



CHAPTER TEN

ALTHOUGH ELISE WASN'T much into exercising, when Winston asked her to accompany him on a jog the next morning, she decided to go for it, and agreed. Along with the workout playlist she had once made, but never used, the fact that things were going very well with her and Schmidt, gave her the boost and motivation she needed. A few mornings ago and a surprisingly healthy breakfast that consisted of misl and fruits, she and Winston waved their goodbyes to the other residents of 4D and escaped into the fresh air, to the already somewhat familiar streets.

She couldn't deny that the current situation she stood in with Schmidt, was rather pleasant. Of course, she dreamed of so much more, but so far it seemed that Schmidt liked her as well and didn't just see her as some weirdo spending her time in their apartment. And she was more than fine with that. If she couldn't have Schmidt's undying love and a ection, then she would settle for being friends, but a er portraying his girlfriend and dancing so closely at the party, she couldn't help but feel that there was something more between them. And this time, it wasn't just her imagination, as Schmidt did in fact have feelings for her, but his not so epic love confession hadn't been heard, and so far, he hadn't found the strength to admit all those things again.

Still, Elise was feeling good and the cheerful, positive attitude was what kept her going. She hadn't went jogging in ages, though she had once tried to do it regularly, but she had quickly fallen out of the routine she had attempted to keep up. Yet doing it now wasn't so terrible, and the sunshine that was shining on the outside, and inside her, motivated her to run past Winston and move her feet in a steady pace whilst singing the songs she was listening to. She already knew that she probably wouldn't join Winston tomorrow, nor the day after that, but at least she tried today, and that was all she considered of importance.

"Wow, Ellie. Didn't think you'd outrun me", Winston admitted as they caught their breaths and the jog faded into lazy, slow steps. Taking out her earphones, the woman laughed lightly and nudged Winston with her elbow, which was something she had probably never done, but it felt good. She had found some great friends, one perhaps above all. Winston li ed his eyebrows when Elise just continued to smile, and the man squinted his eyes as if observing her closer.

"You're in a good mood today", Winston pointed out, and Elise just shrugged whilst they started to walk back to the apartment.

"I guess I'm just having a good day. I feel like nothing could bring me down", Elise flashed a smile, but oh how wrong she was.

As soon as Elise looked ahead to see where she was going, her body bumped into another and she almost fell back, only for a pair of strong arms to catch her collapsing figure. With the air smacked out of her, Elise started to mutter an awkward apology while her cheeks heated up, but the worst was yet to come. Once she looked up to see the person she had stupidly walked into, her heart flipped at the sight of none other but her ex-boyfriend, Thomas Floyd, smiling down at her as if they were good friends or something alike.

"Elise", he breathed out, nodding at her to acknowledge her presence, and managing to keep it cool and calm — however, Elise was the opposite. Shaking and stuttering, Elise looked at him with shock widening her eyes, not sure what to say, or what else to do except give Winston a pleading look, a silent cry for help. Thomas had never lost his glory, he was still the handsome man in his usual leather jacket, with the infamous smirk dancing deviously on his so lips Elise could vividly remember kissing with her own ones. And then, their shared happiness had come crashing down, he tore her heart out and stomped on it, shattered her self-esteem and made her hate herself. So, there was that.

"Ellie, we have to go, c'mon", Winston tugged on her arm, drawing her away from Thomas, who was still smiling, earning a disapproving glare from Winston. Elise nodded, and let Winston drag her away from the man that had only caused her misery and heartbreak, yet seemed to still have an effect on her. He was reeling her back, with a mere smile and a simple, lingering touch on her arm, and she hated it, but couldn't help it either. But she tried to remind herself of Schmidt, the one who seemed right for her, and the one she was in love with.

Obviously, Elise was shaken by the sight of her ex-boyfriend, but to Winston she seemed a lot more than just that. Elise went numb, and when he tried to ask about the guy he couldn't recognize, she didn't reply. All she did was stare ahead with a blank expression, as if the stranger had caused her to whole body and mind to shut down and reset itself to old settings. She didn't know what to say or think, so instead of doing that, her thoughts remained as one gigantic mess that consisted of two names — Thomas and Schmidt, competing for attention and a ection. Evidently, Elise's a ection was directed towards Schmidt, but frankly, seeing Thomas did bring something up, and she wasn't yet sure if it was positive or negative.

