



CHAPTER THREE

THE SUN WAS shining bright outside, considering it was beyond noon and the hours had passed quickly — however, the light wasn't what woke Schmidt from a deep slumber he didn't remember falling into, but the chat in the kitchen that had a negative shade to it, resembling an argument. It was a familiar setting, so Schmidt wasn't surprised, though certainly bothered by the noises but instead of getting up, he only opened his eyes and sighed. He could remember playing True American with his roommates and Elise during the previous night, and clearly it had gotten intense, because at some point his mind just went blank and he carried no memories of what happened next. Still, he had a good feeling somewhere deep within him that caused a smile to shine on his lips as he closed his eyes again, and rolled to his side.

It was very potential that the true reason behind his smile was Elise. Ever since he saw her at the comic store, he had been downright smitten and failed to not stare at her whenever he could, merely because her shy smile or hopeful eyes were too beautiful. He wouldn't call it love, but a level ten crush for sure. And therefore, even if he tried to convince himself otherwise, it was most likely Elise that caused him to smile as he rested on his side and threw out his arm, only to feel a warm body underneath his hold as it landed not on the mattress, but someone, indeed.

Instantly, at the feeling of a smaller body sleeping quite close to him, Schmidt opened his eyes in shock and let them widen at the sight of none other than Elise Stevens herself, sleeping with just underwear and a flannel on — which Schmidt presumed to belong to himself.

Several dozen thoughts burst into his mind and he went through each possibility, weighing the chances and trying his very best to think about the previous night, but when nothing came up and another minute with his arm around Elise's waist and his eyes glued to the somewhat revealed, beautiful body had passed by, Schmidt quickly jumped up from the bed and tried to be as quiet as only humanly possible.

Bursting from his bedroom, Schmidt ran to the kitchen where all of his roommates were sitting and sipping on coffee, eyebrows knitting together at their neurotic friend, who seemed rather shaken by something they did not yet know, but knowing Schmidt, they would soon. And they weren't wrong. In a loss of words, Schmidt pointed his finger towards the door of his room, jaw dropping, but nothing came out as he stared at the counter with utmost shock written all over his face as if he had been struck with a shovel.

"Friends, Winston — it is possible I slept with Elise last night", he finally revealed, and the reactions were exactly what he had expected — Nick spat out his coffee, while Jess let out a doubtful "Whaaaat?" and Winston raised his hand in order to high-five his friend. Schmidt gave a disapproving glare to Winston, but eventually it faded away and became replaced with a smug grin, before he smacked his hand together with his friend's and silently celebrated the fact that he had done what he had wanted. Yet it felt hollow somehow.

"I just—I don't remember a thing! I bet it was amazing. But I was too intoxicated and now, it's just... blank. And dear god, I hate it", Schmidt smacked his fist against the table, the shock on his features turning into annoyance. Jess shook her head, still in disbelief, and with that she strode over to the door of Schmidt's room and quietly peeked in to confirm that the known ladies' man wasn't just lying for a show, but telling the truth, which seemed rather real. Jess gasped and clasped her palm against her mouth at the sight of Elise on the sheets, clutching one of the many pillows against her chest while soundly sleeping with a peaceful, dreamy look on her features.

Jess turned back to Schmidt, and closed the door before running over to the man and hitting his arms with her small, but angry fists due to being profoundly disappointed in him. They had found a great friend, and it was very likely Schmidt had screwed it up just because he couldn't keep it in his pants. And for that, he earned all the punches Jess delivered on a continuous loop until Schmidt managed to sneak away, behind Nick who led his hands in order to bring peace into the kitchen that was being taken over by the frustration and angry tension.

"Douchebag jar! All of your money, into the jar, now!", Jess hissed, trying to keep quiet to let the girl in Schmidt's room sleep, and feeling nothing but sympathy and compassion towards poor Elise, who had fallen into Schmidt's traps. The man chuckled from behind Nick, and shook his head, but walked towards the jar nonetheless, though before putting in any money, he turned to face his friends with an amused look.

"Not all of my money. Five bucks, at the most. Besides, it was the heat of the moment, alright? Get over it", Schmidt smirked, even if he wasn't able to get over it himself, if anything, he was feeling like the luckiest man on Earth, but attempted to hide it as he looked down and dug up five dollars from the pocket of his kimono, and then mushed them into the jar. Jess groaned loudly, clearly unhappy with the situation, but it was understandable. Winston wasn't too happy either, because he had thought he was getting a new, great friend but knowing Schmidt, there was a large chance they'd never see Elise in the long again. It was his style — sleeping with women and then throwing them away like old socks.

Jess rolled her eyes and pushed the glasses up her nose before crossing her arms and offering Schmidt a displeased look. "Don't quote Asia to me. That alone means another five for the jar", the woman demanded, and whilst he did as had been ordered, the door of his bedroom opened and a shy looking Elise stepped out awkwardly, fiddling with the hem of her shirt as she approached the kitchen counter. Schmidt's eyes widened, and all the things he had thought of saying went down the drain along with his confidence, because of the natural beauty, who blushed under the many stares and looked down to avoid eye contact with the people surrounding her.

"Morning, El. Coffee?", Winston was the first one to speak and break the thick, awkward silence in the room, but instead of kindly accepting, Elise shook her head.

"I hate coffee", she admitted with a faint smile, "I prefer tea." Jess smiled at her words, considering she loved tea too, and the woman gladly offered Elise some. Soon enough, the bunch had fallen into silence again and it was obvious why, and it only made things ten times more awkward and unbearable for Elise, who hated social interactions in general. And there she was, for everyone to judge and stare at, after staying the night in Schmidt's room — who, by the way, didn't bother to say a word to ease the embarrassing atmosphere.

