

Her smirk

I knew she was trouble and chaos. I could tell just by the smirk of her pursed lips every time she thought she was getting away with something. But despite being a good spotter of a lie or a trick, I was not a good guesser, and I did not know what she was hiding. I couldn't have known. I couldn't have stopped it. Could I?

It all started in June, almost a year ago. Marta had just moved from Cologne to Bonn to start her master's in economics. After three years getting her bachelor in Cologne, she wanted a calmer city to connect with herself again... but mostly to get away from Jasper. They had been broken up over five months, and although she was the one who broke things off, Jasper was more than happy to move on with his life and start dating again just a week later.

So, she moved in with me. We had been online friends since 2013, when we connected over my Harry Styles fan account on Twitter. After that, we met a couple of times either in Bonn or Cologne and always got along well. When she told me she was applying to Bonn, I offered her a room at my place.

I remember the first night she slept at the apartment like it was yesterday. We had spent the entire day assembling her furniture and organizing her closet. The room was coming together nicely, so we ordered some pizza, had some wine, and put on some music. We decided to open the slide doors to the balcony and enjoyed the summer air. It was around nine. The breeze coming in was still warm and somehow very refreshing too. We were both wearing Nike shorts and sports bras. All of it belonged to me since Marta had arrived at the apartment in a floral summer dress. Not the appropriate attire for moving day.

My pepperoni pizza tasted straight out of heaven after the busy day, and I assume her vegan pizza tasted about as good as a vegan pizza can taste.

"Are you excited that I'm moving in or are you already having second thoughts?" – she asked with a provocative look on her face. She was clearly not expecting a negative answer on my part.

I laughed. "I think I'm alright with this. If you don't steal any more of my clothes".

"Are you jealous they look better on me?" – She asked again in that provocative tone.

"Honey, the day you look better than me in anything is the day the world ends." I tried to sound convincing, but even a child could have spotted the lack of intent behind my counterstrike. Marta was, in fact, a beautiful person. I am not one to focus too much on looks, but, for her, I always made it a point to take a mental note of how freakishly gorgeous she

was. Her parents were from the Philopenas, and, despite spending most of the year in Germany, she looked like she had just arrived from a month on holidays at the beach. Her hair was wavy and dark with golden highlights and her eyes seemed to always be smiling. Even tired and sweaty, she was more beautiful than any other person I had ever met.

“You’re more beautiful than you give yourself credit for, you know? Cutting that hair would a good place to start.” Her comment caught me off guard. She wasn’t really one to give out compliments, so felt honored to be at the receiving end of one.

“You’re nice. Not as nice as you want people to believe, but still nice.” She laughed at my comment. We both knew it was true, though I doubt she would have been willing to admit to it. She prided herself on her “open” and “welcoming” personality and her ability to get along with everyone. No one can get along with everyone unless you make a point of it.

By that point, our wine bottle was empty. She asked: “What else do you, I mean “we”, have there to drink on a Friday night?”. When I said we didn’t have anything, she insisted we go out and get really drunk. “That’s the only proper way to celebrate anything when you’re under thirty. Unless it’s a pregnancy, in which case, not even drinking can save you. Let’s go, loser!”

We stripped from our moving attires and Marta was quick to pick out two of the shortest dresses I have ever seen in my life out of her closet for us to wear. “I wore your stupid moving attire, which I’m super thankful for btw.” She added with practically no hesitation. “So now, you have to wear the appropriate hot girl party attire.” I don’t think I looked too convinced in that moment, because she quickly said “It’s only fair, Louise.” With that, I was convinced. I don’t know if I should blame it on the half bottle of wine I had had or the excitement of her moving in or the best pizza ever, but I went with her. And I will forever wish I hadn’t.

As we were leaving the building, I noticed her smirk. The one I saw every time she was plotting something. I never knew what it was and, often, nothing too catastrophically horrible came of it. What came out was however, exactly what she wanted. Every time.

I ignored it though, because I figured she was just proud of herself for having convinced me to go out. And maybe that’s all it was. Maybe she never meant for what went down to happen. Why would she?

We ended up at a club near the bus station, where I had taken her on one of her visits to Bonn. It was still around eleven and the club was beginning to fill up. We were standing in line to get in when suddenly I heard a voice that sounds like Jaspers. I thought I was

dreaming until I saw Marta's green eyes open as wide as they could. "Fuck." I muttered, before sadly making eye contact with Marta's ex.

He was just as surprised to see us and there was a hint of horror in his eyes. He managed to swiftly hide it though and was soon smiling and coming our way. At that moment, I realized how that guy and Marta had a lot more in common than I thought. Anyone could see how handsome the man was and how they made a jaw-dropping match, but his general approach to life and ability to get along with people, was also very similar to that of my new roommate.

In a matter of seconds, he was hugging both of us in a bear-group-hug type of thing and, thankfully for me, I did not seem to be the only one extremely uncomfortable with the situation. Even these two masters of disguise and social butterflies were not being able to hide how uncomfortable that was.

The awkward silence that ensued was harshly interrupted, when Marta swung at him: "I didn't expect to see you in Bonn, of all places. But it is great to see you! Tell me: which one of your new plethora of sluts are you visiting tonight?"

