

## take me where my soul can run

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## take me where my soul can run

by [strawberryicebreakers \(TheUltimateFandomer\)](#)

### Summary

He tries not to think about it.

He's a grown man now, someone who doesn't need to run from his feelings nor hide from the monsters under his bed.

He copes, he's coping now, even, and he's a born-dead, damnit, he's stronger than this.

Juno comes back, and it isn't pleasant for anyone involved. Lawrence needs to get away for awhile.

### Notes

local fan writes a beetlejuice fic because she's sick and tired of seeing certain tropes played for laughs when they're actually debilitating to the people who deal with them in real life.

title is from dead mom - beetlejuice.

enjoy!



## receptionists and running

### Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

He isn't a stranger to pain.

It was normal for those in his line of work to have some level of familiarity with pain, even after the whole deceased issue was put to the side, but there were reasons as to why Lawrence was one of the best in the business.

There were theories, of course. Everything from armor in his suit to pills to numb it all had been thought of at one point or another, stories swapped between spirits who had nothing better to do than chat amongst themselves. One of the ideas that frequently popped up, whispered in Miss Argentina's office whenever he passed by, was that born-deads couldn't experience pain in the way that anyone else, dead or alive, could.

Lawrence knew that was a crock of shit. It was something less successful entities told themselves when they saw him come back from a job, bouncing on his toes after everything went right. They were jealous of him.

*And rightfully so*, he thought. He prided himself on his work, elated with every success, at making his own name. Something that would always be associated with him, and never with anyone else.

"Beetlejuice" in and of itself was imperfection written to a T, an intentional misspelling of a proper title, but it was *his*, and that was exactly the way he wanted to keep it. He wasn't "Juno's boy," "the born dead," or any other name. He was Beetlejuice, the bio-exorcist, the ghost with the most, the man -

who was currently trying, and failing, to breathe.

"Lawrence?" The green-skinned woman looked up at him from her seat behind the desk, fingers still on her keyboard. "Are you alright?"

"I'm fine, Maria. I-," his throat felt tight, *why did it feel tight*, *why is this happening again*, "What did you say?"

She frowned at him, seeing through his bullshit but not wanting to start the kind of conversation they'd have if she called him out on it. After his death, she'd spent weeks with him getting his paperwork in order, fixing the status of "recently deceased" back to "born-dead," and ensuring the powers that came with it would return to him. She was the only reason he still had his abilities, the only reason he was still himself, and he could never thank her enough, even if she insisted upon the use of "proper names" when speaking to him.

During those weeks, she managed to pick up on cues he didn't even realize he had, but she was nice to a fault about it. Maria viewed him as a friend, someone she saw on a semi-regular basis and talked to when he couldn't make it to her; she didn't want to point anything out that might make things uncomfortable when they'd only recently exchanged more than a few minutes in each other's presence.

As much as it was weird to admit, he enjoyed having her. She was a bit huffy at times, but Lawrence knows that he's one to talk, and at this point, it was just nice to have a friend that hadn't tried to wreck his life, or lack thereof.

She looked him over as she said, “Miss Juno’s waiting for you. She came back into her office earlier today and asked me to contact you.” Her typing resumed as she continued, “lucky for me, you walked in on your own.”

“She’s in her office?”

“That’s what I said, yes.”

“Did she say why she wanted to see me?” He looked down at his hands. Grime was wedged in every nail bed, dusted onto his suit, and almost certainly in his hair. He ran his fingers through it, trying to get anything surface-level out, but he knew it wouldn’t do anything in the long run. There’d been too much of a mess for too long for any of it to be displaced, bar a shower and what would have to be the Netherworld’s most patient dry-cleaner.

“She said that you’d know why.”

Teeth tasted sour in the back of his mouth when he swallowed, bitter and gross. *Pull it together*, he thought, *you’re not a kid anymore. You can talk to her like a man.* “Alright,” he said. “It’s nice to see you, Maria.”

“Same to you, Lawrence.” As he turned to go down the hall to her office, Miss Argentina stood from her chair, stopping him with one hand on his arm, other palm flat on her chest in faux offence.

His footsteps faltered. “What?”

“Why didn’t you tell me you were getting your hair done?” she asked, pointing at him. “I would’ve come!”

“I,” *fuck, what color is it?* He couldn’t pull his hair down to check, it hadn’t been long enough for that since the 60’s, but he chanced a glance upwards. “I didn’t go to anyone.”

“Oh,” her mouth quirked into a grin, “keeping secrets? Was it one of the breathers you mentioned a while back?”

Something in the center of his chest turned cold, and frankly, he didn’t want to think about why. “No, Miss Argentina.”

Her eyes narrowed. “Back to titles, are we?” At his silence, she sighed. “You know, *Mr . Beetlejuice*,” she said, stressing the honorific, “you’ve got to learn that if something’s bothering you, you’ve got to let me know.”

*Un-fuckin’-likely*, he thought. *She doesn’t need to get wrapped up in this.*

When he walked down the hall, he heard her sit back behind her desk, muttering something under her breath before she turned back to work, leaving him alone with the frosted-glass monstrosity in front of him, proudly proclaiming “*Juno’s Office*” in half-peeled off letters. He raised a hand to knock before the door swung open from the inside.

White hair crowned the head of a small, frail woman. She wore a neat suit, with pearls strung ‘round her neck and an entirely unimpressed look on her face. “You came.”

“I didn’t know you were here,” he said, voice quiet. She went back to her desk, and motioned for him to sit in the seat opposite hers.

There were few things he hated more than this office. Robots. High-pitched noises. The number forty-three. All of those paled in comparison to her office with the ornate liquor cabinet and too-small chairs that he knew she used on purpose.

“Would you have came if you knew?”

In his chair, he pulled at the cuff of his jacket.

She stared at him for a moment before shaking her head, letting out a huff.

“What?” He dropped the cuff from his hand. “What is it?”

“You really can’t change, can you?” She paused, hand reaching to the glass on a black coaster.

“You know, I really thought you’d came into your own when you brought out the sandworm. Never thought you’d actually have the balls to do something like that, but you did, and,” she waved her hand, “here we are.”

Eyebrows furrowed, he said, “I’m confused.”

“Of course you are.”

His jaw clenched. “Why am I here?”

“I don’t know who I thought would be in front of me right now, but it wasn’t you, Lawrence.” She swirled the glass in her hand. “I guess I thought you’d finally moved on from your bio-exorcisms and moved onto a real career. That you’d treat something serious for once in your life.”

He took a breath. Something like this, the jabs at his choice of work, he could deal with. “Bio-exorcism is an important part of the balance between the living and those who choose to reside with them in their world.” He’d had this conversation hundreds of times before.

“Lawrence.”

He looked at her. “Yeah?”

“I don’t care.”

He couldn’t help himself. A laugh came out, abrupt and jagged at its edges. “You never did.”

Her fingers, brittle and bony, gripped the edge of the desk as Juno held herself back. “I’ll have you know,” she said, bristling, “that I did the best I could for you.”

