

Chapter 11

Star-Crossed Memories

Back at room 112, Mr. Summers paced by the softly lit front wall board, hands clutched in front of him. He paused when I entered, his face brightened by the ghostly light, and the way it reflected in his green eyes held me transfixed.

Jess cleared his throat. "Hey, Mr. Summers."

"Hey," I managed shakily, hyper-aware of Jess's steady presence behind me and

Michael's intense gaze on my face.

"Forgive me." Mr. Summers dropped his hands to his sides. "You look so much like

her."

"I know, right?" At Jess's confused look, I added, "Aurora, my sister who died eighteen years ago." His eyes went wide.

Mr. Summers blinked, seeming to notice Jess for the first time. "Yes, I thought

Gemini was Aurora. She startled me out of my wits." He laughed nervously at the memory.

"An honest mistake. And call me Gemi."

"Of course. I'm sorry if I upset you on your first day," Mr. Summers said, his eyes

sad and apologetic.

I frowned at the recollection. "It wasn't a good day, anyway."

"Please have a seat." Mr. Summers gestured toward the two chairs he'd placed by his

desk. As we sat down, the shifting geometric patterns on the front wall board, ~~apparently~~

's screensaver

Who is Michael? I don't recall him being in the last chapter.

A lot is happening here. Expand

Didn't we have this conversation earlier? And Jess was there too.

Weird transition from being anxious to agreeing.

Gemi should not be treating her teacher comparing her as normal. It's very weird

~~some sort of screensaver~~, cast moving shadows across our faces. Jess perched himself on a chair and leaned his elbows on his knees, twiddling his thumbs. I sat next to him, watching the shapes dance across the wall behind Mr. Summers' head.

"This is awkward," Mr. Summers said, settling himself across from us. "I'm not sure where to begin."

"How'd you meet her?" I offered, knowing that Aurora never attended school.

He nodded. "I was in eighth grade. She was neighbors with a friend of mine/who invited her skating with our friend group. After that, Aurora often joined us on evenings and weekends. I liked her right away, but waited until junior prom to ask her out. She was so

talented, so beautiful." He stopped, peering at me uneasily, perhaps afraid he'd said too much. Did he see me that way? I glanced away, self-consciously smoothing the hem of my shirt in my lap.

Mr. Summers shifted in his seat. "We casually dated for a while, then got more serious my senior year. Our parents didn't like it. They never said why; they just ordered us not to see each other anymore. But we continued in secret. I even snuck her into my senior prom while pretending to go with someone else." Mr. Summers laughed. "What a fiasco that was! Your parents found out and came to the dance to bring her home. She ran with me instead. I was the one driving... when it happened." His tone turned somber, and his forehead crumpled in pain.

Jess had gone still as a statue, like he was trying to make himself invisible during this raw, private moment. Though I felt bad for him, I couldn't help but recall there'd been a boy driving in my dream. Throughout most of the scene in the car, the dream boy had faced the windshield. Then he'd turned and smiled...

This feels creepy...

I feel like you should lead with this. It would recontextualize the scene and minimize the creepy vibes. It's an admission of guilt.

Pick 1 question.

The green eyes! That's why I couldn't stop staring at Mr. Summers when I'd entered

the room. My subconscious had put it together. But... how could I have known he was there in the car? How could I possibly have seen that? Without thinking, I jumped to my feet.

"Gemi?" Jess asked, also standing.

"It can't be real... it can't be real..." I paced back and forth.

"I'm so sorry," Mr. Summers murmured, misinterpreting my agitation.

"You okay?" Jess's hand found my shoulder, but the room blurred, ~~and~~ his face swam before me.

"She looks faint. Get her to sit down." Vaguely, I saw Mr. Summers draw near in concern. "Gemi, take slower breaths. You're hyperventilating."

But I barely paid attention as they guided me to a chair. My mind replayed the accident over and over as I focused on the dream boy's face and his words.

"What was that?" Mr. Summers shook my arm. "Gemi! What did you say?"

Unaware I'd said anything out loud, I thought through the last few moments, then turned to him and whispered, "I love you to the stars and back."

Mr. Summers gaped and stumbled backward into his chair. Behind him and all around, the room's interactive boards and holographic desk displays flickered and went dark, as if responding to his distress.

Jess hovered over me with a bewildered look on his face. "You okay?" he asked, his shadow stretching across the now-quiet board on the front wall. His eyes darted between me and Mr. Summers, who sat bathed in the dim emergency lights that had kicked in when the room's system failed. The only other light now came from the windows on the curved outer wall.

Once Mr. Summers could collect himself, he asked, "Why did you say that?"

More internal narration here. We need to feel her panic and distorting sense of time.

Pick one

That's a bit of a silly question right now.

