



CHAPTER FOUR

"CALM DOWN, ELISE. It's okay. Winston said you're always welcome", Elise was preparing herself for what was potentially the bravest thing she had done — walking over to lo 4D and making herself comfortable, like she had been told to do several times. She was their friend now, and she had the permission to hang in the apartment, yet the thought of it was wonderfully nerve-racking and built anxiety within her. Unloading her nervousness into the fast steps around the hallway, Elise considered the many possibilities, and how she could be kicked out, and wondered if Winston had misspoken and meant that she wasn't always welcome. Therefore, perhaps, it would be the best to turn around and leave, and come with an invitation instead of spontaneously bursting in. Because, frankly, Elise was not a spontaneous person. Nor a brave one.

Already about to take a step towards the elevator, the very same li stopped with a ping, and she froze to the spot as Nick and Jess came out laughing at each other. Only when they noticed Elise standing there with wide eyes and a face drained of color, they ceased their laughter, and Nick threw his arm over Elise's shoulder to guide her towards the front door of their apartment in the assumption that the woman's intentions were to visit — which they were, until she grew too fearful and decided to back away. But now, at least she didn't have to come alone, when Nick and Jess were more or less pushing her indoors and that meant her presence was desired, which again delighted her.

"Ellie! How are you?", Nick asked as the three of them entered the apartment, and the young woman shrugged shyly whilst looking around the already familiar surroundings. From the couch, Winston greeted his friends and directed a smile to Elise, who returned it, but truth be told, she couldn't help but wonder about Schmidt's whereabouts.

"I'm fine. The shop is closed today so I thought I could stop by, if that's okay", Elise answered Nick's question, with a careful smile li ing her pink lips, and all three nodded their heads in agreement, assuring that it was more than okay. Elise smiled a bit more, glad to know these people liked her so much, because she did have a shortage of friends, but now it seemed she had found the best ones yet.

"Of course!", Jess smiled, but a er glancing around, she leaned closer to Elise with an apologetic look. "It's just— I don't know where Schmidt is at the moment, so...", the woman shrugged, and Elise had already opened her mouth to protest and explain that she wasn't there for Schmidt only, that there was nothing between the two, but before she could have the chance to do so, Schmidt himself appeared from his bedroom and marched straight over to Elise, who was le with an open mouth, devoid of words and common sense as she stared into those dreamy eyes of his.

Jess shut her mouth, and so did everyone else, just stared at the two as they looked into each other's eyes, silence falling into the room and along with it, great tension, which was impossible to read and therefore caused Elise to grow nervous. She couldn't interpret the situation, nor the observing look on Schmidt's face, but luckily, the silence lasted for a couple of seconds only, and then, the man spoke and much to Elise's shock, linked his arm with hers.

"Elise, are you busy? No? Good, come to the bar with me", Schmidt stated simply, and whilst Jess' eyes widened and Elise opened her mouth to disagree, the man had already led her to the front door. She wanted to disagree so terribly much, but the hold he had on her was too good to weasel out of, and the temptation to go with too large to resist, and therefore, instead of pulling away and refusing to leave with him, she merely doubted his intentions and the location they were heading to.

"The— The bar? What bar? Why?", Elise asked several questions, none of which were answered, and a er she managed to shoot Jess a fearful look as a cry for help, she was taken out of the lo and waves were o ered to her as the door shut. Once they had reached the elevator, Schmidt let go and mentioned how he wished to remain reasonable and lower the possibility of looking like a stalker kidnapping an innocent woman, which admittedly made Elise choke a laughter and mask it with an awkward cough fit. Schmidt noticed though, and he desperately tried to hide a proud smile, but that didn't go unseen either.