As soon as Winston and Elise got back to the apartment, the woman ran into the room she shared with Jess and buried herself underneath the several decorative pillows to scream into them, unloading her frustration. Winston quickly followed, and Schmidt was also alerted by her definitely unexpected, strange behavior and therefore walked into the room as well. Elise felt like crying, although she wasn't exactly sure why but she was strongly leaning towards the option of pure hatred for Thomas, who had showed up at the most inconvenient of times and messed up her thoughts and screwed her up entirely. And all that had happened in a couple of seconds, God only knew how she'd fall apart if she met him again.

"Ellie, good god, are you alright?", Schmidt asked with concern, taking a step towards Elise, but as soon as he understood the many risks of approaching a person without knowing what was going on, he remained by the doorway, where Winston stood as well. Elise rose from amidst the colorful pillows, and with a sigh, seated herself on the bed and crossed her legs as her lips parted to assure that she was alright, but the truth was, she really wasn't, and she was done making up lies and excuses. Sure, she was a bit worried that her troubles couldn't interest them any less, but from the genuinely concerned look on Schmidt's face she gathered the courage she needed in order to speak up.

"Not in the slightest. I bumped into Thomas, also known as the man who broke my heart into a billion bits and pieces", Elise groaned, and covered her face with both palms, feeling a mixture of sweat and tears against her burning hot skin. As she closed her eyes and fell into despair that Thomas liked to spread around with merely his presence, Winston and Schmidt processed the information that hit them like a storm out of the blue, earning equally shocked reactions from both.

"What? That was Thomas the Asshat? Girl, all you needed to do was say and I would have whooped his dumb ass", Winston spoke in sincere disbelief, and then fell into thought of the time he could have smacked Elise's idiot ex across the face, but in the lack of information, he hadn't. Winston was a good person, kind and caring, but the mention of the man, who had wrecked Elise and the little confidence she ever had, got him enraged. He would have gladly gone back in time just to meet him again, and this time give him a proper introduction to Winnie the Bish and his two fists.

Schmidt approached Elise, and sat next to her on the bed with a sad look filled with sympathy and compassion written over his features. Whilst wrapping an arm around her body and pulling her closer, Schmidt sighed and rested his jaw atop her head as his fingers started to caress her so hair, which smelled like a caramel due to the shampoo Schmidt had seen in the bathroom earlier. He could feel Elise's body easing into his, and while she remained on the verge of tears, Schmidt tried to come up with some soothing, comforting words, and Winston just stood at the doorway, partly shocked because of Thomas, partly shocked because of how close the two had gotten without him noticing. He didn't really mind though, if anything, all of the friends were secretly hoping Schmidt and Elise would end up together eventually.

"Look, Elise, it will be fine. We'll help you deal with him, obviously. We could bring Schmelse back!", Schmidt smiled happily, trying his best to help, and as soon as the combination of their names reached Elise's ears, she looked up at Schmidt, who kept a convincing smile on his lips. However, before she could speak a single word, Winston had taken his turn.

"Uhh, or, how about you stop making ship names for you and we do something actually smart", Winston interjected and gave a sassy look to Schmidt, who rolled his eyes but didn't argue. "Ellie, I think you should just go to work and we'll come with you. If he shows up and starts to boss you around or something else, we'll intervene, duh But whatever you do, don't backslide, he continued with a warning tone, directing a stern stare towards Elise, who gulped, yet managed to nod her head.

Elise could do that. With a fresh smile, she stood from the bed and le Schmidt's comforting hold despite the blissful feeling it brought, and nodded again to convince not only Winston and Schmidt, but herself. The plan sounded good, and as long as Elise remembered the one rule, she'd be fine.

No backsliding.

Elise felt good about the plan Winston had formed for her, even if it was rather simple, but the occasional reminder that this was Elise's territory was what kept her somewhat brave. Bravery was a feeling she wasn't too familiar or in good terms with, but she couldn't fight the truth which was exactly what Winston had spoken. It was indeed her territory, her comfort zone, and if Thomas came in Comic Planet just to mess things up, she could kick him out as she had every right to do so. She had her own shop, whilst Thomas seemed to still wear the same leather jacket and obviously hadn't grown out of his usual habits. He was still a douchebag, on a much more serious level than Schmidt, who was rather dreamy — but Elise, she was successful and mature.

Although, her success hadn't quite reached the stars yet, considering she was homeless, but that was just little details Thomas didn't need to know.

