



## CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

**IN A SURPRISINGLY** short amount of time, Elise had gotten things done, her new apartment furnished and prepared to a point where she could move in quite soon. Schmidt happily joined her on the first night in her new home, and it was like from a movie, and for the first time in forever, Elise was definitely happy with no worries in mind, and everything was fine. She was used to having something bothering her and keeping her up in the middle of the night, but now, she had friends to make her feel special, an incredible boyfriend who loved her unconditionally, a dream job that paid well and an apartment she was completely in love with — though, not as deeply as she was with Schmidt.

There was only a single part of the day which Elise absolutely dreaded, and that was leaving her lovely apartment to go to work. She wasn't usually a fan of early mornings, but she loved even her alarm clock and a er buying a yellow, adorable kettle, making her morning tea was even more fun than usual. So, waking up wasn't a problem, but stepping out of the door and saying goodbye to her amazing, new home was something she couldn't enjoy, even if she loved her little Comic Planet and working there was like a dream come true. However, Schmidt usually le for work earlier than she did, so the apartment was o en empty and that made things somewhat easier.

Elise still sometimes stopped by 4D and spent the night there, but even if she was living across the hall now, she and her friends spent plenty of time together. Winston had a habit of stopping by the store during the day, and Jess usually le around the same time as Elise did and they o en shared the elevator in the mornings. In the evening, Elise occasionally stopped by Nick's bar and other nights, they had dinner in 4D together or watched one of Elise's many many movies in her adorable little living room. Her life was, frankly, going great and the happiness didn't seem to have an end.

The day at work went quickly as always, since it didn't feel so rough when she could spend the entire day reading the comics, listening to her favorite songs and during the more peaceful hours, she had a tendency to play Candy Crush on her phone or text Schmidt, who never failed to cheer her up as if her day wasn't going well enough already. It felt like only a few minutes, not hours, had passed as Elise stood in the elevator again and waited for it to reach her floor, but today wasn't similar to every other day. Usually, she had her earphones on and secretly twirled around a couple of times in the hallway before taking out her keys, accessorized with a few Funko Pop keychains and letting herself in.

Today, she had forgotten her earphones, and as she stepped out of the elevator, she came face to face with a man in the hallway and the sudden arrival shocked her. Stopping in her tracks, Elise froze, eyes widening while the man she was staring at pushed himself o of the wall, uncrossed his arms and smiled widely at the surprised woman.

"Dad?"

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Elise, sadly, could not remember the last time she saw her father — a er her parents had divorced, she had spent most of her time with her mother with only a few occasional visits to her dad per month, which obviously saddened her due to the close relationship with both. And when the chance to live more with her father arrived, Elise was already packing her bags to leave Arizona for Los Angeles, and since then, the two of them had merely exchanged a few calls, some text messages but no actual meetings. Which was why Elise hugged him for minutes, even if they were standing in the hallway, but the sight of her father was just too good to be true and she had to make sure he was real, truly there.

"Your mom sent me the instructions to your new house, and it's been too long since we saw so I decided I'd surprise you and visit. I have some work stu in L.A anyway, so I thought, why not stop by while I'm at it?", Walden grinned, and Elise nodded at the good point he made. Chewing thoughtfully on the inner side of her cheek, Elise glanced at her front door, then at the door of 4D and decided that perhaps he'd like to meet some of her friends, and therefore, took a step towards the lo she no longer lived in, though frequently visited and still carried a key for.

"I'm glad you're here. Look, uh, my friends live right across the hall so we could go there, and you could meet them? And I don't have any co ee at my place, because I hate co ee, obviously", Elise smiled at her father, who nodded as a response to the suggestion. Sighing slightly at the more familiar ways Walden fell back into — since they didn't usually hug or talk very much — Elise gestured towards the other door she stepped towards, and with the keys she already had in hand, she unlocked the place and stepped in.

"Uh, guys, my dad will be here in three seconds, just a heads up. He's pretty grumpy and quiet and likes fishing and rock music, okay?", Elise whispered to her friends, who looked up from whatever they were occupied with, and before anyone could say anything, Walden had entered the apartment and o ered a small wave of a hand for Jess, Winston and Nick. Elise looked around to find Schmidt, but he was nowhere to be seen and the woman concluded he was still at work, which was a good thing, because she was quite certain her father thought she was still dating Thomas, and had made it very clear he didn't like any guys flirting with her precious little Elise. It had taken Elise weeks to convince Walden of Thomas' good intentions and get his blessing on their relationship, and look how that turned out.

