

OF ALL THE BURGER BARS IN ALL THE TOWNS ...

DARKNESS & LIGHT CHAPTERS 12/13: SEAN'S POV

Following is an excerpt from chapters 12 & 13 of Darkness & Light: The burger bar scene. This one was definitely a lot of fun. I hope you enjoy.

O-O-O-O-O-O-O-O-O-O-O-O-O

“Think we’ll get bollocked for detouring for food, Sean?” Dan asked as we hopped from the pickup.

Josh, Dan and I had been sent out for mastic and screws whilst we waited on a brick delivery.

“Nah.” I rolled my shoulders and stretched out my spine. “Not so long as we take some back for the others.”

As usual, our stomachs had gotten in the way of doing the simple there-and-back.

“Good, because I’m starved,” Josh said, already on the move toward the burger bar.

As I padded after him, my nostrils flared with my discreet inhalations—a natural instinct for a werewolf—one my two pack brothers probably mimicked, in search of undesirable scents.

The only smells that blasted my senses, though, came from the greasy food we headed for, and the dull odour of engines and oil from all the parked vehicles and those passing by on the road.

Sunlight reflected at me from the many windows of the burger bar, obscuring some of the occupants within. Dan reached the door first and hauled it open, stepping into the

foyer in time to rescue an old biddy with her misbehaving shopping trolley stuck in the inner entrance.

With a muttered, “Thank you, young man,” the woman rolled on past us, the wheels of her dodgy contraption squeaking like crazy.

Once she’d exited, the three of us bustled into the restaurant to be greeted by a blast of conditioned air.

Dan and Josh marched ahead, their slight head tilts telling me they observed as they walked.

As I trailed behind, a prickling sensation that didn’t seem to have anything to do with the remnants of chilled air raced over my skin.

I halted.

My eyes narrowed.

A twist to the right revealed a couple females kitted out in the most Godawful gear I’d ever laid eyes on.

Turn to the left and all oxygen vacated my body.

In a chair, in the left corner by the window, slouched over a pad, she scribbled in with an intensity I’d spent the last eight years dreaming about.

There, sat a female I recognised enough to set my pulse soaring.

I didn’t know how long I’d stood staring when Josh smacked my shoulder. “Hey.” His gaze drifted to where my sights had been aimed. “Checking out the locals?”

“It’s her,” I muttered.

“Who?”

“The one I told you about.” The female who’d participated in dreams I’d spent eight years worth of evenings looking forward to. The female whose name came up whenever pack history got discussed and who any werewolf worth their salt would have heard of.

The female I'd spotted in a supermarket only days earlier and hadn't the bottle to approach. "Jem," I whispered.

Josh's eyebrows winged up. "What? You kidding me?"

I shook my head, my attention returning to the blonde hair falling forward across her face. After only a few ticks of studying her, I knew I'd never allow a second chance to slip by. Surely, only a total muppet wouldn't recognise a sign when smacked upside the head by it—twice. "Give me a few minutes, okay?" Without waiting for his answer, I weaved through the tables until I reached the female's.

She didn't look up. Didn't even seem to acknowledge my arrival. With her free hand curled into a tight fist, and her brow drawn tight, her arms twitched just below the shoulders as she continued to write.

I took a moment to inhale ... *Jesus* ... and my lids almost fluttered closed. Reassured my olfactory drew the same conclusion as my sight, that it definitely was her and I wouldn't be making a total idiot of myself, I slid out the chair opposite her and sank my rear down.

Still, I didn't warrant so much as a glance from her. Either, whatever she wrote took all her concentration, or she simply didn't give a damn about my being there.

I guessed I could have talked to her ... *Yeah, go on, I dare you* ... but she seemed lost, so deep in whatever she wrote, I doubted she'd even have heard me if I did.

I sent a backward glance toward Dan and Josh, where they'd settled into a couple of seats.

The pair of them waved me forward, Dan mouthing '*Talk to her*' with a jerk of his chin.

I turned back.