“The fuck?” He stood up, wincing when he heard the chair’s *screech!* against the floorboards.

“You’re kidding, right?”

She looked up at him. “I did everything right when it came to you. I was a good mom. It isn’t my fault that you never realized it.”

“Oh, and what is ‘everything right?’”

“Feeding you,” she said, voice sharp. “Clothing you. Raising you.”

His footsteps thudded against the years-old shag rug, quieted by the fabric as he strode over to a table, distancing himself from his mother. “What about-,” he rounded on her, picking up the baby blue ashtray nearby, “what about everything else?”

“What else is there?”

The tray cracked beneath his grip. “Maybe some support every now and then?” He couldn’t look at her; he faced away, back to her as he stared at his feet.

“Give me a damn break. You didn’t need any of that.” A sneer gathered her face together with eyes that mocked the man before her. “What would you even have me say?” She pitched her voice up in a crude impression of the moms that would occasionally pass by, holding onto a child after a party or trip gone wrong. “*Oh, Lawrence, I’m so proud of you! You’ll be such a good man one day, I love you so much !*” A laugh croaked out of her as she dropped her act. “Is that what you wanted to hear so badly?”

The answer tore from his throat before he could stop it. “Yes.”

“Christ,” she said, “grow up. You don’t need your mommy holding your hand every day.”

Something snapped inside of him, and he turned to face her. “You never did to begin with! You-,” his voice cracked, he was frustrated and knew he was going to get shit for it later, but he kept going. “You never checked up on me, never wanted to see me, never-, God, you never even told me who Dad was or where I could find him. Did you ever even think that I might want to meet him?”

“He was smart.” Juno leaned back, voice steady. “He left while he could, and I wasn’t going to allow you to blunder into his life and wreck it.”

“What about me? What about how I wanted to meet my dad?”

“Not everything revolves around you.”

“I know! I just-,” he stammers, chest tight. “I just wanted a family.” His voice grew quiet by the end, words coming out at barely a whisper.

For once, Juno doesn’t have a reply at the ready. The silence stretches for a moment, her staring at him, him standing in front of her, before -

*Fuck. Not this, anything but this; Christ, she’ll never let it go if I-*

“Are you crying?”

“No, I’m-, I-,” he scrubbed at his face with a striped sleeve, breath coming in short, painful jabs. “I’m fine, I-,”

“Look at that.” She raised a hand directed at his hair. “Purple hair. Not this again, Lawrence.” Her head tilted, a movement reading out nothing but disapproval through lowered eyebrows and rolling irises. “I told you to learn how to quit doing that.”

“I can’t-, I can’t exactly stop it!” He’d tried. He’d watched shitty rom-coms and listened to sad stories, waiting for his hair to turn so he knew when to hold back, so he’d learn the signs of when it got to that point, but he never could; when he realized he couldn’t, it would just get worse. Shaving it hadn’t even worked, for reasons he couldn’t comprehend. It didn’t matter now, though, not when she saw him upset like a goddamn child with a plume of violet atop his head.

She sighed, propping her chin upon her hand. “Why don’t you come back when you can handle yourself?”

“I can handle myself, I’ve handled myself perfectly well for years but you can never seem to notice until something bad happens!”

“You tried to kill me with a sandworm and now you’re crying in my office like a newly-dead. Color me surprised if I don’t think you can handle your emotions.”

A frustrated groan ripped from his throat. “You don’t understand it at all.” He breathed hard and fast but it wasn’t staying in, his head felt light and if he wasn’t already a mess he knew his vision would be swimming, but she just kept looking at him, not saying a damn thing. “How can you just stand there?” He coughed, the sides of his throat were stuck together and his voice was cracked to hell. “How can you-, how can you act like nothing is happening? I’m your *son* !”

The break at the end of his phrase electrified the woman. In a swift move, she stood up from her chair and strode over to him to grip his bicep in her hand, pulling him down to look at her.

She huffed when he flinched. “Listen to me now, and listen clearly. People talk. My boss sees one of my workers pulling shit in the living world and comes down on me to see why. He doesn’t care about who you are or why you’re doing what you do, all he cares about is that you stop it. I wouldn’t have to treat you like this if you didn’t pull stunts like you did with the breather and the spirits in her house.”

“They cared about me,” he whispered. He couldn’t look at her when he said it. “They-, they treated me well.”

“They played with your emotions and killed you, Lawrence. They wouldn’t’ve done that if they cared about you. You could help them, so they used you, and got rid of you after your use ran out.” She looked at him, and, in a cruel twist of action, laid the hand not on his arm onto his jaw, a tender action that forced him to look at her. “If they cared, why didn’t they ask you to stay?”

“I told them I was leaving, I-,”

“No, Lawrence,” she shook her head, “if they wanted you to stay, they would’ve said so.” Her eyebrows raised as she dragged her hand back. “But, even after that, no matter how much you ruin what you do, you know you’ll have me.”

He felt like he was going to be sick.

“Now,” she said, moving back to her desk, “how about you calm down, and we can talk?” Her fingernails caught on a set of papers that she shuffled in her hands.

Knees weak, he took a step back.

“Lawrence?” Her eyes flicked up, and she smiled. “Well, that’s certainly new. Maybe we can work with that.”

He looked at the door.

It wasn’t far away.

She turned back to her papers. “Come sit down. I think I know of a house I could send you to, they’re supposed to pass over within the month. They’ll need a guide, and even if you didn’t use the best methods last time, someone still needs to be there for them.”

He reached a hand back, feeling for the doorknob. When he grabbed it, it was unlocked. The door opened.

The shuffling of papers stopped, and Juno looked up. "Lawrence?" Her gaze narrowed when she saw the open door. "Close that before I have to hear that awful receptionist's chattering."

"I," he stammered, "I'm sorry."

"About what?"

He almost threw himself through the doorway with how fast he tried to leave. It shut behind him, and he knew he only had a minute, max, if he wanted to get away. The hallway had never seemed as long as it did in that moment.

He broke out at the end of it, startling Maria, who dropped her pen when she saw him. "Lawrence," she said, cautious, "what happened in there?"

"I need to leave," he said, out of breath. He could hear her moving about, she was coming and *he had to leave*.

"Alright, alright," Maria took her pen in hand, and wrote out an address. "I know you know it, but my address is on this in case you need it. There's a spare key under the aloe plant. Text me if anything happens, but let yourself in and I'll get there as soon as possible after my shift ends."

They both heard the door open at the end of the hall. "Thank you, Maria," he said, voice hushed.

"You can thank me tonight." She gave a pointed glare at the door of the building, and gave him a slight push towards it. "Leave. I'll hold her off."

"I don't know how to repay you."

"Christ, Lawrence, just leave!"

"Okay," he said. The door gave way under his hand, and he stepped into the outside Netherworld. Everything seemed to roar around him, cars rushing by and women talking as they passed him on the sidewalk, stepping around him as he stood. A taxi nearby caught his eye, and he rushed to it, waving a hand to stop it.

