the dress, and clapped her hands together to show her support. Elise looked absolutely adorable in the navy blue dress, adorned with rose print and a black collar, like it was made just for her, always meant for this purpose. Once she was dressed, her hair curled slightly from the ends and her glasses found from underneath the bed — Lord only knows how they ended up there — Elise felt somewhat ready, and she was on schedule too, as Schmidt had announced that they would leave at 7 pm, which was still ten minutes away.

Elise was happy she got to borrow Jess' clothes. Perhaps it was silly, but she felt lucky to have a friend like her, because she had never had anyone to spend time with — someone to exchange clothes and talk about boys with. She wasn't sure if Jess felt the same way, but in Elise's opinion, the half an hour they spent preparing her for the role of Schmidt's beloved girlfriend brought the two women closer, and she was beyond happy to feel that way. Sure, she and Schmidt had grown close lately, and Winston was a good friend too, as was Nick, but at the end of the day, the only one Elise could tell all of her worries to was another woman, and especially when Jess was so alike to her, things seemed perfect. She was truly happy to find a friend in her.

The realization of the key to a good friendship being honesty made Elise regret lying earlier, and just as she was about to step out of Jess' room to face Schmidt at the front door, she turned around and looked at Jess with a look of pure remorse. "I lied, I do like Schmidt", Elise blurted out, unable to hold it back, but she never intended to let it out like that so as soon as she did, her palm covered her mouth and regret flooded into her heart. Jess squealed and mirrored Elise's gesture, placing her palm against her mouth in shock whilst gasping against the skin of her hand.

"I knew it!", Jess grabbed Elise from the shoulders, and shook the woman aggressively, before shooting a worried look to her. "Will you be fine?", Jess asked in concern, unable to even imagine what it would be like to pretend to be someone's girlfriend when you actually hoped for it. Still, despite the obvious challenge and struggle she was most likely going to be faced with at some point, Elise inhaled deeply and forced a nod to assure Jess that she was fine, and would be, too. Even if she wasn't entirely sure.

She smiled a bit, realizing that, yeah, she did like Schmidt a lot and she had possibly made a mistake when she told Jess, yet it felt so relieving and great to admit it. It felt amazing to have someone worthy of this information. And that encouraged Elise, who nodded again and let out a steady breath, aiming to be as confident as only possible.

"I'll be fine."

With that, Elise opened the door of Jess' bedroom to find Schmidt at the front door, pacing back and forth in a nervous manner and biting on his lower lip in anticipation. He was early, but so was Elise, yet the sight of her earned a relieved sigh from Schmidt, who had apparently expected her to take more than an acceptable amount of time on her appearance. But as soon as his eyes landed on the gorgeous angel that stepped from Jess' room, his mouth just hung open and no words came out, as every single thought in his mind became replaced with the image of her in that dress and every possible adjective to describe her unconditional beauty, until it was too overwhelming to handle and he felt dizzy. Exhaling shakily, Schmidt rested his hand on the wall to find balance again, and his lips widened into a sincerely happy smile.

"Y—You look amazing, Ellie. You might be the cutest girlfriend I've ever had", Schmidt winked with a grin stretching his lips, and although he meant it in a light manner — or so Elise assumed — her heart leaped and the words replayed in her mind in a hypnotizing way, stealing her attention until Schmidt offered her his arm, and she managed to move and return the smile he flashed. To be honest, she was already having second thoughts and reconsidering that whole being fine thing, but as Jess gave her a concerned look, Elise nodded to promise that there was nothing to worry about.

"I'll be fine", Elise simply told Jess, before Schmidt opened the door and the two of them walked out of the apartment, towards a party that would change a lot of things between them.

However, as soon as they got to the party, and Elise saw all the people dancing underneath the romantic lights, and she felt the atmosphere of the room along with Schmidt's hand taking hers, she quickly changed her mind and realized that she had been wrong, and giving herself false hope.

"I will not be fine", Elise corrected herself with a sigh, and gave a careful glance to Schmidt, who was grinning and moving his head along the music that alone made her want to never let go of his hand.

And truthfully speaking, she already knew that the role of Schmidt's girlfriend was going to be the one thing she could never be entirely prepared for.

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**so i'm two chapters and an epilogue away from having the whole book written omg no, though obviously this is only the eighth chapter i'm publishing, but still.**

**also, did you guys watch the first episode of season six yet? how do you like it so far? i love it tbh, i don't know how i'll be able to wait for next week!)):**

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