Their waves and silent communication escalated into hissed mumbles.

I wanted to tell them to shut the hell up but knew that wouldn't exactly endear me to the female if she caught me mid-growl. Instead, I nudged closer, the feet of my chair scratching across the floor until my knee brushed against hers beneath the table.

Her eyes flickered upward.

I held my breath, bracing for discovery.

Without even seeming to register my presence, her gaze headed south again, her hand still sweeping the pen across her notebook.

A slight tip of my head to the left allowed me to see her face through her trailing hair. I followed the soft curve of her chin, of her cheeks, but the downward cast of her lashes hid what I really wanted to see: her eyes. "What are you writing?" I asked before I could stop myself.

Her pen paused—but only for a second before rolling once more across the page.

At least I'd gotten a reaction, if only a small one. Encouraged, I asked, "Aren't you going to tell me?"

Her hand stopped moving again. "It's a record."

Although she didn't look up, my sigh eased out at the sound of her voice. Definitely ... *definitely* the same female I'd seen, heard and smelled in the supermarket. Which made her, for sure, the female from my dreams. I swallowed and asked, "What about?"

"Dreams I've been having." Her brow creased slightly. "It's a record of a story within my dreams."

Dreams? Wondering if they were anything like mine, I smiled. "So . . . are you in your story, then?"

Though her face remained dipped, I caught the twitch of her lips. "Obviously, if they're my dreams I'm writing about."

I breathed out a quiet laugh. "What do you dream about?"

She wrote a little more before shrugging. “Werewolves.”

My amusement vanished, and my breaths stalled at the almost iron-clad confirmation—like I needed it. How did I respond to that, though, without scaring her the hell away? “Do you have many dreams about werewolves?” *Stupid question.*

She nodded slowly. “They’re almost always about werewolves—have been my entire life.”

My body seemed frozen stiff like I feared the slightest movement would snap her round and she’d realise who she spoke to and the answers would cease to come. I licked my lips. “So, if the story is about you, what’s the name of the heroine?” Not for the first time, I held my breath as I waited to see if she’d answer.

“I think *heroine* is a major overstatement,” she said. “But if you want to know what *my* name is, maybe you should just ask.”

My chuckle bubbled from me at her *so-Jem* response. “If I ask your name, will you tell me?”

No reply, other than the heave of her chest.

“Is there a hero in your story?” I asked after a brief silence.

“Sean isn’t a hero. He’s a pain in the arse.”

“Sean,” I said, my lips reclaiming their upward curve. “Sorry, what did you say the heroine’s name was?”

“My name’s Jem.”

Oh, hell to the yes! I wanted to punch the air or something equally ridiculous but forced myself to remain calm. “Jem? Not Jemma, or Jemima?”

“Just Jem,” she said.

My sigh gushed out like I hadn't breathed in an hour. "That's because you're born in June, right, after the star sign, Gemini?" Though her shoulders stiffened, I pushed on. "The twins ...? Two sides to the same person?"

Her head made a slow tilt upward.

The instant those eyes of hers came into full view, the dark depths of sapphire blue slammed me to the spot.

Her gaze met mine before dropping to my mouth.

My smile arrived as wonky as hell with the major dose of stupid coursing through me, but no matter the effort, I couldn't seem to set my damn lips straight. When she still just stared, unspeaking, barely moving, I rubbed a hand across my hair.

Her attention shifted and tracked its path, landing somewhere north of my face, and her heartbeat suddenly pounded loud enough to be heard over the background music of the restaurant's radio. Lowering her feet to the floor, she sat up straighter. She scanned the room, her eyes narrowing for a split second before she turned back to me. "What did you just say?"

"Gemini." I swallowed down some trying-to-escape saliva. "You're called Jem because of your star sign. You *are* Jem Stonehouse . . ." ... *has to be* ... "... aren't you?"
Please say you are, please say you are.

Her heart thudded even louder, and her brow folded even deeper. "Do I know you?"