Although Elise was a bit scared of what was about to come, she admitted to herself that perhaps they needed to talk about things. Things that she wasn't entirely sure of, but if Winston had lived in the belief that they had slept together, God only knew how many more did. And what if Schmidt was one of those people? He did get rather drunk a few nights ago, and he woke up with a woman in his bed, so maybe the first thing to pop into his mind was sex. And, granted, she was wearing his flannel, but that was only because she didn't wish to sleep in her clothes, and Schmidt had kindly o ered to give him one of his shirts. How could she decline?

The way to the bar Schmidt had mentioned was quiet and awkward, just like Elise, but once they were seated with drinks in front of them — Schmidt ordered some fancy drink, while Elise settled for orange tea — he wasted no time in formalities, just got straight to the point, but Elise liked that. Even if the following minutes would be awkward as hell, she did prefer talking about something real instead of lame chit chat about the weather or something like that, as conversating in general was one of her greatest weaknesses and she quickly ran out of things to say, topics to ignite. But Schmidt was the opposite, he was brave and social, not afraid to voice his opinion, and that was perhaps where they di ered the most, yet Elise couldn't help but admire that about him. Well, that and the ability to hide his insecurities and troubles, which Elise could tell he harbored.

It was easy for a troubled person to recognize another, you could say.

"So, I thought we should talk about... You know, about thenight. The fact that we, well, uh, we had sex", Schmidt began, with a smile on his face as if the topic was his preferred one, as if he was proud that it had happened. Except that it never did, and that smile was being boosted by a lie. Something Elise didn't want to tell him, because the mere thought of it was painfully awkward, but she couldn't let him live in the belief that something had actually happened between them. Frankly, perhaps she hoped for that, perhaps she liked the idea of something happening between them, but so far, nothing had. And that caused the sad, shy smile on her lips as she shook her head and then dropped her gaze from Schmidt to her cup of tea to avoid the possibly heartbroken look she could already imagine on his face.

"What do you mean no? Obviously we should talk about it, Elise. I get that it's weird but—", Schmidt continued and knitted his eyebrows together in confusion, trying to push Elise into accepting and embracing the facts, but the sad truth was, the situation was the opposite. She knew the facts, he didn't.

"No, I mean... I mean nothing happened between us, Schmidt. I was tired so I fell asleep in your bed, that's it, I'm sorry", Elise explained, feeling a tad overwhelmed for speaking so many words at once, but the bewilderment towards herself soon faded and became replaced with sympathy she couldn't help but feel for Schmidt, who tried his best to smile but failed. Elise didn't take it personally, she had learned from Jess, and Nick, and Winston too, that Schmidt was a well known ladies' man and the list of women he had slept with was possibly longer than Elise's letter to Santa Claus when she was younger. So, she didn't assume she was special in any way, though she didn't quite understand the sadness visible on Schmidt's face either, considering he had a fair amount of ladies so why should losing one be so overwhelming?

"Well, okay then. I guess there's a bright side to this — I can take five bucks out of the jar now", Schmidt grinned, and Elise's heart sank like an anvil had been dropped onto it, and along went her faint smile as she repeated his words in her mind. Schmidt took a sip of his drink, and Elise wanted to do the same and taste her tea again, but instead she just stared at the man, unsure how to feel about what he had said.

"I'm worth five bucks?", she chuckled and looked down, a bit insulted to be honest. She knew Schmidt had put much more money into the jar in the past, and somehow she had expected herself to be worth more than five bucks. Winston had told her how Schmidt had to put money in the Douchebag Jar for sleeping with Elise, and she had felt flattered, until now. Frankly, learning that she seemed to have no value, and that she was merely another girl to fool around with for Schmidt, hurt her like she was stabbed straight into the heart and it was pain she hadn't felt in a long time. Maybe she had been foolish to let Schmidt in, and think she actually meant something. Maybe she had made a mistake, growing a full-blown crush on him and everything.

"Well, yeah", Schmidt admitted, about to confess and assure that she was worth all of his money, worth more than the stars and the moon, carried more value than pure gold or diamonds, but instead all that came out was, "I mean, it's just... you", which quite honestly, shattered Elise's heart. It wasn't his intention, nor did he, but in order to keep his feelings under control and claim that he wasn't into Elise, he forced himself to lie. That little white lie just happened to come out unnecessarily rude, but it was beyond repair, and Elise was already getting up.

