



CHAPTER TWENTY-FOUR

ON THE NIGHT of the engagement, Elise hadn't entirely realized how much work it meant and had been rather surprised because of Schmidt's very thorough plan to make the wedding work. To be honest, Elise was growing stressed and anxiously already, but instead of revealing how situated she was feeling, she smiled at her fiancé — which felt good to say, nonetheless — and ordered to take care of tasting the cakes. Naturally, she also had a wedding dress to pick and that was the only task of the day yet it terrified Elise wonderfully.

At least Elise didn't have to work. She had successfully hired some people to work at Comic Planet and now, things weren't so exhausting and she was able to cut out some of her own hours in order to give most of her attention to the wedding arrangements. Although, the stress that work had caused didn't leave, merely moved over to different, but equally relevant matters she now had to handle. Choosing a wedding dress was certainly challenging, and she was aiming for perfection because she knew that was what Schmidt aspired to have as well, but Elise was sure that with Winston's help, she'd have the prettiest dress in the world.

Winston claimed that he carried tons of experience and therefore also the ability to pick the most breathtaking wedding gown, and as soon as Elise had insisted on leaving the bottle of champagne back at the hotel, she felt safe and trusted her friend. It had been a while since the two of them spent time together anyway, so Elise was more than happy to find company in Winston, who drove them to the nearby boutique where Elise accepted the mission of finding a wedding dress that was grazing perfection, if not all in.

The sight of so many white dresses, mixed with a couple of other colors, caused Elise to gulp thickly and shiver at the thought of wearing one herself. She was positive that she wanted to marry Schmidt, but it was a big step nevertheless and the idea of taking someone else's name, promising to spend the rest of her days with someone and showing the best and the worst of herself to him, frankly, terrified Elise. Getting married was the dream, but it wasn't an easy thing to do — in any way, really. For the past couple of days, Elise had been sensitive and on the verge of tears but somehow she had managed to avoid falling apart, although it only meant that once it was bound to happen, it was going to be major. It wasn't healthy to bottle things up, especially for someone as emotional and fragile as Elise.

Yet, she put a smile on her face and glanced at Winston, who seemed equally amazed by the dozens of dresses. "Where should we start?", Elise asked, but before Winston could end the dreamy sequence playing in his head on a continuous loop, a woman working in the shop approached the two with a bright smile. Instantly freezing and falling into utter discomfort, Elise's eyes widened and her hand searched for Winston's arm to she could grab it rather painfully, but at least the grip woke him from his thoughts and he saved the situation by answering for Elise.

"Hello there... Cynthia", Winston began after glancing at the name tag on the woman's little black dress, and then stepped out to take over the moment and protect Elise from the excessive amount of interacting with unknown people. "My friend here is getting married and we're looking for a wedding dress. Something... Hmm, something classy and stunning but not too pompous. Something that'll make her the prettiest woman in the room, but in a cute way, you know what I mean, Cynthia?", Winston explained then, glancing at Elise once in a while to observe the woman and gather together what was most likely her preferred style. And so far, it was quite accurate.

Cynthia nodded and led them to find the dress that fit their criteria, and in the meanwhile, Winston and Elise found their way to a fitting room with seats outside, where the man ended up. Elise was pacing nervously back and forth the room and waiting for the woman to return with some potential dresses in anticipation, though there was a pang of fear knocking at her heart and causing her to doubt and overthink everything. Soon enough, Cynthia came back with three dresses and Winston cheered at the options, and Elise felt just as excited about them all, even if she tended to be quite nervous but admittedly, all the dresses were gorgeous and it was going to be a hard choice, for sure.

"Here, why don't you try this one out first. I'll be right outside if you need help with putting it on, honey", Cynthia ordered with a smile, and gave Elise a ballgown kind of a dress, like it was stolen from the closet of a princess and it made her smile. It was simple, but beautiful and in that moment, Elise forgot about fear and the joy kicked in, as she rushed into the fitting section and got undressed. After placing her clothes aside, Elise stepped inside the dress and when she couldn't come up with a different way to get it on, she began to pull. It worked, kind of, and Elise managed to lift the gown until it was at her chest and she could smile happily at the mirror she was staring at — a rare occasion, but she couldn't hold it back either.