When it stopped, he got in, all but collapsing onto the leather seats.

"Where am I taking you?" The driver was a young man that he hadn't seen before with a hole in his right shoulder. If he noticed the state his customer was in, he didn't say anything.

"Andean Heights." After a second, he added, "I'll pay you extra if you can get me there in under twenty minutes."

"Whatever you say, sir."

The cab sped off, and he finally felt as though he could breathe. The city rushed by him, a blur of lights and bricks as the sun set behind it all. In an odd way, it could be seen as beautiful, even to people who weren't forced to live there. The sight of it all calmed him.

As they turned a corner, he felt a pull in his chest. He stiffened; he knew what that meant and he didn't want anyone to see him like this. His face was dry, thank God, but he knew he still looked like a wreck with red-rimmed eyes and shaking hands.

It pulled again. He tried to smooth down his suit, straightening the cuffs from their crumpled state. He didn't know who was calling him, but he wanted to look as professional as he could. They



could be a client, after all, and he doesn't need people to think that he's lost his charm.

A final pull grabbed him, and he disappeared.

## Chapter End Notes

have I seen the musical? nope!

have I seen the movie? nope!

have I seen the cartoon? nope!

am I still writing a fic about it all? you betcha!

tvtropes is the only reason I realized junio was an implied alcoholic. if tvtropes lied to me, I apologize. also, used movie!junio for this.

I've researched my fair bit about ACoA [adult children of alcoholics/abuse] over the years, but I went back into it all for this fic and Christ, the ghost with the most fits all of the traits to a goddamn T. "Impulsive," "constantly seeking approval/affirmation," and "terrified of abandonment" are the major ones, obv, but even minor traits like "doing anything to keep a relationship" ring true. kinda makes me wonder if the writers intended to write him with those traits or if it just happened.

just taking a brief aside to mention how much I absolutely detest the whole trope of male character + shit mom = comedy. a shining example of that is the show "archer" which, despite the humor, plays the mom of the main character as some snarky but lovable character even though it literally shows her being incredibly abusive to her son from birth to adulthood. like,,, that isn't funny? she isn't ~misunderstood~, she's a woman who should've never had a fucking kid and deserves punishment for the way she treated an innocent child. but noooooo, it's funny because he's a man and it plays into the whole "lolz my mom is such a bitch!" joke.

anywho

if BJ seems ooc, that's because he is. this sort of stuff really whacks you out when it happens; the angriest person can become meek and terrified while the nicest people can scream and curse. been there, done that, got the complimentary t-shirt. well, and he can't exactly sex-joke his way out of talking with his mom.

tried to expand on the netherworld in general. I love the idea of it being like a city, which I think is like,,, the opposite of how its portrayed? not sure. the spirits have to live somewhere, and there's gotta be a traffic system going on. I think it would probably look like DC or NYC; lots of spirits, lack of space. with that, not everyone kills themselves or causes their own death, hence why there are taxi drivers and random spirits roaming about.

random mention - I would've adored seeing a version of "dead mom" for BJ, mainly because of the implications and how it takes the same idea of a mom who isn't there but turns it around. junio is there, but it would be better if she wasn't. she's a "dead mom" in the way that she's close to deadbeat when it comes to actually being a loving parent.

in all seriousness, though, I'm tempted to write a bit more for this idea. don't know if it's just me but the idea of lydia + the gang slowly realizing why, exactly, BJ acts the

way he does is fascinating. that, and I want to write about him getting a family that actually cares for him, y'know?

next up - let's find out what lydia's been up to!

like something? hate something? want to see something happen in a future fic? want to see me eaten by a sandworm? let me know! comments are a lifeblood that keeps me going in the face of schoolwork and life in general.

my tumblrs are @strawberryicebreakers for main and @bisexualbeetlejuice for anything BJ-specific. hit me up!

# hair dye and hijinks

## Chapter Summary

in which we find out what Lydia's been up to, and see Delia being a good mom.

## Chapter Notes

this was all written as one big story. broke it up into two chapters for clarity!

enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Four months after everything, after the move and all that came with it, Lydia Deetz felt at home with who she was. She was comfortable knowing that yes, she still had Dad, but she also had Delia, Adam, and Barbara. Even if school blew the steam out of her, even when she still had a bit of trouble making friends, she knew she could chat with one of them when she was alone.

In that comfortability, she had time to think about what had gone on all those weeks ago.

It had been dark, for want of the best word. She'd treated her dad and Delia like shit, and she wasn't proud of it. Though she'd been hurting, it hadn't been an excuse for how she'd acted, especially when they'd been trying to help. They'd forgiven her, though, and had a talk about what to do if she got into a similar emotional state again.

She talked it through once a week with her therapist. Dad had asked her if she'd be comfortable going, and she was all for it; getting better was her goal, and besides that, Lydia thought that everyone needs someone to talk with. In the office, she'd talk Doctor Anderson through whatever issues she was dealing with, and he'd help her as best as he could. He'd never say it, but she knew that he knew there were things she wasn't telling him, but it's not as if she had a choice in the matter. She knew that if she ever even mentioned things like sandworms and the Netherworld, she'd be shipped off to a psych ward before she could say "born-dead."

Which, again, brings her to another problem. No one in her house wanted to mention a certain entity; not when they repaired the various holes in the walls, not when they found a red bowtie in the corner of the living room, and certainly not when the police came, two days after the end of it all, asking why there were reports of screaming coming from the house at all times of the day.

Even though he'd only been with her for a week, she'd grown to love him like the older brother she'd never had. He was chaotic, loud, brash, and kind of gross, but he was what she needed back then, and his presence had helped her out of the depression she'd fallen into. Sometimes, her mind would wander, and she'd wonder what would've happened if he hadn't been on the roof that night, but she didn't like thinking about that, especially after she saw the Netherworld. The idea of spending eternity with a cracked neck was horrifying.

In all honesty, she missed him. She still looked over when she saw stripes in the hallways, stopping

in the middle of the student flow to the point of disturbance just because a freshman wanted to go for an edgy look that day. Hearing someone with a voice that seemed to drag across gravel still brings a smile to her face, even if it doesn't say her name anymore. She missed him, but it wasn't too bad. She could deal with it.

Until, of course, Angie from her AP Psych class came in on Thursday, halfway through class and out of breath.

"I am so, so sorry," she said, giving the teacher her late pass and she sat in her assigned seat next to Lydia. "Traffic was shit, sorry, traffic was bad and I couldn't get in the parking lot, and -"

"It's not that big of a deal," their teacher said. He turned back to the board. "As I was saying, *Pavlov's Dogs* were a series of experiments by Ivan Pavlov that was a breakthrough in behavioral psychology. Personally, I think -"

His voice faded into the background. She stared at her seatmate.

"Lydia," Angie asked, tapping her on the arm, "is something wrong?"

"You dyed your hair," she whispered.