"Hi, I'm Jess! Welcome to our humble home...", Jess was the first one to approach Walden, raising an eyebrow to encourage him into introducing himself, and as soon as he did, Jess enthusiastically added, "Welcome Walden!", and shook hands with him despite his desire to not have any kind of physical contact, but for the sake of politeness he accepted the gesture. Walden was a lot like Elise, to be honest — both of them were somewhat shy, afraid of social situations, quiet and withdrawn, and of course, there was the love for rock music. Elise perhaps resembled her mother more on the outside, but truthfully speaking, she had always connected with her father the most. Yet she had barely seen him in years.

As Nick and Jess began giving Walden the tour of the house just to kill time, Elise rushed to Winston and ran her hand nervously through her hair. "He can't know about me and Schmidt, Winston. To him, I'm still the little girl that needs to be taken care of and if he finds out, I'm dating Schmidt, he'll haunt the poor guy", Elise panicked, evidently trembling as she started to rock back and forth on the couch where she had joined Winston. Hushing the woman, Winston placed a hand on her shoulder and smiled kindly, trying to assure that everything was going to be just fine.

Before Winston had time to say anything, the front door opened and Schmidt walked in and shrugged o his jacket. With a sigh mixed with relief and extreme panic, Elise jumped from the couch and rushed over to Schmidt, who leaned in for a kiss but the woman dodged it as well as she only could. Being rejected caused a confused, somewhat sad look to appear on Schmidt's sharp features and Elise wanted to shower him with a ection and kisses, but instead she sighed again and glanced around to make sure his father wasn't there to eavesdrop.

"Remember when we pretended we were dating? We kind of have to do the opposite now, please? Pretend like we're just friends?", Elise begged with despair painted across her face, and although confused, Schmidt nodded as he was willing to do nearly anything Elise asked him to.

Elise pressed a so , but quick kiss onto Schmidt's cheek and just as she was pulling away, Jess and Nick arrived back to the living room with Walden. Forcing a smile, Elise stepped away from Schmidt, and from the couch, Winston sco ed and shook his head at the evidently terrible idea that would, potentially, come crashing down at some point. Elise understood the risks she was taking with lying, and as much as she hated doing so, she ended up introducing Schmidt as one of her friends anyway.

"Dad! This is Schmidt, one of my good friends. Like Nick here. Just friends", Elise spoke nervously and added a terrified laughter, praying that her father couldn't tell how much of a mess she was, and although he probably could, Walden still nodded and didn't question her words.

"This won't end well", Winston quietly muttered to himself what he was convinced was only the truth.

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Elise wasn't sure how it happened, but somehow, Jess, Nick and Winston le the apartment in order to get food for them to eat together, and she ended up on the couch with Schmidt and her father — a dangerous combination in her opinion, but Schmidt had insisted on charming the hell out of Walden, and before Elise had had time to argue, he had began a conversation about rock music with the knowledge he carried, thanks to Elise herself. She was terrified of how the evening would end, but luckily, it seemed Schmidt's plan to charm her father was working and they were getting along well.

But then, Elise's father decided to direct the conversation somewhere entirely di erent.

"So, how's Thomas? Where is he?", Walden asked, glancing around the apartment as if expecting to find the mentioned man lurking in the corners of the place. Elise swallowed thickly, and glanced at Schmidt to make sure he wouldn't lash out and start a rant on why Thomas was the worst, and how it was now his duty to make Elise happy, but instead of doing so, the man nodded approvingly to encourage his girlfriend into pretending like she was still dating Thomas the Douchebag.

"Uh, he's—he's fine, I... um...", Elise stuttered, only then realizing that the plan wasn't relying on Schmidt. Schmidt was doing an excellent job and for Elise, he was willing to pretend something she could only imagine was rather unpleasant, but her lie was about to fail because of her. To begin with, she hated lying to her father and the guilt was eating her alive, but that wasn't the thing that mostly upset her. It was having to tell him that she was still with Thomas, that they were happy and things were going great, when in reality it was the opposite. She had grown to despise Thomas, and the thought of actually being together with him only for him to poison her, tear her apart from within and break down every tiny piece of confidence she had tried to build, it made Elise sick. She couldn't do that.

