



## CHAPTER ELEVEN

**ON A SIMPLE** Thursday evening Elise was spending at the store, she understood that she had never told her friends how she had a younger sister, Emma, a few years younger than her and with a personality entirely, drastically different from hers. The realization came to her along with an invite to Emma's wedding, which was a massive surprise, but in a way, not unexpected at all. While Elise had always been the one to think everything through and worry about everything, consider the consequences and pay attention to other people's opinions and feelings, Emma did whatever she liked and played by her own rules. Packed with determination, grit and the rebel phase she really never grew out of, Emma was impulsive and it was exactly her style to announce a wedding two days prior to the event.

It came as a complete surprise to Elise, and she suspected it was the same for Emma, but her sister wasn't a complete fool nor one to get married to someone she didn't truly care of, and therefore she instantly replied to the invitation with a smiley face and a promise of her presence at the wedding. Surely it was unexpected, but she was still happy for Emma, and she hoped that her friends would feel the same way when she'd suggest going to the party together. It was partly because Elise really didn't want to show up alone, partly because she felt like the people she lived with didn't know enough of her yet, and introducing them to her family was one way to do it.

That was why she made a mental note to bring the subject up during dinner later that night, and prayed for the best.

»

"So, I got a message from my sister today", Elise started the conversation — a shocking plot twist in all of their lives, yes — as they were all munching on pizza she had grabbed on her way to the lo. Jess looked up with a delighted expression, and the others seemed equally interested in finding out more about this sister of hers, and Elise was more than willing to explain. Although Emma was nothing like her, except she too carried a sensitive side somewhere within her, they had been best friends growing up and still stayed in contact actively. Elise had never been very social, and considering she had shared a room with Emma for a large portion of her childhood, they had grown close and that hadn't changed despite living in different states nowadays.

"She's getting married", Elise informed, and finished her slice quickly before exhaling deeply and deciding it was best to just spit the suggestion out there instead of twirling it in her mouth. "I know it's sudden since we haven't known each other for very long, but I really don't want to go alone and I thought it would be nice if you guys met my family, so... Do you want to travel to Arizona with me?", she proposed while nervously closing her napkin in her fist and glancing around to find any kind of reactions from the faces surrounding her.

And luckily, they all seemed to like the idea.

"That sounds awesome! Yes!", Nick spoke enthusiastically, and smacked his hand against the table in excitement, making Elise smile at the positive reaction.

Jess rolled her eyes, but then placed her hand on top of Elise's and smiled supportingly. "I can't wait to meet your family, El. I bet they're all just as cute as you!", she stated with excitement filling her tone, and Elise gave her a grateful look whilst a hint of blush crept to her cheeks. She glanced at Winston and Schmidt just to make sure they were supporting the plan as well, but obviously the both of them were grinning widely and Elise felt silly for even doubting their enthusiasm.

"Oh, one more thing...", Elise cleared her throat and tried to smile innocently as she dropped the bomb. "We have to leave tomorrow."

»

Elise had traveled by airplane once or twice before, one of the times being when she moved away from home to Los Angeles where she got her fresh start, yet the experience was still frightening and tore apart her nerves one by one until she was a shaky, anxious mess on the small seat. The group of friends had decided that flying to Arizona would be the easiest method, especially as Elise had invited Cece to join them in order to get to know her better, as she was a real good friend with everyone else. Cece was seated beside Jess behind Elise, who was sitting next to Schmidt naturally, and in front of them were Nick and Winston, the two of them already bickering over a bag of candy.

The flight was about to take off, and despite experiencing it before, Elise was scared like it was her first time, and the small chance of a plane crash was enough to make her sweat. Schmidt could tell she was freaking out, and therefore he made a bold move and took her hand to calm her down, and although at first it only increased her panic, she ended up relaxing and her breathing slowed down along with her heartbeat, from rapid to normal. Elise began humming a Panic! At The Disco song to calm herself, and the combination of her old habits and Schmidt's tight, comforting hold on her hand certainly did the trick and in a moment, she felt ready to do this again.

"Hey, Elise, thank you so much for taking me with you guys. I know it's a bit weird to go to your sister's wedding but...", Cece spoke from behind Elise and leaned a bit closer, with a huge smile widening her painted lips and Elise couldn't help but mirror the expression. She didn't know Cece very well yet, but so far she did seem awesome and kind, and if the rest of friends liked her, then she was sure she would too. Even if she was kind of scared, at least she didn't have to be with Cece alone, and they could all have fun together.

"No, no, it's not weird. Emma told me I should take all of you with me, since, uh, I don't usually have a lot of friends so she wants to meet you guys or she won't believe me", Elise joked with a faint smile, but then added with a more serious tone, "I'm glad you're joining us, Cece, really", which earned a grateful smile from the woman as she rested back towards her seat and let Elise in peace. Elise was only telling the truth, though, because she was indeed happy that Cece was there too. She didn't like leaving people out either, so things had worked out well so far.