"I did!" Angie smiled, grinning like a cat while she twisted a curl around her finger. "It's just for today, though. Temporary hair dye! I think it brings out my skin tone, what do you think?"

"It's very," she said, "green."

"It is!"

"Girls?" Their heads turned to the front of the room. The teacher looked at them.

"Sorry, sir."

"Sorry about that," Lydia added.

"Please try to keep quiet in class." At their nods, he continued with the lesson.

She didn't even try to take notes, not when she couldn't even focus. *It's just a color*, she thought, *it isn't Angie's fault that she chose the color that I can't seem to deal with. It isn't her fault that he isn't here anymore. It isn't her fault that I miss him more than I should even when I barely knew him.*

*God, I miss him.*

*I miss him laughing at my jokes, I miss him scaring the lights out of the Maitlands, I miss how he'd make the clones dance with me and throw me in the air like a little kid.*

Angie's face broke her out of her thoughts. "Lydia?" Her hand was soft where it rested on her wrist. "Are you sure you're alright? You look kind of sad right now."

"Allergies," Lydia replied. She shrugged, "the trees in my yard are going haywire right now."

"Oh, okay! I've got tissues and cough drops in my bag if you need any; my brother has the same thing going on right now."

She thanked her seatmate, and turned back to look at the board.

Even if she couldn't think about school right now, there was something she could plan for tonight.

-

Dinner was generally an uneventful affair at the Deetz home. Barbara and Adam loved to cook, even though they couldn't eat anymore, and Lydia wasn't going to say no to a good meal. She helped set the table, though, and by the time Charles and Delia got home, everything was ready.

At the table, she waited.

"How was your day at school, Lydia?" Delia asked, taking a sip from her glass.

"It was good," she fidgeted with her napkin, "but there was something a bit weird."

Adam looked over at her. "What was it?"

"You know the girl I sit with in Psych?" They nodded, and she continued, "well, she came in late today."

Looking at her, Barbara was curious. "Was it traffic? I saw a large backup on the street earlier after you left."

"Yeah, it was, but that wasn't really that odd. It's just," she paused, laying her hands in her lap, "she dyed her hair." At the silence, she added, "and her hair was green. Neon green."

No one spoke. She glanced at everyone around her; Barbara and Adam looked at each other while her dad and Delia wouldn't meet her eyes.

"I think we should bring him back." She didn't need to clarify who she was talking about.

"Lydia, I don't think that's such a good idea," Adam rushed to say, turning to her. "I mean, who knows how he'd react to being back here?"

"Plus," Barbara added, "he might be busy. We wouldn't want him angry at us if he was in the middle of something."

"Then we say it slowly, give him time to realize he's being called." She raised her chin. "Aren't you guys curious to see how he's doing? If he found his dad?"

"I am interested in meeting the man who had him as a son," Charles said.

"Exactly!" She smiled at them. "It would be good to bring him back."

"That's not what I'm saying," her dad said, but she cut him off.

"Should we do it tonight? I could clear a space in my room to do it, or we could use the attic, or -,"

"Lydia." Adam's voice was stern, and he looked her directly in the eyes as he spoke. "I think what Charles is trying to say is that, well, it might not be the best thing to do. We don't know how he'll act, or if he'll wreck the house again, or if he even wants to be back."

"He has to!" Her voice grew louder as she spoke, face hot as she tried not to let her frustration show. "I know he wants to come back. I mean, it wouldn't make sense if he didn't. We were friends!"

"I know you two were," Delia said, careful, "rather close, but are you sure you've thought this

through?”

“I have, I promise.”

From beside her, her dad took her hand. “Lydia, we,” he motioned to the other adults at the table, “need to think this over. It’s also a school night, and you need sleep.”

“Dad, I-,”

“Give us the day to think it over, dear. I’ll let you know after school tomorrow if it’s going to happen. Until then, please, let’s have a nice dinner.”

She took a breath. “You promise you’ll think about it? Not just, like, say you’ll think about it but you really know you’re going to say no?”

Delia laughed. “If he won’t, I will.” She paused. “I know how much your friendship with him means to you.”

“Thank you!” Lydia smiled, and even though the Maitlands still looked hesitant, and her dad looked downright uncomfortable, Delia gave her a smile back.

Dinner was a short afterwards, with Lydia finishing her meal quickly and rushing to her room as soon as she could. She blew through her homework, changed into pajamas, and got under her covers.

She couldn’t sleep. By this time tomorrow, he’d be back. She’d finally have her friend back. He’d tell her all about whatever weird shit he’d been doing in the Netherworld, and she’d tell him about school. She knew he’d hate hearing about Pre-Calc and Government, that he’d tease her for being a nerd, but it would all be worth it to have him back. Maybe he’d teach her more about how the Netherworld works, or what he was like as a kid.

How old is he, exactly? Did dead people go to school? Was there even an education system in the Netherworld? Did he have a significant other back home now? If he did, she’d never let it go. She’d pester him until she got to meet the lucky [or unlucky, depending on how you view it] spirit, and give them a shovel talk for a millenia-old man.

*I’ve always wanted to give a shovel talk , she thought, yawning, but how would that work? Can’t threaten someone if they’re already dead. Maybe I could -*

With that train of thought, she fell asleep, dark hair sprawled against the sheets.

-

“Are we actually talking about this?”

“Yes, Charles,” flipping her book as she spoke, Delia shot a glare at her husband. “This means a lot to Lydia.” The teenager in question had left for school hours ago, and would be home soon. The other three adults had tried to postpone the conversation one way or another, with the Maitlands holing up in the attic and Charles claiming to be busy with work, but she wasn’t going to let this go. “I won’t let you all refuse this to her unless we have to.”

“He’s dangerous, Delia, you saw that.” Adam paced in front of the couch where she and Charles sat. “I don’t know if we can trust him to come back.”

“I agree,” Charles added. “For Christ’s sake, he tried to marry Lydia!”

“To be fair,” Barbara said from her armchair, “he was adamant that it was a green-card thing.”

“What about afterwards?”

“What, after we tricked him to think we all wanted him in the family?” Delia raised her eyebrows as she sighed. “Even though he pulled a lot, and I mean a lot of shit with us, you’ve got to admit that it’s fucked up to play with someone’s feelings like that. Besides, he was good for her, at least for a bit. They had a nice little camaraderie going on.”

“I think I’m with Delia on this one.”

Delia clapped her hands together, smiling at the other woman. “Thank you, Barbara!”

“And what brought you to that conclusion?” Adam glanced at her, pausing in his pace.

“I think we can trust him. He seems like he could be a good man, at least after a shower or two.”

The tension in the room broke as Charles snickered. “I’m sorry, I’m honestly curious to find out if that’s how he’s supposed to look, or if it’s a choice.”

Adam sat on the armrest of his wife’s chair. “We’d have to watch over him; if he tries anything, he’s got to leave.”

“Agreed,” both women said. They looked at Charles.

“I’m not going to say that I like this plan,” he said, “but if it makes my daughter happy, I’ll do it.”