When Elise had finished her tea, she got up and thanked them for the hospitality. "I should get back to the shop, you know, I'm opening in a few hours and all that. Thanks again, maybe I'll see you soon?", she spoke softly, directing a smile to each and every one of them, but before walking out of the apartment for good, she looked at Schmidt as if she meant to say something, but neither of them had the time to speak a single word, when she had already left and shut the door behind her. Schmidt's heart leaped at the eye contact he kept replaying in his mind, looking back to the small, silent gestures that happened between him and Elise, and trying his damn best to remember everything that happened last night only to be wonderfully disappointed. It was safe to say, he regretted getting so drunk.

Swallowing medicine to help the hangover, Schmidt sighed heavily. "I bet it was like heaven", he stated quietly, earning another swat in his arm from Jess. But frankly, even if he was forced to shut up about it, it was all the man could think of. He had possibly hit the jackpot.

Elise's head hurt, and she was tired and all she wished for was the day to be over so she could watch The Vampire Diaries and eat popcorn, her comfort food for hangovers, even though hers wasn't so bad. She hadn't gotten too drunk, though considering they had played a drinking game, becoming a bit tipsy was inevitable. And a bit tipsy had led her into Schmidt's bed, which, admittedly had been comfortable and the best sleep she had had in a long time, but now, she had to work for the next twelve hours and as much as she enjoyed seeing people come to her shop, she couldn't wait for closing time.

Bon Jovi was quietly playing from the speakers to create a vibe in the store, and Elise was humming along the music while tapping her pen against a notebook she was using to write down ideas for the store, or occasionally, it was for daydreaming about Schmidt. Perhaps it was time for her to accept the fact that she was really into him, even though she didn't know him very well yet, but despite having a kimono as leisure wear and a douchebag jar just for him, he was something great. Even if he was, at times, cocky and nothing like Elise, there was something more to him, she was certain of it and that, along with the undeniable charm and incredibly attractive smiles he kept sending her way, was why she had grown fond of him and his company.

The bell above the door rang once, twice, as another customer walked in, and Elise found the strength to look up from her notebook, and through the thick lenses of her glasses she saw Winston, much to her delight. A wide smile appeared to her lips and she straightened her back whilst closing the notebook, and waving at Winston, who glanced around the shop but ended up walking to the young woman working behind the counter. There was something about Winston that made smiling inevitable and impossible to resist for her — perhaps it was the general kindness, or the contagious smile on his own lips, but nevertheless, she liked him. Just as a friend, of course, but liked anyway.

"What's up, Ellie? Look, I was kind of wondering... I don't mean to pry, but is there something going on with you and Schmidt?", Winston blurted once he was resting against the counter, surprising the woman entirely, and as the unexpected question hit her, she fell from her office stool and landed on the floor. Winston's eyes widened, and he looked over the counter to make sure the woman wasn't injured, but as she quickly scrambled up to both feet and assured that she was okay, he relaxed, however it didn't mean the end of the awkwardness. If anything, it was only about to rise.

Elise blew her hair out of her face and laughed nervously while shaking her head and giving Winston odd looks, as if he was a crazy person for even asking that. "Schmidt? And me? Puh. Nah. Nope. He has a very... nice... face, but uh, that doesn't mean anything", Elise muttered and glanced down nervously, afraid to look Winston in the eyes, but much to her shock, he didn't laugh. He just smiled, and even then, it was fond and not mocking or amused. And for once, Elise felt safe in the presence of someone else than her mom, or the bunny she had when she was six years old. Winston was a genuinely nice person, and as Elise came to realize this, she slowly looked up and met a pair of deep eyes with a glimmer of fondness in them, which made her smile a bit.

"A nice face? I'm pretty unlucky in love myself, but to me, it seems you have some serious feelings for our Schmidt", Winston suggested with a slight nudge against Elise's arm, causing the girl to blush as she bit her bottom lip and craved to shake her head in disagreement, but perhaps then she would have lied. "Besides, you two did sleep together, so there's that", the man added boldly, earning a thoroughly dismayed expression from Elise, who nearly choked on her own tongue. Eyes widening, and jaw dropping, Elise stared at Winston, who seemed equally surprised by his new friend's reaction, both unsure what was happening now.

"W—What? What? I—I did—I did not sleep with— with Schmidt! Gosh..." Elise turned red and avoided eye contact with Winston, utter embarrassment dawning onto her as she considered the image which Winston had painted for her. Perhaps it wasn't the idea of it — admittedly, it had crossed Elise's mind once or twice during the few days she had known the residents of 4D for — but the fact that Winston had stated it so casually. It had never happened, yet Winston seemed to know things Elise didn't, and hadn't experienced.

"But Schmidt said... Oh Ohhh, so you and Schmidt didn't have sex last night?", Winston smiled smugly, and Elise rapidly shook her head with shock still written all over her face. "Sorry for the misunderstanding, El", he added, and the woman assured it was alright, even though the thought quite never left her head entirely. Nonetheless, she smiled, especially when Winston grabbed a Snickers bar from the box resting on the counter, and insisted on showing the store his support, before paying for the chocolate and then stepping towards the exit.

"Hit me up whenever you want to, El. And you're always welcome in the long, too", Winston smiled, and with that, he was gone.

From then on, a quiet phase began, and only a few people stopped by the shop for a few hours, but Elise was completely fine with that, because at least she had time to daydream some more, and imagine all the things she and Schmidt would do together.

Yeah, maybe she did have a thing for him after all.