With a sigh slipping from between her lips, Elise took a better position on the seat and tapped her fingers against her thigh along the song she was singing in her head, and Schmidt smiled fondly at the sight. He dug through his pockets, and once he found what he was looking for, he lifted his hand and showed Elise the earphones he had taken with him. When they were plugged into his phone, Schmidt offered one of the earphones to Elise, despite being profoundly afraid of germs and therefore the idea of sharing them wasn't ideal, but for her, he was willing to do so. Elise gladly took it, and when she had one in her ear, and Schmidt had the other one, he unlocked his phone and opened the music section.

"I transferred some songs from my laptop to my phone. What should we listen to, babe?", Schmidt smiled, and from the seats in front of theirs, Nick started to complain about the nickname Schmidt had taken under usage and grown far too familiar and fond of. However, Schmidt merely ignored Nick's groans, and looked at Elise, who parted her lips, but before she could let out a single word, the airplane took off and rose in the air. Feeling utmost discomfort, Elise squeezed the armrests of her seat and shut her eyes tightly with her heart burning with the desire for relief and freedom of the worst of moments.

"Stairway to Heaven", Elise breathed out, repeating the title of the song until Schmidt found it from his music library and successfully tapped it on. He had updated his library and downloaded several rock songs, mostly the ones Elise had made a list of and insisted on being absolutely essential. The song did have a calming effect on her, and as soon as the familiar tune played from her single earphone, her breathing evened and her tight grip on the armrests loosened. Schmidt was amazed by the reaction, and nodded approvingly at the song his phone was playing, and after turning on the airplane mode, he shoved it into his pocket.

The rest of the flight was rather nice, though it wasn't very long anyway, but Elise was glad to spend the time by listening to rock music with Schmidt and once in a while teaching him something about the songs, with her head resting on his shoulder and their fingers still entwined.

From behind them, Cece and Jess kept on staring and nodding at each other, both fully aware that the two had some unspoken feelings for each other, and as the plane landed, they officially made it their mission to get the two of them to confessing their feelings by the time they'd get back to Los Angeles.

**ON A SIMPLE** Thursday evening Elise was spending at the store, she understood that she had never told her friends how she had a younger sister, Emma, a few years younger than her and with a personality entirely, drastically different from hers. The realization came to her along with an invite to Emma's wedding, which was a massive surprise, but in a way, not unexpected at all. While Elise had always been the one to think everything through and worry about everything, consider the consequences and pay attention to other people's opinions and feelings, Emma did whatever she liked and played by her own rules. Packed with determination, grit and the rebel phase she really never grew out of, Emma was impulsive and it was exactly her style to announce a wedding two days prior to the event.

It came as a complete surprise to Elise, and she suspected it was the same for Emma, but her sister wasn't a complete fool nor one to get married to someone she didn't truly care of, and therefore she instantly replied to the invitation with a smiley face and a promise of her presence at the wedding. Surely it was unexpected, but she was still happy for Emma, and she hoped that her friends would feel the same way when she'd suggest going to the party together. It was partly because Elise really didn't want to show up alone, partly because she felt like the people she lived with didn't know enough of her yet, and introducing them to her family was one way to do it.

That was why she made a mental note to bring the subject up during dinner later that night, and prayed for the best.

»

"So, I got a message from my sister today", Elise started the conversation — a shocking plot twist in all of their lives, yes — as they were all munching on pizza she had grabbed on her way to the lo. Jess looked up with a delighted expression, and the others seemed equally interested in finding out more about this sister of hers, and Elise was more than willing to explain. Although Emma was nothing like her, except she too carried a sensitive side somewhere within her, they had been best friends growing up and still stayed in contact actively. Elise had never been very social, and considering she had shared a room with Emma for a large portion of her childhood, they had grown close and that hadn't changed despite living in different states nowadays.

"She's getting married", Elise informed, and finished her slice quickly before exhaling deeply and deciding it was best to just spit the suggestion out there instead of twirling it in her mouth. "I know it's sudden since we haven't known each other for very long, but I really don't want to go alone and I thought it would be nice if you guys met my family, so... Do you want to travel to Arizona with me?", she proposed while nervously closing her napkin in her fist and glancing around to find any kind of reactions from the faces surrounding her.

And luckily, they all seemed to like the idea.

"That sounds awesome! Yes!", Nick spoke enthusiastically, and smacked his hand against the table in excitement, making Elise smile at the positive reaction.

Jess rolled her eyes, but then placed her hand on top of Elise's and smiled supportingly. "I can't wait to meet your family, El. I bet they're all just as cute as you!", she stated with excitement filling her tone, and Elise gave her a grateful look whilst a hint of blush crept to her cheeks. She glanced at Winston and Schmidt just to make sure they were supporting the plan as well, but obviously the both of them were grinning widely and Elise felt silly for even doubting their enthusiasm.

"Oh, one more thing...", Elise cleared her throat and tried to smile innocently as she dropped the bomb. "We have to leave tomorrow."

»

Elise had traveled by airplane once or twice before, one of the times being when she moved away from home to Los Angeles where she got her fresh start, yet the experience was still frightening and tore apart her nerves one by one until she was a shaky, anxious mess on the small seat. The group of friends had decided that flying to Arizona would be the easiest method, especially as Elise had invited Cece to join them in order to get to know her better, as she was a real good friend with everyone else. Cece was seated beside Jess behind Elise, who was sitting next to Schmidt naturally, and in front of them were Nick and Winston, the two of them already bickering over a bag of candy.