“Excellent!” With that, Delia swept herself onto her feet. “You all need to leave the room.”

“Why?”

“I’m cleaning it, obviously.” She rolled her eyes, motioning at the doorway. “If you think I’m going to be having guests over and not have everything look nice, you don’t know the fundamental traits of the woman you proposed to. Now, could you leave the area?”

Hand on their shoulders, Barbara led Charles and Adam out of the room, glancing over her shoulder at Delia, who waved. The minute they were gone, she let out a breath.

Honestly? She wasn’t exactly prepared to have that particular man back into their lives. She wasn’t sure if he’d keep being, as Barbara put it so eloquently, a “needy pervert,” or if he was just going through something when they first met.

He, simply speaking, confused her. From the conversations she’d had with Lydia, to seeing the man himself in person, she wasn’t sure what to think of him. She had theories, of course, but she was never going to voice them aloud unless he confirmed any of them through his actions. Even if he confused her, though, she knew how much Lydia wanted this, and didn’t want to disappoint her.

Pushing the table out of the way, she cleared a space in the middle of the floor. Even if she hadn’t seen him appear before, as she hadn’t noticed him until he’d already begun wrecking the dinner party, she assumed he’d appreciate the space.

She found a few of her larger crystals, mainly quartz and the like, spreading them out amongst the area, partially hidden by drapes or shadows. He didn’t need to get any ideas.

For the next hour, she continued to clean, dusting the shelves and even vacuuming the floor, until she heard the front door unlock.

“Hey!” Lydia stuck her head in the room, cheerful. “I’m home!”

“How was everything at school today?”

“Same as usual.” She tapped her foot, and finally seemed to notice what the other woman was doing. “Delia, why are you cleaning?”

“I thought we might need somewhere open to bring our guest tonight,” she said, smiling down at Lydia.

“You mean -”

“Yes, Lydia. He can come tonight.”

The teen’s posture sagged in relief. “Thank God,” she said, moving to throw her book-bag onto the couch. “I really didn’t want to have to argue with Dad.”

“Ah, don’t thank me yet. He’s still in denial that he agreed to it. And,” she added, shaking her head at the girl, “don’t clutter this place up while I’m cleaning it!”

“Alright, Delia,” she said.

“I mean, at least wait a day, y’know?” Lydia snickered at that, which Delia was going to count as a point in her favor. “I was thinking of bringing him in around eight-thirty, is that okay with you?”

Lydia nodded, and shook a plastic bag in her hand. “I picked up some snacks on the way home. Some actual food, some sweet stuff, the works.”

“That was very thoughtful of you, sweetheart. I’m sure he’ll enjoy it when he gets here.”

“Speaking of which, actually,” Lydia said, toeing floor with the tip of her sneakers, “I was wondering if I could be alone with him?” At Delia’s expression, she added, “just for a few minutes or so! Totally PG, nothing like that because, well, ew, but I just feel like he’d respond better if it was only me in the room.”

“I don’t know, Lydia.” She set down a wipe onto the table, now on its side in the corner. “I’m not sure how well your father would take that.”

“I’ll convince him! He kept going on about how he might react badly, so this is a fix!”

“Whatever you say, hon.”

-

Eight-thirty seemed to take forever to come by, but before she knew it, Lydia saw the time on the clock spell out the moment she’d been waiting for all day. She all but ran down the stairs, feet thudding against the steps as her bag swung behind her. “Dad, Delia!”

“We’re already here,” her dad said, leaning against the wall that separated the living room from the rest of the home. Delia stood at his side, with the Maitlands opposite them. “Are you ready?”

“As ready as I’ll ever be,” she replied. “Give us a few minutes when he pops in, even if he’s angry. I need to talk with him.”

Adam put a hand on her shoulder as best as he could. “We’ll set a timer for ten minutes. If you need more, let us know, but either way we’re going to come in once it goes off.”



"If he's violent, we're sending him back after the time's up," Charles added, tapping his foot against the floor.

"Of course," Lydia said. She walked into the room, and turned back to look at the adults. "Thank you, guys, honestly. You really didn't have to do this for me." They smiled at her, and moved into the kitchen to give her space.

*Alright, she thought. Here goes nothing.*

"Beetlejuice." Her voice scratched against her throat as she said it. *That was the first time in months any of us had said his name.*

She waited a minute before repeating it again. "Beetlejuice." The air seemed to grow sharper around her, almost as if it were angry, but she wouldn't let it stop her. At this point, she couldn't.

Standing to her full height, she said once more, "Beetlejuice."

With a crack, he appeared in front of her.

"Beetlejuice!" She laughed, a small jump in her step as she walked towards him. "It's so nice to see you again, what's been -,"

Her question died before she got the rest of it out. "Beej," she asked, as calm as she could, "why is your hair black?"

"It's a long, uncomfortable story, kid." His voice sounded as wrecked as he looked, wrecked suit and all. He wouldn't meet her eyes, but she knew what people looked like when they'd been upset, really, unflinchingly upset, and the idea of someone like Beetlejuice getting like that was unnerving. "What'd you call me here for?"

"I missed you."

"Yeah, alright, try that once more with feeling," he said, wagging a finger at her. "Not falling for that shit again."

"I'm serious."

"Strike two! Be careful, babes, one more strike and," he swung an invisible bat, but she saw the lethargy in the action, "you're out."

"What's up with you tonight?"

"What isn't? Like I said, long, exceedingly uncomfortable story that I don't particularly feel like sharing." He leaned against the wall, and closed his eyes. "Now, you want to tell me why I'm really here?"

"I have snacks." She rattled the bag at him.

"And that involves me how?"

"I wanted to see if they have this stuff in the Netherworld. If they don't, I want you to try it." She sat down cross-legged, and patted the space in front of her. "Sit with me."

He opened his eyes, looking at Lydia as he peeled himself off of the wall and shuffled over to her, mirroring her position on the floor when he sat down. When she said nothing, he looked at her, unimpressed. "Dazzle me," he said.

“I can do that,” she replied, and pulled the first item out of her bag.

## Chapter End Notes

delia being a good mom! lydia finally able to be happy! bj utterly refusing to believe that someone might actually miss him! what more could you ask for in a fic?

again, I'm thinking of turning this into a series if I have the drive to continue it. let's see!

like something? hate something? want to see something happen? want to see me eaten by a sandworm? let me know! comments are fantastic, especially when I post this shit at 2:28am, fully aware that I have to get up at 5:45am.

my tumblrs are @strawberryicebreakers for main and @bisexualbeetlejuice for bj-specific content! hit me up!

# conflicts and conversations

## Chapter Summary

in which conversations take place, a certain character appears in the land of the living, and gummy cola bottles are discovered.

