



CHAPTER FOURTEEN

"**IS THERE SOMETHING** going on between you and Cece?", Elise spoke with a careful, scared tone as she put a piece of pink cotton candy in her mouth, her eyes avoiding Schmidt's, who was sitting beside her on a small bench in the carnival. The two had gotten something to eat as they had given out all the flyers and let Cece and Robby behind, and finally found peace and time alone, giving them the chance to discuss what was between them. Only moments earlier, Elise had promised herself to drop the matter and be happy with what she had with Schmidt currently, but whenever his gaze searched for Cece or the name let his mouth, a piece of Elise's self-esteem came crashing down until the worry grew so strong within her, she had no choice but to ask.

Leading them to the present — Schmidt nearly choked on the sweet treat he had been devouring, but as soon as the sugar melted on his tongue and he regained his breath and ability to speak, he shook his head. However, it didn't remove the initial fear that flamed in Elise's heart and caused the concerned frown on her features, mixed with insecurity and the worry that Schmidt would end up doing the same as Thomas, and leaving her because she wasn't good enough. She needed confirmation, convincing, and admittedly, she hated being so needy but Schmidt seemed to completely understand as the woman looked down and fiddled with the jacket that belonged to the Agent Carter attire she was totally pulling on.

"Elise, no. I would never treat you like Thomas did, alright? Cece is my friend, that's all. Okay, I admit that I was trying to ruin her date back there, but when I think about who I like the most, it's you, El. And for me, there's no one better than you. You're perfect just the way you are, and there is no need to worry or feel insecure, I promise", Schmidt smiled softly and placed a hand on her thigh, feeling the fabric of her skirt while leaning closer to the woman. Elise raised her gaze and looked into Schmidt's happy, green eyes, making it impossible for her not to feel the same kind of joy that pushed away the sadness in her.

"Thank you. That's just what I needed to hear", Elise sighed in relief and rested her forehead against Schmidt's, their lips nearly touching for the second time, and even though the taste of cotton candy on his lips was a tempting thought, they let the moment slip through their fingertips, and before they could meet in the middle in a soft kiss, Nick had run to them and intervened what was going on.

"Nicholas!", Schmidt spat in annoyance as he pulled away from Elise, shooting the man a profoundly enraged stare, and if looks could kill, Nick would be gone by now. Despite having what was almost a kiss interrupted, Elise smiled, and let Nick speak once he had glared at Schmidt with equal irritation. It amused Elise, how the two occasionally bickered over the most trivial matters yet in the end of the day, they were the best of best friends and fit together like two puzzle pieces. They completed each other, and that was something Elise aspired to have, perhaps with Schmidt himself. Alright, most definitely with Schmidt.

"Sorry guys, but I promised Jess we'd go to the Haunted House and I don't want to go alone anyway so... Let's go", Nick nodded towards the old, gloomy building that was none other but the infamous Haunted House, and Elise grimaced with discomfort at the idea. She was easily scared, and very sensitive too, so the thought of doing something as frightening as what Nick was suggesting wasn't ideal, and completely out of her comfort zone.

"Uhm, I'm not sure if I'm brave enough to do that", Elise admitted with blush creeping to her cheeks, and Nick was about to open his mouth to assure that he was just as scared, which was why he needed someone to go with, but Schmidt was quicker and took Elise's hand to give it a comforting squeeze.

"Don't worry, I'll protect you", Schmidt promised, but instead of gladly agreeing to the idea, Elise sighed and shook her head while standing up. Schmidt and Nick were both rather surprised by her reaction, but it wasn't that she didn't like the offer, just thought Schmidt had something else he needed to do.

"You should go and apologize to Cece and Robby. I got Nick, I'll be fine. Or at least I hope so", Elise chuckled, and walked over to Nick before giving Schmidt a convincing nod and a careful smile. "I'll see you afterwards?", she added, and once Schmidt had promised to do so, he headed in a different direction and let Elise alone with Nick, who sighed and tried to smile to lighten up the mood but there was no denying the fact that they were both scared as hell and doubted their chances of survival. Still, they had made a promise to Jess, and perhaps it was time to face their fears and get a bit of an Eye of the Tiger vibe on.

Unwilling, but attempting to go to the Haunted House and have fun, Nick and Elise headed towards the place despite how scary it seemed, and with confidence, they entered the attraction and exhaled deeply into the sudden darkness surrounding them. The list of Elise's many fears was a tad too long, but darkness was definitely there, along with spiders, clowns and many more things she could expect to find in a damn Haunted House, one that she suddenly found herself in. Nick's presence didn't ease her jitters either, because he was just as much of a mess as she was and was literally shaking as they walked through the dark, scary hallways of the house.

It was all eerie, quiet and terrifyingly calm for a while, but eventually a clown jumped out and Elise shrieked as she cowered into the corner, Nick following her lead and screaming higher than the woman as the clown neared them. Squealing together, Nick and Elise clutched onto each other and prayed for their lives with the feeling of utmost fear deep in them, so intense Elise couldn't even keep her eyes open. Meanwhile, Nick stared into the clown's eyes and continued to scream until the creepy creature ran on and let the two alone, panting and trying to slow down their heartbeats. Elise strongly doubted if she could ever recover from the unexpected attack, and knew that she wasn't going to sleep very well that night, but somehow they found the courage to continue.