New paragraph

Feeling ^{Why?} calmer, I replied, "That's what you said before the car flipped over." [His loud,

There's no transition into his crying

sputtering sobs were all the confirmation I needed to know I'd been right. Around us, the room's systems kicked back to life, with geometric patterns ^{reappearing} again on the front wall board, and a loading signal blinking at the holographic display above each workstation.

Jess grabbed a tissue box from Mr. Summers' desk. "Mr. Summers?" He held them out to him.

This is not typically allowed even with teacher permission. First names imply they are equals or friends which is NOT the case. Special needs classrooms are an exception.

"Michael, please," he replied, taking the box. "We aren't in class now. You can call me Michael."

"Yeah, okay." Jess hovered over Michael a moment longer, then sat back down.

"Gemi," Michael's voice wavered, "how did you know I'd said that?"

At first, I hesitated, afraid they would think me crazy if I told the truth. ~~But~~ being right about Michael's last words to Aurora gave me courage. With a hard swallow, I relayed my dream of the crash and of the hospital afterward. "It was like I'd actually died. It was terrifying." My arms wrapped around my chest as if shielding me from the horror of the memory.

Michael had gone completely still, the color completely drained from his face. "You dreamed about the crash?"

"After moving back into the house where Aurora lived. Other things have happened since." I told about my vision of Aurora and the voice I heard. Michael's expression froze. Jess looked like he was going to pull the zipper clean off his sweatshirt. Love this 3

"Maybe Aurora did come back," Michael whispered, eyeing me as one does a venomous snake. I pressed my lips together to keep them from quivering, hurt by the fear in his gaze.

maybe not the best comparison...

Jess, seeing my forming tears, turned a dark glare on Michael, who worked to compose himself.

"Please don't misunderstand," Michael leaned toward me, his voice soft. "Her death devastated me. They said the accident wasn't my fault, but ~~but~~ deep down... I still blame myself. It's my guilt that haunts me." He frowned into his hands.

Pity swelled in my chest as I studied him, huddled in his chair, still struggling over a death from eighteen years ago. "The roads were slick. You couldn't have known that would happen."

He stilled, his eyes lifting to meet mine. "They were, but how did you know?"

Back to back eyes description
 "They were slick in my dream."

Michael's eyes narrowed. "But that was just a dream. Maybe you overheard your parents talking about it?"

"No," I shook my head vehemently. "They never talked about her. She ^{is} ~~was~~ a taboo subject in our house."

"Never?" Michael seemed pained by the idea. "Maybe you overheard them once and forgot. Your dream must have come from somewhere."

"Not possible," I said. "I ~~can't~~ ^{don't} forget. My memory is one of the few things I can rely on."

That gave Michael pause. "What do you mean, you can't forget?"

"I can remember everything ~~being~~ born ~~my~~ entire life." I shrugged, not sure why anyone would find that very interesting.

"Are you serious?" Michael leaned forward, his ~~teacher's~~ curiosity overtaking his earlier distress. Beside me, Jess had stopped fidgeting entirely, his attention laser-focused on my words.

"Sure. Every file, every face, name, date, place. I just have to see it once. That's why I don't need my tablet for the class material—I just replay it in my mind. Can't lots of people

do ^{it} ~~that~~?"

Jess shook his head, lines of disbelief etched into his forehead. "You're the only person I've met ^{who} ~~that~~ can do that. You mean to tell me you have the entire calculus module memorized?"

"Y-yes?" I responded, struggling to find words as they stared at me. "It's not like I understand it all. I still have to study, like you. I just don't need the tablet to do it."

"You study it in your mind..." Jess repeated.

"A true photographic memory!" Michael exclaimed, his face beaming. "Aurora had an excellent memory, too, ~~as I recall~~, but nothing close to what you're describing. Remarkable," he breathed.

"I never realized it was that unusual." I shrugged again, still puzzled by their amazement.

"Oh, it's very rare," Michael assured me. ~~Then~~, ^{Maybe have her explain why she never thought it was weird.} in a brighter tone, he continued,

"Today's been full of surprises."

"I'll say," I agreed. "Though there's something I've been wondering about."

"Yes?" Michael replied, his tone wary.

"How do you know my grandfather, Isaac Eden?"

"All the teachers know your grandfather, Gemi," Michael said, a bit too dismissively.

"He's given talks at our school many times."

~~But~~ ^{Seems like she is addressing Isaac instead of Mr. Summers.} it's more than that," I insisted. "How do you *know* him?"

Michael's eyes narrowed. "What makes you think I'm acquainted with him?"

"Your picture is on the mantel over his fireplace."

He gasped in surprise, his words almost a whisper as he asked, "He put my picture there?"

"Next to mine." I paused, watching the emotions play across his face. "After I realized it was you in my dream, I knew it was also you in that photo, though you were a few

* This is a very text-heavy section. More ~~more~~ narration and details can help space it out a little. *

years older. That's why I didn't put it together at first, because of the age difference and how you look now."