## Chapter Notes

so. holy shit! did not expect this fic to get the attention it has but like,,, thank y'all :)! it means a lot to fic authors to see ppl actually commenting on these things. tbh I was hesitant to post this, and even more ehhe about writing more, but seeing the love y'all have for it is spurring me on!

decided to try to continue this! I might mock up a few other fics in this 'verse, hence the series. I write as often as possible, but life is hectic as hell.

this chap is very dialogue heavy. I hate writing dialogue. yeehaw!

enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

“The fuck is that?”

“This,” Lydia said, holding the bag out to him, “is easily one of the best creations that humanity has ever made. Gummy cola bottles!”

Wary, Beetlejuice took the bag out of her hand, ripping into a corner of the packaging. She leaned forward as he inspected it. “Do they taste like glass?”

“Why would anyone buy something that tastes like glass?”

“I don’t know,” he said, taking one out of the bag. “Masochists?”

“I’m not a masochist, Beej,” she said, shaking her head.

He huffed a laugh, looking at her. “Yeah, you say that,” he said, “but the goth outfit really doesn’t help your argument.” He tossed one in his mouth, testing it.

She smiled. “Whatever, you weirdo.”

She looked up at him. It was, to put it simply, really nice to see him again. After months spent between her therapist, school, and her parents, she was happy to see that there was still something constant in her life. BJ was always going to be an odd guy, but that’s something she could count on. Even if he was acting weird now, he’d be back to normal soon, making her laugh and being the guy she knew months ago.

At least, she hoped.

“So,” she started, thumbing at the handle of the bag in her lap, “what’s life been like for you?”

“Nothing much, just getting my powers back and all. Never die, kid,” he shook his head, “the paperwork ain’t worth it.”

“About that,” she said, “I, uh, I wanted to apologize for all of that.”

His eyes narrowed as he looked at her. “Don’t.”

“What? No, Beej, it wasn’t fair that I-”

He set the bag down, hands on his knees. “I was a creep who should’ve gotten the message that you guys wanted me gone. It isn’t your fault that you had to do something about it.” He smiled, but whatever emotion he was trying to go for never showed on his face. Shrugging, he waved a hand. “Don’t lose sleep over it, sweetheart.”

She groaned, frustration building as she dropped the plastic in her hands to the floor. “Why are you acting so weird?”

Silent, Beetlejuice looked at her with an eyebrow raised in question, and that only made it worse. “I told you, had a bad day, and -”

“Okay, yeah, but one bad day doesn’t do this shit to someone. I thought you’d be angry,” her voice raised, “and it’s just like, you aren’t? How are you not yelling at me right now, or wrecking something?”

“You know I’m a person, right? Like, someone with a brain and a general thought process?”

She threw her hands up. “Obviously.”

“Alright, then you should also be able to understand that I have emotions beyond the general anger and happiness you’d give to a cartoon character.”

“I know that, Beej, it’s just,” she said, anger sapped out of her, “if you’re not angry, what are you?”

“Melancholic. Slightly upset.”

“At?”

“You don’t need to know everything, kid.”

“Yeah, but it’d help if you told me.” She picked her bag up again, rifling through it. “Ever had a Snowcap?”

“I’ve seen one,” he said, holding a hand out. She passed the box to him, and, for a moment, everything was calm.

She watched him as he tried the food she’d brought for him. He still looked tired, as if he’d run a marathon and sworn off coffee, but the most concerning thing for her was the hair. At this point, she’d gotten the idea that, to some degree, his hair was like one of the shitty mood rings she’d received as a prize at a roller rink’s ticket counter, but she had no clue what it meant when it was black. “Why’d you need to get your powers back?”

“I died as a human, kid.” He tapped his knee with a free hand as he spoke, “and with that, I lost my

powers. I was your average, garden-variety ghost.”

“Weren’t you a ghost to begin with, though?”

“Nope,” he said, popping the ‘p,’ “I was born like this.”

Carefully, she asked, “dead?”

“Mhm,” he said. “Born dead, lived dead, died dead. I got a sweet power set due to all that, but when I died, I died as a human, and therefore, only had human powers when I crossed back over.”

“How’d you get them back?”

“I have a friend who knows how to fix it all,” he said, voice soft. “She’s the best, kid. I wouldn’t be here without her.”

As he spoke, Lydia saw the tips of his hair start to shift, lightning as a tinge of green began to edge back in. She knew an opportunity when she saw one. “What’s her name?”

“Maria,” he said. “She works in the offices in the Netherworld; with her access to files, she fixed everything up as quick as we could.”

“Oh, that’s neat! Does she work with your mom?”

“I-,” with a snap, the green disappeared. “Yeah, Lydia. She does.”

*Shit*, she thought. “I’m sorry, I forgot you lost her.”

Beetlejuice scoffed, throwing his head back. “Kid,” he started, “losing her was the best thing that could’ve happened to me.”

“She’s your mom, though,” she protested. *Denial won’t help him with this sort of thing*, she thought, *I’d know that better than anyone*. “You’ve got to miss her, and that isn’t anything to be ashamed of. I mean, I miss my mom like hell, and I only knew her for fifteen years. You knew yours for a lot longer.”

“Lydia,” he said, voice firm, “with all due respect, I’ve got to ask you to not talk about shit you know nothing about.”

“I can help, you know? My therapist helped me work through my grief, and I could try to do the same with you.”

“You don’t know what you’re talking about.”

“I do, though! I know better than anyone what it’s like to lose your mom, especially when you loved her. Even if you guys argued, I know it isn’t easy to go through all of this alone. I -”

The box snapped in his hands, crumpling under his grip. He stood up. “Lydia, can you just tell me why I’m here? I need to get back.”

“I told you earlier, but you didn’t believe me!” She stood up as well, fully knowing that she couldn’t reach his height, but she could damn well try. “I missed you!”

His hands formed fists at his sides as a dark red started to stain his hair. “Just tell me the fucking truth, kid. What do you need, what do you want me to do for you?”

"I just wanted to talk to you, you dick!"

"Stop lying to me!"

She's done with this. "I'm not lying, Beetlejuice!" Staring up into his face, she saw the red in him, how pissed he was at her, and she couldn't bring herself to care.

*Why won't he listen to me?*

At her yell, he froze, back straight and shoulders locked as he faced her. He wouldn't look her in the eyes.

"Beetlejuice," she said, lowering her voice, "I missed you. I wanted to see how you were doing, and I'm glad I did because something's going on with you right now and I want to help." She took a breath, stepping away from him. Tired, she asked, "Is it really that hard for you to believe?"

"Yeah, kid," he said, voice hoarse, "it is."

A ring nearby, obnoxiously high-pitched, pulled the pair out of their reverie. Turning her head, Lydia looked in the direction of the noise.

Standing in the doorway, Delia smiled at them, holding her phone in her hand. With a click, the noise vanished, leaving an uncomfortable silence in its wake.

"So," she said, tapping a hand against the frame, "ten minutes are up! What's the plan?"

"The plan," Beetlejuice said, turning to her, "is that I'm leaving."

"You just got here!" Delia strode over, keeping her distance from the man as she set herself behind her step-daughter. She placed her hand on the teen's shoulder as she spoke. "Lydia's been excited to see you all day, and you leave in less than an hour?"