"I really hope you do,"—*God, do I hope you do*—"otherwise I'm making a complete fool of myself."

"Who are you?"

I gave her my best smile, like that alone could convince her. "My name's Sean, Jem." My smile widened—I probably looked a total goon. "I'm Sean."

Her eyes widened. Her pen fell from her fingers to the floor. Her mouth did a real cute opening and closing trick that distracted from the confusion and uncertainty in her eyes.

Sticking my arms atop the table, I resisted the urge to lift my palms and clamped my lips against the ‘*well, say something*’ balancing on the tip of my tongue.

Her mouth opened again but stalled. A tiny squeak sounded in the back of her throat, and her arms went to lift but stalled after a couple inches. For seconds, she hung there as though frozen in poise—until she seemed to snap out of it and snatched her pen from the floor, leaping to her feet.

I stared up at her. I also pretty much expected her to sit back down. Not for one minute did I think she’d bolt from the table, almost tripping over my chair in her haste, and barge out the restaurant like I’d set fire to her arse—though, that was exactly what she did.

I pushed up from my seat and strode to the window, reaching the glass as she smacked into the side of a little Peugeot in the far corner of the car park. She snatched keys from her pocket, dropping them a couple of times before she managed to get the door open.

I frowned as I watched her. The fumbling around, the panic in her face—she looked totally terrified. *Of what? Me?* Why the hell would she be scared of me? Didn’t she know me? Did she think me some local psycho trying to make a random hit on her?

“Sean?”

I ignored Dan’s call—couldn’t seem to remove my attention from the blonde female as she tossed the pad and pen she’d been using into the back of her car and drew a mobile from her pocket.

“You sure about this, Sean?” Dan asked from his seat.

I didn't bother to turn to him. "Yes," I muttered as Jem peered back toward me, her lips mumbling something I couldn't decipher. *Sure as I've ever been about anything, dammit.*

"Maybe you called it wrong?" Josh said.

Teeth grinding, I pretended I hadn't heard him and pressed closer to the glass as Jem stuck the retracted mobile against her ear.

Whoever she called must have answered because her entire body stilled, and her lips moved again. *It's Jem*, I lip-read. A few seconds later, she pushed away from the Peugeot and began a manic pace across the tarmac.

I brushed my hands across my scalp, dropping them when she glanced my way again.

She held eye contact for a few beats. Spoke into her phone. Raked her fingers through her hair. Her nattering restarted as she disentangled her fingers.

Watching her so wound up drove me almost insane. My feet wanted to carry my hide outside so I could drag her back and make her talk to me, but my head refused to give the order to move.

Maybe my head knew something I didn't.

My hands fisted against the effort of staying put, though—even more so when her eyes rolled heavenward and she started yanking at her damn eyebrow, frustration all but pumping from her in waves.

For minutes, her lips blurred in their rapid speech, her fingers twitched about—at her waist, scratching her shoulder, rubbing her head—before she turned back toward me.

Our gazes locked.

Her lips seemed to say, '*He's still inside*', then '*Watching me*' after a brief pause.

I frowned harder at the reservation in her stare, the brace of her body, the whiteness of her knuckles where she gripped her phone, catching, ‘*What am I supposed to do?*’ before her lips blurred too fast to follow again.

Like a switch had been hit, she ceased to speak, but the pacing kicked back in. As though she hadn’t liked what she heard, she brought her phone round and glared it before giving it a good shake and slamming it back against her ear.

More mumbling and her brow creased.

She stiffened, only her lips moving.

Incredulity twisted her features as ‘*What?*’ erupted from her followed by something indistinguishable. She seemed to be arguing, her left arm waving out, her palm lifting, her feet shuffling in a disjointed march until she halted, and her upper lip curled beneath the scrunch of her nose.

She swung her attention back to me, her brows raised.

“Why don’t you just go out there?” Josh asked.

Lips compressed, I blanked him, watching Jem converse some more into her mobile.

She turned away and toed the asphalt of the car park.