After Cynthia had helped Elise close the dress so it was properly on her, the woman stepped out and presented herself to Winston, whose eyes widened at the downright glorious sight. "Girl, you're glowing", Winston commented then and clapped his hands together, and frankly, Elise couldn't help but nod in agreement as she glanced down at the floral lace covering the somewhat big, but beautiful dress. Twirling around, Elise felt like a Disney princess and she was unable to stop happy giggles from escaping her mouth, which made not only Winston, but even Cynthia smile. Elise could only imagine how fulfilling her job was, even if it was tiring and some people would be hard to please, but she was helping women find their dream dress for their own wedding, and succeeding had to feel good.

"What do you think, Ellie?", Winston asked and smiled, "is this the one?", his tone enthusiastic but he could see the look in her eyes which was adoring, but guilty. Meaning she didn't like it enough. Elise shrugged and shot an apologetic look to her friend, who shook his head and insisted that if she wasn't 100% sure about it, then she had to try on something else because she wasn't getting married in some piece of trash she didn't love with her entire heart. That dress was going to be in every single of photo, and everyone was going to see it, so it had to be something worthy of all that. So, even though Elise did like the dress a bit, she walked back into the fitting room due to not getting the proper vibe she was searching for. She wasn't sure, but she wanted to be.

Next up was a mermaid dress with an open back, a long tail and a proper amount of bling on the lower part of the fancy dream. But for Elise, it wasn't so wonderful, because before even slipping it on she knew she would only profoundly dislike the tight fabric showing off her entire body and making it difficult for her to feel at ease and comfort. Therefore, she would have rather skipped the dress but with an open mind, and Cynthia's pressuring words in her ear, Elise put it on with the woman's help and stared at the mirror with a sense of judgment. She absolutely despised giving the details of her body away for everyone to see and laugh at, she hated the tight dress hugging each inch of her skin like it was painted on her and that caused the look of discomfort on her face when she stepped out for Winston to review.

Winston's eyes widened, but he could tell Elise hated it so without a single word, he shook his head to disapprove the dress, which earned a sigh of relief from the woman, who couldn't wait to get out of it already. But having so many struggles and no victories exhausted Elise, not only physically, although jumping from dress to dress felt like an effective method of exercise. She was getting tired from inside, and truthfully, when nothing seemed to go right, she wasn't the type to push through and fight. She was the type to break down and cry, which was the only option that seemed right as soon as she got in the fitting room. Telling Cynthia to stay outside, Elise shut the door and turned to face herself in the mirror only to hate what she saw.

Getting married wasn't a cakewalk, it was a goddamn struggle and a big step that Elise feared she wasn't brave enough to take. She wanted Schmidt, but wasting a crazy amount of money on a wedding and inviting all the people and putting so much pressure on Elise was about to break her. She was already cracking, and through those fractures in her confidence, doubt and fear could slip in and spread the insecurities within her. She had believed that getting married would be simple and it would be pure joy from the beginning to the end — after all, she did get to be with Schmidt — but so far, she was only stressed and worried and scared for reasons she thought she could make a list of, yet she was unable to think of a single one now.

However, it was enough to push Elise over the edge, and bursting into tears, she lowered herself to the floor despite still wearing the wedding dress, and covered her face with her palms. It was rather normal to feel emotional regarding marriage, but she failed to realize that as she sobbed against her hands and trembled evidently, on the floor of the fitting room. Obviously her sobs could be heard, and in no time, there was a knock on the door but before Elise had any time to beg for peace or allow entrance, Winston had quietly sneaked in and sighed at his best friend weeping in a wedding dress.

"Wait here, Ellie. I just have to make a quick call, alright?", Winston tried to calm her down, and after she had nodded, the man rushed out and took out his phone, while Elise stayed behind and continued to cry to a point where it felt like she had no more tears left — only to be proven wrong.

Elise didn't have to be alone for long, when the door of the small room opened again and she turned around to see her beloved Schmidt with a sad smile on his lips. Joining Elise on the floor, Schmidt went to his knees and then proceeded to sit down before pulling the woman closer and wrapping his arms tightly around her. Sighing, Schmidt closed his eyes and hushed Elise, his lips pressing against her cheek in a comforting, loving kiss with the strong desire to help her through the breakdown. Being in his hold made Elise feel safe, but she was still doubtful and honestly, in a mess, but at least she was Schmidt's mess and now, he was going to take care of her.