"He's leaving?" Adam made his way into the room, drifting along the edge of the sofa. "I thought he'd refuse to go like last time."

Barbara, who had followed behind him, nodded. "It's odd. He's acting odd." She looked over at Lydia. "Why is he acting odd?"

"He won't tell me!"

"That's rude," the final member of the company said, taking a similar stance to Delia. Charles glanced at the man in question, uneasy. "Is he angry?"

"I don't think so," Barbara said. "He'd be yelling if he was."

"Wasn't someone yelling earlier?" Delia turned to Lydia. "Was it you, or him?"

"I think it was him," Charles added, "he has a very distinctive tone."

"Wait," Delia asked, "Why'd he yell at you?"

"He won't -"

"*He* is in the damn room, and would prefer to be addressed instead of talked about like I wasn't here."

Lydia's mouth snapped shut. Around her, her family stood, quieted by the reality of the situation. While they'd been arguing amongst themselves, he'd remained silent, waiting to see how long it would take for them to realize he was there before he took matters into his own hands.

"I know," he said, pushing a hand through once-again black hair, "I know that it's rich coming from me, but can you guys just get on with it so that I can leave?"

"Get on with what?" From his location near the couch, Adam stood upright, trying to look the other man in the eyes as he fidgeted.

"Whatever it is I'm here to do." At their lack of response, he shrugged. "I'm here for something, just tell me what it is so I can get it done and hightail it out of here." He directed his next words at Lydia. "What is it? Shitty teacher? Boy pulling your hair?" With a force leer, he asked, "girl not pulling your hair when you want her to?"

"Mr. Beetlejuice," Charles said, "you're here because Lydia wants you here. Nothing more, nothing less."

"Cut the shit, Chuck." His voice came out as a snarl as he glared at the aforementioned man. "If there's no reason for me to be here, I'm leaving."

"You can't leave," Barbara said, striding over. She stopped just short of him, chin up. "We won't let you."

"Sweetheart, you can't make me do anything I don't want to do."

"The only reason you're even here is because she wants you here, and the least you could do is stay to make her happy!"

"I'm warning you, Barbara. Don't push this."

"No," she said, "back me up here, Adam."

"Alright," Adam said, straightening his shirt as he walked over. "Why are you so intent on going back?"

"I," he started before cutting himself off, glaring at the couple. "You don't need to know why."

"I think we do. See," with a hand, he gestured to the room, "even after everything, we still invited you back. Lydia still wants to see you." He tucked the hand behind his wife's shoulder. "What could possibly be more important than that?"

"I have a life, you know? A job, a house, people that," he paused. "You know, I've made a life for myself over the past millennia. I don't just wait around to be summoned by suburban families and white teenage boys."

"Assuming you're telling the truth -"

"Which is unlikely," Charles pitched in.

"Why haven't you left yet?"

"I -," at a loss for words, he sputtered. "I've been trying to leave! You guys won't leave me alone!"

"Yes, but you could've left the second you came. You stayed."

“Yeah, BJ,” Lydia said, looking at him. “Why are you still here if you’re so adamant about going back?”

“Fine.” He threw his hands into the air. “Want me gone? I’m leaving.” A pen on the desk had the pleasure of being snatched, Beetlejuice’s grip tight around its barrel. He uncapped it, drawing a box around the wall closest to him. With a swipe, he drew the doorknob and raised a hand to knock.

The front doorbell rang, stopping him in his tracks.

“Lydia,” Delia said, voice delicate, “why don’t you go answer that for us?”

“What? No, he’s leaving, and I-”

“Sweetie, I know.” She leaned down, whispering into the teen’s ear. “We’ll try to stall him for a bit longer. Take your time at the door.”

“Fine,” she said. With a look behind her, seeing Beetlejuice’s fist still close to the makeshift door, she raced downstairs. The old oak door loomed in front of her, and she wrenched it open. Outside, all she could see was a long, tattered trench coat wrapped around someone she didn’t recognize. Something about her was off, but she couldn’t tell what.

A vaguely accented voice asked, “This is the Deetz house, correct?”

“Yeah,” Lydia said, slow.

“Excuse me,” the figure, a woman evidently, said. When Lydia saw her move, she attempted to close the door, but the woman weaved around her, making her way into the house.

In proper lighting, Lydia realized why she seemed odd.

The woman’s head turned, jade skin alight under the chandelier’s gleam in the foyer. Her jacket, wrapped tightly around her, stayed in place even with the haste in which she walked, heels clicking against wood flooring like marbles thrown onto a glass table. She walked with a purpose, as if she knew exactly where to find what she was looking for.

Lydia tried to follow her, losing herself behind the woman’s long strides, and almost smacked into her back when she halted outside of the living room. “Ma’am,” Lydia said, “you don’t need to go in there.”

“On the contrary,” she said, smiling. “This is exactly where I meant to end up.” She turned on her heel, moving straight into the room with the confidence of a model’s runway walk atop a worldwide stage. The conversation inside immediately hushed as she zeroed in on what she found before her. “Lawrence?”

At the edge of the room, Beetlejuice stood, still as stone. “Maria?”

Without a word, she crossed the floor to him. With her heels, she had an inch or so above the man in front of her. She laid a hand on his jacket, smoothing out the wrinkles beneath it.

“Maria,” he repeated, “why are you here?”

She glanced at the other people nearby before turning her attention to him and lowered her voice. “You didn’t answer your phone. You know I get worried when you do that.” She paused for a moment. “I know it’s usually fine, but after today,” she patted her hand against him, “I was concerned, so to speak.”



"I'm sorry. I got kind of," he trailed off, "caught up, y'know, in this whole situation. I forgot to check."

"I'm just glad you're okay," she said. She shifted, looking at the decor before narrowing her eyes at what was behind him. "Lawrence -,"

His head whipped back, and upon seeing the door, he sighed. "It's -, it's not what it looks like."

"Really? Because it looks like you were trying to get her attention again."

He stayed silent, looking over her shoulder.

"Oh, Lawrence," she said, and gathered him in her arms. He wouldn't reciprocate, he never did, but she knew he appreciated it. "You can't keep doing this."

Behind them, the others stared, unsure of what to do. Out of anything that could've happened, they never expected something like this.

"Can someone tell me who she is?" Delia asked, watching the woman.

"She's from the Netherworld," Lydia said, filling her in. "She talked to me when I was down there. She and him are," she paused, trying to find the right word, "close, from what I heard."

"How is she here?" Barbara looked between the Deetz and the pair. "I thought he was the only one that could leave?"

"I know a guy," the woman, Maria, said, listening in even as she wasn't facing them. One of her hands had crept up to the base of the man's skull, holding him so that he wouldn't get out of her grip. "Besides, that's not what's important right now." She took her arms from around him, stepping back.

Head cocked, Lydia's curiosity grew. "What're you talking about?"