"Actually, uh, we're not dating anymore", Elise spoke suddenly, surprising not only Walden, but Schmidt whose eyes widened. He searched for reassurance from the stern look on Elise's face, to confirm that they were really doing this and telling Walden that they were together, which was a lovely idea, but against everything Elise had told him to do only moments earlier. And Elise assured Schmidt it was what she wanted by turning to face him with a gentle smile and taking his hand carefully, which earned Walden's attention immediately.

"Yeah, uh, Thomas hurt me. A lot. He broke me, but Schmidt... Schmidt helped me, dad. I love him, and I sincerely hope you'll accept that, but if you don't, I will still be with him because he's the one for me", Elise confessed, momentary bravery keeping her going until she was finished and she had to stare at Walden in the silence that fell into the apartment. Suddenly uncomfortable, Elise shu led on her seat, but when Schmidt so ly squeezed her hand and gave her a loving, warm smile, she did the same and knew that she had done the right thing.

"Yeah", Walden cleared his throat. "I know. That Winston guy told me, and he also told me everything from how you met to how Schmidt here defended you from Thomas. I thought that guy was an asshat, anyway", he shrugged and surprised the two lovers sitting across him, both of them devoid of words, or thoughts in general.

"I just can't understand why you wouldn't tell me in the first place?", Walden then broke the silence that fell into the room, and Elise blushed, clearly ashamed for lying to her dad.

"Uh, I'm sorry. I was just so scared you wouldn't accept us, I guess", Elise shrugged, and glanced at Schmidt, who began so ly caressing her hand. Walden was amused by this, but he could also see how clearly in love the two were, and it was impossible to not approve their relationship. Frankly, he couldn't remember the last time she saw Elise so happy, even if it was merely through small gestures but it was as if there was a magnet between Elise and Schmidt, pulling them together because it was right, it was how things were supposed to be.

"Ellie, if you're happy, no one else's opinion really matters. But I do accept this, because you two seem very happy and in love and that's everything I care of. Though if you hurt my daughter, I will sever your limbs one by one, alright?", Walden spoke, the smile on his lips soon fading into a stern expression. Schmidt swallowed thickly, but then he reminded himself that he had no intentions to hurt Elise, ever, and nodded with a smile.

He was only going to love her until the end of times.

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A er dinner, Walden headed out, but Elise stayed in the lo just for the sake of old times. Although it hadn't been very long, and she still saw her old roommates daily, she missed living in the lo and having her tea with them before going to bed. Some things had changed though — she was now in the same bed with Schmidt, and then there was also Coach, who had somehow missed the whole situation with Walden Stevens making a surprise visit.

But when it was already late, and Elise was climbing into Schmidt's bed whilst the man was getting rid of his shirt — a sight to behold, truly — she couldn't help but think about the beginning, when she opened her store, and she was invited to dinner in the lo. When she could barely talk to Schmidt, and when she still slept in the back of Comic Planet, and when she was unable to believe that one day, her dreams would actually come true and she'd be successful, and together with Schmidt. However, as Schmidt followed Elise's lead and climbed into the bed and sneaked under the covers before pulling her closer, it seemed rather real, and Elise smiled widely at the realization of that.

"I love you, Ellie", Schmidt whispered in her ear before placing a so kiss on her cheek, and the woman shivered, but replied the same way. As his arm wrapped around her waist and they closed their eyes, the night fell and a peaceful slumber began nearing the both of them, but Schmidt wasn't entirely done yet. The deep, calming silence in the room was split in half as Schmidt checked so ly from behind Elise, and forced himself to speak once more.

"I didn't know you were such a daddy's girl, El", he teased, and Elise blushed instantly, but remained grateful for the darkness as there it could not be seen. Besides, she knew what had to be done.

"Jar!"

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**i felt like introducing elise's dad had to be done so, here he is! next up is the cruise episode and i can't waaaaait to publish that one (:**