As if Winston was a fortune teller, eventually the door opened and Schmidt did walk in with a confident smile on his lips, which was Thomas and Winston's cue to hide behind the shelves of the shop. Instantly tensing up and feeling a flood of nervous butterflies in her stomach, Elise gripped the edge of the counter but forced a kind smile to her lips whilst putting down the pen she had used to tap against her notebook. Elise hummed along the song that was playing from the speakers in the corners of the ceiling like she always did in order to ease her jitters, and once again, it did its magic and she found herself exhaling in some kind of peace.

"Hey, Elise. This is where you work? What a coincidence", Thomas grinned, although it was obvious he had located her down — she could tell from the look on his face that he had something he needed to get o of his chest. They did date for a year and a half, until he threw all that away because she wasn't the perfect woman, but in that time, they grew to know each other more than just well and therefore, Elise could easily read him like an open book.

"Actually", Elise inhaled deeply, and glanced at Winston, who was peaking from behind one of the shelves and showing a thumbs up to encourage the woman to brag. "I own the shop", she finally added as she directed her gaze towards Thomas, causing the man to be insulted or feel proud, so she was a bit of both. Thomas leaned against the counter, and nodded approvingly while glancing around the shop before landing his intent gaze back on Elise, making her swallow thickly at the sudden eye contact she was by no means prepared for.

"That's cool. Look, I'll just get to the point. I regret leaving you, so I called your mom for information on your location. So I came here, and what I want to ask is, will you give me another chance? We could go for dinner tonight, catch up...?". Thomas suggested with a suave tone and a charming smile, luring her into his trap, and he damn well succeeded. Already hypnotized by the familiar song he played on repeat until he'd break her again, Elise bit on her lower lip and looked deep into his eyes, as if he was a snake working his magic on her. And for a second, she actually considered saying yes.

"Well...", Elise began, shutting out everything else but the man before her, but luckily, the moment was interrupted like Winston had promised. Except that it wasn't Winston, it was the opposite — a rather jealous Schmidt, who emerged from between the shelves with a high annoyed look on his face.

"Excuse me", Schmidt smiled sarcastically, and poked Thomas in the chest as they faced each other. "Can I just say something? You're a douchebag even more than I am. You broke this amazing girl's heart, when all she did was be herself, which is an awesome friend and a beautiful person inside out. You ruined her, and now you have the audacity to come to her store and flirt with her like you never did anything", Schmidt spat, his expression changing from fake amusement to pure irritation and hatred towards this man he barely knew, but what he was aware of was enough to make Schmidt strongly dislike him. Schmidt loved Elise, he had realized that, and there was no way in hell he was going to lose Elise to someone who wasn't even nearly worthy of her love and a ection.

"That's right, bitch", Winston bopped Thomas, crossing his arms over his chest in a bossy manner. "We ain't letting this awesome woman backslide for a piece of trash like you. So beat it, dude, before I beat your face", he threatened and threw out his arms in a confident way, when in reality he looked quite lame, but it was enough to drive Thomas away. Li ing an eyebrow, Thomas turned to face Elise one last time, but once she had nodded to confirm what her friends said, the man scooped and walked out of the store, leaving behind what he thought he could actually have. But boy, was he wrong.

Winston and Schmidt high-fived, and Elise smiled fondly at the two, knowing that she was more than lucky to have them in her life. She had almost given in to the temptation, but the two men had stopped her from falling back to old habits and settling for less than she was worthy of, and for that she was immensely grateful. Although Elise was sure that she'd see Thomas around, if he would choose to stay, she was ready to face him now that she had seen the truth and realized what was best for her. And what she considered best for her, was standing right in front of her, looking better than anyone she had ever seen, with the most stunning smile and the most amazing personality.

Schmidt had defended her, made her feel beautiful and great along the way too, and driven away her terrible ex-boyfriend. And that earned an adoring sigh from her as she rested her jaw against her palms and gave a look of sole admiration towards Schmidt, who was indeed the right one for her, the man she needed and wanted to be with. Although he didn't know of her feelings, and she didn't know of his, they still considered each other lucky just to be this close. Despite not actually being Schmidt's girlfriend, Elise couldn't help but be happy that she had him now, instead of Thomas.

Yeah, screw Thomas — she had Schmidt and that was all she needed.

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okay i've o icially written everything, now i just have to publish the rest of this book and wow i'm sad about it. i ownky want to do a sequel but idk??? i have books for both nick and winston in my dra s though ☺

anyway, this book is ending at chapter 25 + epilogue, so there's still plenty le luckily!!

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