I started laughing at that. Sometimes I forgot how brutal my friend could be and, honestly, I loved it. I was not often fake to people or pretended to get along with someone, I didn't like. But I could never be as cut-throat and straight-up as she was. To my dismay, Jasper started laughing too. "I was honestly kind of excited to see you, especially looking this good, but I'm glad you're still acting like you were before. You see, I forgot how much of a crazy bitch you are." And then he turned to me: "Did she move in with you?" I nodded. "If you're as smart as she always says you are, run away. She cheated on me, and then accused me of being the cheater. She kidnapped my dog and crashed my car and now she followed me to Bonn. I bet she told you she was trying to get away from me, but I've been living here for three months now, trying to get away from her." Suddenly, I see Marta's hand slam against the side of his face. I was quick enough to hold her arm back and stop a second strike. He closed his eyes for a second and then turned back to face Marta "I really hope I never see you again." And then he left.

I did not know what to say. I was still holding her arm when she twisted it to be face to face with me. That's when she started crying and laid her head on my chest. I let go of her arm and hugged her. When I looked up, I saw everyone else standing in line was staring at us and I really felt the need to get out of there. Grabbing Marta again by the arm, I pulled her all the way back to our apartment. I did not turn my head back once to face her and she did not try to pull away from my grasp.

Back at the apartment, I could barely look at her. I knew those things he said couldn't be true. He was lying, trying to isolate her. She slapped him. She had to. He wouldn't stop lying. But she still slapped him. Maybe he wasn't lying. Was I used?

"Was I used?" I asked in the calmest tone of voice I could muster.

"What?" She seemed surprised by my enquire. "Was I used, Marta? Did you use me?". She didn't reply. I continued, this time louder: "Did you use me to move here and follow your ex-boyfriend, who you just assaulted?". Still no response. I was finally able to really look at her face. Her eyes, that were always so full of life and joy, were now empty. Not even sad or disappointed or scared. Just empty. It was the first time in our long friendship that I felt I did not know her. In front of me, there was a stranger standing. An apathetic stranger who refused to enlighten me on what was happening to my friend.

I pushed further: "What happened, Marta? How did this happen? How did you end up in Bonn, where he lives? Did you cheat on him? Did you hurt his dog?"

She finally broke down and started to cry. I saw her crumble completely as she tried to speak through the tears. "He beat me up. So I cheated on him. It was the only way to hurt his ego and get him to leave me. He also beat up the dog, so I took him with me when I left."

"I just saw you slap him, Marta" I answered. "Because he already turned everyone in Cologne against me. He was about to do the same to you and I just couldn't let him. I left Cologne because there is nothing left for me there. And I had no idea he was here. Please don't leave me as well. I promise I am telling you the truth. I know I should have told you about all the reasons I moved here, but I wasn't ready to talk about the abuse yet."

I wanted to believe her, I did. But there was that smirk. Even through the tears, I could see it. She thought she was getting away with it. I felt a shiver go through my spine, as I realized I would never get the truth from her. After breathing deep, I told her I believed her story and how sorry I was that she was a victim of abuse. She sat me down on her bed and started telling me detailed stories of times Jasper beat her up. She was crying though it all and I really wanted to believe her, but I didn't. I still hugged her and let her fall asleep in my arms. It was two in the morning when I slid her over, so she wasn't laying on top of me and I went to my room. The stories I had heard were horrifying and the last thing I wanted to do, was exactly I did. I texted Jasper. He replied right away. I figured he was probably expecting to hear from me after what went down. He offered to meet up with me the next day and give me his side of the story and I agreed to do so at a coffee place 10 minutes away from the apartment. Despite the adrenaline from the events of that night and the arrangement of my secret meeting with Marta's alleged abuser, I fell asleep almost immediately.

When I woke up the next day, all the curtains in my room were open, since I had forgotten to close them the night before. I was getting adjusted to the light, so I couldn't be sure, but I thought I saw Marta putting my phone down. She was definitely in the room though and seemed to have been for a bit, but she played it off as if she had woken me up by coming in. "Oh hey, did I wake you? I just wanted to ask if you need anything from the supermarket. I'm going there now." I nodded no and she left the room without even mentioning the night before.

I got up and looked at my phone. I was to meet Jasper in 20 minutes, so I quickly got dressed and heard Marta leave the house 5 minutes before me.

Jasper was already waiting for me when I got there and suddenly, I felt remorseful. I was about to hear out the guy who beat up my roommate. But I couldn't help but feel Marta had not told me the truth.

When I approached his table, Jasper seemed content to see me but also very nervous. "Thank you for meeting me. Marta didn't follow you, did she?". I said she left the house before me and that seemed to calm him down a bit. He went on: "What I told you yesterday is the truth. Marta cheated on me, several times in fact. But then she'd always accuse me of cheating on her, which I never did. She also hit me. There's police records of it and I have filed for a restraining order, but I sadly didn't get it, since they didn't believe I wouldn't be able to defend myself, if she attacked me. I have been trying to get away from her for months. I broke things up and moved, but now she's here. And I don't know what to do. I know this is hard to believe, but you must have noticed something is off with her."

I didn't know what to say. I didn't know who to believe and who to trust.

And that's when I saw her. Marta was staring at me from the other side of the street. She looked mad and sad and disappointed. And that's when I looked down at her hand and when I saw it.

She started running in our direction. Jasper followed my gaze and screamed when he saw her and when he saw it. He was starting to get up, but it was too late. In just a split second she was on top of him, and she was striking him with it. It was a knife. My knife. From my apartment. It was now in him. She kept going and kept striking him and I was just standing there. I was too terrified to stop her and too terrified to run. So, I watched my friend and roommate continue to stab a man with my knife.

And then, as quickly as she had begun, she stopped. And she looked straight up into my eyes and smirked. That smirk that was sure to get her what she wanted. And for the first time, I understood what her smirk meant. I was next.