"Yeah, that seems to be the problem every time. And I think you should leave the five bucks in the jar", Elise smiled as sarcastically as she only could, but considering she was one of those nice, kind people the world was in a shortage of, it came out somewhat polite. That was her problem, every single time. She was too nice, too friendly and unable to be rude, even for her own protection. She let people in, and in the end, she just got hurt. And she had barely known Schmidt for a couple of days, and he had already done that.

Elise was about to leave, when Schmidt holding her, Schmidt hand and stop her from walking out on him. Holding her, Schmidt pulled her to himself until they were facing each other, although he was still seated by the bar, but nevertheless, it caused Elise's cheeks to burn as she avoided eye contact with her best attempts. Obviously, she failed, and ended up looking right at Schmidt, who showed signs of compassion with a sadness and sympathy twisting his features into an apologetic expression.

"Wait— El, what do you mean that's the problem every time?", Schmidt asked, trying to smile a bit to lighten up the mood but once she saw the look on Elise's face, signifying standing right at the verge of tears, he got more serious. Elise was a sensitive person for sure, and the subject of her ex-boyfriend was always going to be touchy, like a fresh, exposed wound, even if months had passed. But nothing quite hurt like knowing you weren't good enough did. It was unbelievable, indescribable pain, beyond aching and all the way through immense, mental torture to realize that she hadn't done enough. She was just Elise, nothing more. Nothing special.

It was her huge insecurity of hers, being the way she was, and Schmidt had hit her right in the sensitive spot.

"My boyfriend. He, uh, he le me, because apparently, I have no life. I'm just... a sad nerd. Isn't that what you expected the owner to be? Well, you weren't wrong — I like a lot of bands and fictional characters and I may or may not know the whole script of Captain America: The Winter Soldier by heart, and he le me because of that. So yeah, I'm just me", Elise explained, unable to hold back the gush of words. She wasn't used to saying so much, she was just the quiet shy girl in the back of the room, but indeed, it was a touchy subject and Schmidt had downright poked it. And from the look on his face, she could tell he carried deep regret, and was looking for the right words to mend the situation, but knowing Elise, she'd end up forgiving him anyway.

Schmidt shook his head, and sank his teeth into his bottom lip in annoyance. "That guy? Look, I may have a Douchebag Jar, but I sincerely think he should look a whole damn bucket", he spat, and despite the common sense within her, Elise let out a small laugh and looked down at her awkwardly shu ling feet. Schmidt dropped his hold on her hand, a gesture which had already felt so right, so warm and familiar that Elise had forgotten all about it. Now that they no longer touched each other like that, she felt like something was missing.

"Elise, I'm sorry. You're really... You're great. I shouldn't have said that about you. Can we please start from the beginning? No getting drunk or anything, yeah?", Schmidt suggested with a hopeful look in his eyes, and Elise had barely opened her mouth when he had already continued. "Look, how about this — I'll make it up to you. You clearly need someone, a guy, so I'll help you. Who knows, maybe you're going home with someone tonight, huh?", he grinned, and for a second, Elise was shocked that he would even suggest such a thing, but then she understood that, A) she didn't mind the idea of some company, B) she probably couldn't have Schmidt anyway, and C) she was entirely unable to do it all by herself.

So, even if it was a potential mistake, Elise grabbed the hand Schmidt was o ering, and with a smile tugging up her lips, she nodded.

"Deal."

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ugh, cuties

okay this is only the fourth chapter but i'm already emotional because i don't want this book to end, ever?? but i'm probably ending this around chapter 20, 25? and i'm already working on chapter fi een, helP.

also, i've fallen into this routine of publishing a new chapter a er two days, so yeah, you can expect updates 2-3 times per week (:

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