I couldn’t go out there. No way. No how. Jem’d probably run a mile if I did.

At least she looked a little calmer as she gave a small nod. A little more lip action, her chest rising like she took a deep breath, and she spun back toward the restaurant.

“She’s coming back,” Josh said like he’d never been so entertained.

I didn’t answer him, didn’t seem able to remove my sights from the approaching female, my smile sliding onto my face when she tugged on the door.

As the glass panel whooshed closed at her rear, I turned to face her, my heart leaping about in my chest, my fingers itching to grab a hold of her and assure her she hadn't made a mistake, hadn't got it wrong. I really was me.

Instead, I stayed put and waited.

"I'm back in the burger bar," she said into her phone as she came my way. "I'm walking back over to him." She stopped in front of me.

My smile widened. "You came back."

"Is that him?" came a voice through the phone.

"Shh, Jess," she said. "Be quiet a minute." She peered up at me. "I need to do something."

My eyebrow twitched—lips, too.

The female's heart pounded out an erratic tune. "I can't do this, Jess," she whispered into the phone. "He'll think I'm a freak."

"Little sis', if he knows you, he already *knows* you're a freak."

I contained my snort at the comment but didn't succeed in my hiding my grin.

"Just do it!" the voice snapped.

"Okay," Jem hissed back before turning her attention to me.

"What did you want to do?" I asked.

"I . . . um . . ." She blew out a breath. "I'm going to do something because I need to be sure. And if you're who you say you are, and who I think you are, then you won't find it weird."

To anyone listening, her words would have sounded like insane rambling. To me, they made perfect sense, and I grinned like a moron as it sank in she was taking me seriously. "Okay."

"Jess, I'm just going to put the phone down for—"

“Don’t you *dare!*” the disembodied voice hissed down the phone.

“This is private.” Jem sighed. “I’ll pick you back up in a minute.” After sticking her mobile on the table beside us, she once more looked at me. “Please, don’t move. I just want to . . .” She bridged the gap between us, her toes pressing against mine, bringing her *waaaaaaay* closer than I expected.

I froze, a gulp temporarily lodging in my throat.

Pushing up onto her tiptoes, she closed her eyes. Her hand braced against my chest, my heart thudding in response beneath her palm, and she leaned in close to my throat.

And sniffed.

I glanced to Dan and Josh, quirking up an eyebrow in a ‘*told ya so*’ gesture.

At her gasp, I turned back to see her eyes fly open—before they drooped again and she sucked in an even greater inhale than before.

My own head ducked a little nearer as I reciprocated, a low rumble building in the back of my throat at the sweet, womanly musk emanating from her.

Josh’s chair scraped across the tiles, breaking my moment. “I don’t believe it.”

As I peered across at him, a tinny voice escaped the mobile on the table. “Jem? Jem?”

With my smug grin amped up to full brightness, I glanced back to her, finding her eyes open and one hundred percent on me. “I knew it was you, Jem.”

Uncertainty flickered in her expression again.

Not what I wanted to see. Not at all.

With a step back, she un-clawed my T and made a slow reach for the yackering mobile phone. “I’m back,” she said into it.

“Holy shit, Jem! You were ages. What took you so long?”

“I was doing what you told me to do.”

Who the hell she spoke to I didn't know, but whoever it was, they must have known at least something about us to have made that kind of suggestion.

"You sniffed him?" the voice asked.

Jem nodded. "Yes."

"Shit! You're nuttier than a fruitcake."

"Thanks for that," she muttered.

I studied the female from my dreams, standing before me, the way her blonde hair brushed her shoulders, the blue of her eyes darkening each time she frowned, the shifting of her features revealing her emotions.

Not nutty, I decided—just downright confused.

"Well?" the voice asked.

"Huh?" Jem's gaze swung up to mine, entrapping me like prey and blocking out everything else until she murmured, "It's him. It's Sean."

My sigh heaved from me as my lips spread wider than ever.

"Holy shit!" said the mobile.

"Exactly," Jem muttered.