"What's wrong? C'mon, you can tell me anything, babe. You know that, right?", Schmidt mumbled quietly into Elise's ear while holding her hands and caressing the soles of her feet carefully. He didn't want to upset her more, so he made sure to not be too soothing or pushy, and each word was thoroughly considered, just because he hated seeing Elise so down and never wanted her to feel that way. Sad Elise, equaled sad Schmidt.

In between the cries and hiccups that caused her whole body to jerk, Elise struggled to find the ability to speak but after Schmidt had assured her everything was just fine and he was there, and there was no need to rush or worry, she found herself somewhat calmer.

Snuggling, Elise rested her head against Schmidt's chest and closed her eyes, causing tears to fall from her eyelashes to her cheek, from where they rolled onto her wobbling lower lip and made her taste the bitterness of them. As her fingers slowly entwined with Schmidt's, Elise inhaled deeply and tried to collect her thoughts to turn them into words, and with his endless attempts to comfort her, she succeeded somehow.

"I'm sorry, Schmidt. I want to marry you, but I—I don't know if I can. I'm scared and—I just—I'm terrified", Elise stuttered, still shaking and her eyes opening so she could look up at Schmidt with an apologetic look. She felt like a burden, one of her many insecurities really, but the fond smile on Schmidt's lips signified that she had nothing to worry or feel insecure about. But he thought it was okay, and whenever Elise was feeling low and in the need of a confidence boost, he was there to give it to her. He knew there were moments in which Elise felt less than she was, and lacked bravery and self-esteem, but he was more than willing to deal with those, naturally.

Shaking his head, Schmidt chuckled and looked down at Elise with a happy, affectionate gaze. "Ellie, I'm scared too. Really scared. But that's okay, and I know it's a big step but we'll take it together, hand in hand. I want to marry you, and I want all of you, even your fears and your insecurities and I want to love you and make you see you have nothing to worry about", he reassured, placing a soft kiss on Elise's forehead, making her smile through the tears and feel a little bit of relief. He was saying very sweet things though, so it was impossible for her to not smile after hearing how he loved her despite her anxiety and self-esteem issues.

"I know getting there is an uphill, but I promise, the wedding will be what you've dreamed of and afterwards, it'll be just sheer happiness", Schmidt smiled, and Elise nodded in agreement after realizing he made good points. Arranging the wedding was a struggle, but when she imagined the aftermath, she couldn't fight the shy smile from creeping up to her lips. She was certain they were going to be very happy together, and she would live the life she had dreamed of since she was a little girl.

Thanking her fiancé for the incredibly sweet words, the encouragement and the reminder that everything was fine and would be in the future too, Elise gave him a loving kiss before getting up from the floor with his help. Elise hugged Schmidt once more, feeling safe in his presence and never wanting to let go but eventually, the man reminded her of the matters she was currently handling and she was forced to step away from him.

"Mermaid isn't your style", Schmidt whispered in her ear with a teasing smile. "Try that one", he nodded towards the third dress hanging from the hooks on the walls, and with that, he led the fitting room and Elise was standing alone again. But this time, she wasn't feeling sad or doubting whether getting married was the right thing or not. She was feeling rather confident about the upcoming days, including the wedding she believed would be just amazing, and with Schmidt's words in mind, Elise took to the mermaid dress and took the last one, certain that it was the right one.

And Winston agreed. It was exactly Elise's style, and it was the one she was going to wear to the wedding, the one she was going to get married in.

"Girl, you're getting married. You sure you're fine?", Winston asked when the two were walking back to the hotel after paying for the dress and taking it with them. Winston looked at Elise with friendly, but genuine concern twisting his features into a soft frown, but instead of falling apart, Elise smiled happily and nodded.

"Yeah", Elise smiled, "I'm better than fine, really. I'm marrying Schmidt."

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cutIESSS and aw elise my poor baby): ++ but also elinston is brotp af omg

okay so the next chapter will be the last one omg sos i'm not reADY

but thank you sooo so so much for 5k reads!

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