Jess straightened in his chair, his eyes narrowing at this new piece of information. I could almost see him adding it to the puzzle he was piecing together about me.

Michael's expression shifted slightly. "I've already said more than I meant to. Ah—" he shook his head, warring with himself. "What's the use? You'll find out eventually... The reason our parents wanted to separate us is because... she's my half-sister." He leaned close,

his voice low and intense. "That means you're my half-sister too, Gemi."

Gazing into his green eyes, it clicked. The way they gleamed...just like Dad's. The

geometric patterns on the wall behind him began spinning faster, as if responding to my racing thoughts. His face and hair were equally similar. Yet the revelation stung—my parents had been married several years before having Aurora. Had Dad been unfaithful to Mom? The idea pressed against my chest. Suddenly, Dad's excessive gifts made more sense. Was he trying to make up for Michael? Or was there more to the story—something tied to Eden and all these secrets everyone kept?

"When did you find out?" I asked.

"After she died." Michael massaged his right palm, a habit that seemed unconscious.

At my curious glance, he clarified, "I broke my hand in the crash. It doesn't bother me much unless I'm thinking of it."

Jess made a small sound of sympathy, and I noticed him rubbing his own hand as if

feeling phantom pain. His subtle gesture made me smile inside.

Michael frowned at his hand, continuing, "My parents told me before Aurora's funeral. It felt strange to be there, knowing James was my father. He talked to me once, about a week afterward. Said it was hard for him. I suspect he blamed me for what happened. Then

he had you and moved to Colorado. I wish I could have known him more." He sighed.

Why does she keep looking at these?

So they just had no idea why their parents disliked their relationship?

Wouldn't they find out they have the same dad?

This is not how Gemi should discover this! I feel like a teacher would go to greater lengths to hide this information.

This should not be his first response. His mouth should be hanging open.

"Is that why you weren't at his service?" I asked, my voice breaking, the pain of the memory still fresh in my mind.

"Oh, I was there," Michael corrected, surprising me. "You wouldn't have seen me. I kept toward the back."

Don't
need 2
apologies
in same
paragraph
here.

~~"I'm sorry."~~ Michael's breath hitched as I rested my hand on his shoulder. "Sorry you couldn't sit with us. I hope we can change that."

Start with Gemi's gesture and then Michael's response. Clarifies sequence of events.

"Nothing would thrill me more, Gemi." A tender smile warmed his face.

Releasing his shoulder, I asked, "And Isaac? When did you meet him?"

Michael's hand drifted to his wrist device. "After you moved to Colorado. He... took an interest in my academic career. Helped me get this teaching position. I imagine he'll be happy we're talking. Will it upset your mother?"

"I don't know," I shrugged. "She worries that I'm lonely."

Michael nodded, then laughed softly, tapping his wrist panel. "I just sent you my contact card, but with your memory..." He tilted his arm to show me his personal number.

"Did you get that?"

Closing my eyes, I repeated it back to him perfectly. When I opened them again, his eyes glimmered with amazement.

Jess shifted and pointed to the time on the front wall board. "We should get moving." I got up, understanding the hint.

"Thanks for meeting me today," I said, eyeing Michael warmly.

"I'm happy you came. Reach out anytime, no matter the hour." Michael's voice had changed, taking on a protective tone. He hesitated, then kissed me on the cheek.

Wtf???

Surprised, my body stiffened. From the corner of my eye, I saw Jess tense, his hands curling into fists before deliberately relaxing them. But as I processed Michael's kiss, I decided it felt right, brotherly, even, and my heart overflowed at the gesture.

He should NOT be allowing this.

You barely know him, Gemi. There's not enough time to establish a brotherly relationship.

Teachers should NEVER kiss their students AT SCHOOL.

Jess cleared his throat softly, and I felt suddenly self-conscious. Having Jess here, witnessing this transformation from teacher and student to brother and sister, made everything feel more real—and more complicated. Michael seemed to realize it too, his professional demeanor sliding back on like a familiar jacket.

It is still teacher and student. Adding labels should not change that.

Yet as Jess and I left the classroom, a cloud of doubt settled over me. Behind us, the classroom's displays pulsed with an unusual pattern—half steady, half erratic—as if mirroring my own conflicted state.

When did the geometric patterns change to "unusual" patterns?

As if reacting to me.

This revelation made my palms sweat. And I couldn't help but feel this was only the first thread of a much larger tapestry, one that wove together Michael, Eden, and me in ways I was only beginning to understand.

Describe with more concrete details.

Make it so interesting that it's obvious why we're looking at it.

Why? What does Jess have to do with how she interprets the situation?

She's more preoccupied with this than the other revelations? At this point, I think her brain would be fried. End chapter with Gemi thinking about the BIGGEST takeaway.