"That was horrible. Can we just get out of here already?", Elise begged, squinting her eyes at the flickering lights and hoping for a migraine to stay away as she went a bit closer to Nick and held onto him in the hopes of safety, but if she wanted someone to protect her, she should have taken Schmidt instead of Nick. If Elise hadn't been so scared, she would have teased Nick endlessly about the way he screamed higher and more than she did, but she couldn't really blame him, as she too had experienced the horror and the panic that never really let them alone.

"I completely agree, but we need to find the exit", Nick pointed out, still shaking, and each step wary and careful. Elise shivered, and tried to keep her eyes closed to avoid the bright lights and whatever they would face next, but in order to see where she was going, she had to peek occasionally instead of relying entirely on Nick. In a way, Elise was glad she had ended up in the Haunted House with him though, because he was just as scared, and not bragging about how brave he was and making fun of Elise for being a coward, which she admitted to be, but that didn't mean she was okay with being mocked.

Excluding the occasional scary voices echoing throughout the house, Nick and Elise seemed fine, until another creature jumped out, and the zombie that had showed up right in front of them caught them by surprise, earning a terrified shriek from Elise, but a less successful reaction from Nick. Squealing as well, Nick threw a sucker punch towards the zombie that had startled them, but as his fist came in contact with the face in front of him, they heard a familiar voice assuring it was a friend and not a hostile monster. At the realization that it was Jess he had hit, Nick's eyes widened and he felt truly apologetic for what he had done, but he had no time to get that out when another person scared them entirely.

"Ellie, I'm here—", Schmidt suddenly spoke by Elise's side, but in the shock his unexpected arrival caused, Nick threw out his fist again in order to punch whoever had appeared so out of the blue. However, in the dark his aim wasn't impeccable and in the rush of the moment Nick failed to see where he was going, and therefore his fist came in contact with Elise's eye, knocking her down with the surprisingly powerful punch. Wailing in pain, Elise joined Jess on the floor, but the moment was far from over, as a sense of fury and the need to protect came over Schmidt, and also, because he was unable to see it was his best friend across him, Schmidt repeated the action and punched Nick in the face.

"That's for punching my girl, son!", Schmidt yelled and threw out his arms with puncturing intent, lights went on and a bunch of guards ran in to remove them from the Haunted House. A part of Elise wanted to laugh at the looks on their faces when Schmidt saw he had punched Nick, and Nick saw he had punched Jess and Elise, but as she was about to break into a grin she remembered how much in pain and aching she was due to the aggressive blow she had received right in the corner of her eye.

The guards grabbed Schmidt and Nick and started to drag them out, while another escorted Jess and Elise to the benches outside and ordered them to sit. Eventually, the moment passed by and the intense atmosphere faded as Elise and Jess sat across each other, both nearly laughing whilst pressing the ice bags against their faces where they had been punched. The guards were lecturing Schmidt and Nick a few feet away from them, and the look of boredom on their faces made the women laugh anyway, despite the pain that spread out on their skin.

"You're a very impressive zombie, Jess", Elise grinned, and Jess laughed but offered a grateful smile to show how thankful she was for the compliment. In return, Jess complimented Elise's costume and surprised her by recognizing the character Elise was going as, but before they could proceed to fangirl over the heroic agent, a man Elise had never before seen approached Jess, and considering they seemed rather cozy she stepped away and sat on another bench to let them talk in peace.

However, Elise wasn't alone for very long, when Schmidt had already walked over to her and she burst into laughter at the sight of him. He had lost the previous costume, and was now wearing only red underwear, a black vest and a stetson, which was quite the flattering, but amusing sight. Even if Elise was laughing, she couldn't help but take a good look at him as he walked over to her and with a grin, seated himself next to her on the bench with a small sigh slipping from between her lips.

"Are you okay?", Schmidt began, giving Elise a faint smile, and the woman nodded as Schmidt took the ice bag from her and started to carefully press it against her face to relieve the pain. There was a look of concentration on his features which earned a sigh of pure admiration from Elise — the way he did everything for and with her, was with so much action and true, genuine care, and it melted her heart every time. Since the beginning, he had been caring and gentle with her and seemed to carry tons of fondness for her, and that was enough to make Elise smile so widely she felt the aching spread out again.

Elise chuckled softly, and nodded to assure Schmidt that she was fine. "I'm okay, I swear. It'll stop hurting eventually. But we need to talk about the fact that you're almost naked, Schmidt", she giggled and bit her lip whilst staring at the man in adoration, her gaze lingering on his revealed upper body and his thighs, which frankly, deserved a fair share of recognition.

"I gave my costume to Robby so it would match with Cece's. But it's okay, plan B was always Matthew McConaughey in Magic Mike", Schmidt shrugged with a grin shining on his lips. "Besides, it's not like you haven't seen all of this before", he teased with a nudge, referring to the accident of Elise walking in on him while he was actually naked, and in a matter of seconds, the woman had already blushed. But Schmidt didn't really mind, he just smiled and stared at Elise fondly, overwhelmed by her beauty and the painted red lips he so badly wanted to kiss again.

Instead of kissing her, Schmidt took the cowboy hat from his head and placed it on Elise's curls, before wrapping an arm around her and allowing her to lean against his body. It felt nice, familiar and just right, and as they fell into silence, Elise thought of what she had heard Schmidt say, but didn't mention in the belief that it had been accidental in the heat of the moment.

But her ears had not deceived her, she was sure of that, and indeed, back in the Haunted House, Schmidt had called Elise his girl.

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THANK YOU SO MUCH FOR 2k!!

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