Maria huffed, shaking her head. "You don't need to concern yourselves with it. Lawrence," she said, voice soft, "can I speak to you in private?"

"Whatever you say to him, you can say to all of us," Charles said, watching for her reaction.

"And why is that?"

"You're in my house. Whatever you do inside of it is my business."

A laugh escaped from her, and she raised a hand to cover her mouth. "Give it a century and it'll be someone else's house. A century from that, it might become compost. Why should I care about whatever breather is living in it now?"

"Maria," Beetlejuice said. Without a grip on him, he was drained, as if he could fall over and sleep at any moment. "Just say it."

She picked up his hand in one of hers, rubbing circles into his skin. "It's about Juno."

He closed his eyes.

Words came quick to her tongue as she tried to explain what they were dealing with. "She knows you've left the Netherworld, but she can't leave. Her superiors found out about the incident with the sandworm and have her on desk duty until they can arrange a conference with her."

“How-, uh, how long do you think that’ll take?”

“A month, maybe a month and a half if it takes a while. You know things like this move fast for her, although that was usually because she’d threaten to sic you on them if they didn’t move quickly.”

The corner of his mouth quirked up, an imitation of a smile. “Well, we don’t have to worry about that anymore?”

“I didn’t think so,” Maria said, “but now, I’m not so sure. You,” she pointed at Lydia, “can you bring me some water and a rag?”

Eyes wide, Lydia asked, “sorry, but why?”

She gestured at the drawing behind her with a glare. “I need to get this off of the wall somehow.”

“Maria -,”

“Don’t ‘Maria’ me, Lawrence.” Her hand twitched from where it rested at her thigh. “I know exactly what you were about to do.”

With a groan, Beetlejuice shook his head. “No, I need to go back. Lydia, don’t do what she said.”

“That’s not the only way you return and don’t you dare act like you don’t know that. Besides,” she said, “you can’t come back, at least, not anytime soon. Juno would have your hide the second she saw you. Your best bet is to stay up here as long as possible until she cools down, or until her interworld travel ban is lifted.”

“Wait, sorry, pause,” Delia said. She looked at the pair, the green woman and rumped man, and blinked. “He needs to stay up here? Like, with us?”

“Not necessarily at this home, but he needs to find somewhere and stay there for the next few weeks. I can’t spend half of my time tracking him down like I did tonight.”

Adam leaned over, peering at her. “How did you even do that, though? He could’ve been anywhere in the world.”

Smirking, Maria laid a hand on Beetlejuice’s shoulder. “Once you get to know him, Lawrence is a very, *very* predictable man. You just need to know where to look.”

“Predictable is not a word I thought could be applied to him,” Lydia said. She turned to her family. “He should stay with us until this blows over.”

“Lydia -”

“Dad, it’s the smartest option. He needs to be somewhere where someone can keep him in check. If anything even tried to hurt us, he could stop it.” She smiled as if she was asking for a new pet instead of a person. “Please?”

“I -”

“Maria, can I call you that?” Delia asked, walking over. She looked at the woman, scanning her from head to toe. At Maria’s nod, she continued. “We would love to have him stay with us.” Sounds of protest erupted from behind her, but she didn’t stop. “I think it would be a good experience for everyone involved if we got to know each other better. And, as Lydia mentioned,

we can keep an eye on him.”

The woman smiled, clasping her hands together. “This is perfect, thank you,” she said, and pulled out a phone from one of the coat’s many pockets. “Shit,” she said, “I need to get going.”

“Maria -,”

“It’ll all blow over soon; it’s nothing to worry about.” She rested a palm against his cheek, and said, “I’ll try to pop in from time to time if I can, but I’ll call you if anything happens. The second she calms down, you can come home.”

“I can’t stay up here forever.”

“And you won’t. I don’t know what is going to happen, but I promise I’ll try my best to calm her down if she gets going. I’ll even have Irva and Helen distract her if the need arises.”

At that, he huffed a laugh. “You know they couldn’t do that shit if they tried.”

“It’s the thought that counts, isn’t it?”

“Whatever you say, Miss Argentina.” His voice lowered at the end, teasing her.

She slid her hand away from his face, smiling. “Alright, Mr. Beetlejuice,” she said, toying with him. Addressing the rest of the group, she raised her voice to be heard, but only slightly. “Anything happens, any other entities show up or if doors start appearing on the walls, call me. My number’s in Lawrence’s phone, but the line to my desk is in the handbook.”

“Call you, got it,” Delia replied. “Anything else?”

“Yeah, hide the Sharpies.” Eyebrows raised, she added, “he’s a menace.”

“We know,” Adam said, at a loss at the rapid progression he’d seen.

“Lawrence, walk me out?” She held out an arm, and he took it in his. Quietly, she murmured something to him that Lydia couldn’t overhear as they walked out together.

As soon as they were out of sight, Barbara cleared her throat. “Are -,” she asked, voice small, “are they - ?”

“Barbara, honey,” Adam said, holding her hand, “I don’t think anyone wants you to finish that sentence.”

## Chapter End Notes

I hate writing dialogue.

god,,, BJ in this fic? ending me to write him like this. all I want is for this ratsexy man to have a nice life but It Ain't Like That Now. at least someone hugged him.

is. is it bad that I'm debating on making bj and maria A Thing?

the man deserves love. it isn't official or anything, I'm still thinking of making it a no-romance fic v. maria and bj v. an oc and bj, but I just. really think he deserves someone

that isn't connected to the maitlands/deetzes. as much of a fan that I am of adam/barbara/bj, I really don't think it would fit this 'verse. with that, though, I plan on writing a fic that details what happened in the weeks between the end of the musical and the start of this fic. what are y'all's thoughts on that?

also I just love miss argentina what about it

also x2, if anyone's curious, this 'verse's version of miss argentina looks like yamila saud.

local author says fuck it and disregards like,,, half of canon. whoops. miss argentina can exit the netherworld because I Say So.

bonus points for anyone who realized why BJ gets freaked during the scene right before everyone else joins the fray!

speaking of that scene - don't yell near BJ if he isn't expecting it. happy yells? always fun! angry yells? that's a no go. personally, when that shit happens to me, I raise my ears. don't really know why but that's what I always did as a kid and it just kind of stuck with me. I was tempted to write that in as well, but didn't really know how to make it work.

I'm really bemused at this whole situation, as shitty as it is. like in the musical, everyone meets bj while he's manic, acting out due to circumstance, but now that he's back and not like that they Don't Really Know What To Do with him.

hopefully, they'll learn soon!

hopefully.

like something? hate something? want to see something happen? want to see me eaten by a sandworm? let me know! comments are great, especially when I'm Sick as Fuck because AP kids don't stay home when they're sick and infect their entire class. love that!

as always, my tumblrs are always open! @strawberryicebreakers on main and @bisexualbeetlejuice for BJ-specific content. I've already received a few asks and I Love That! keep sendin' em in!

# showers and sandworms

## Chapter Summary

in which ghost with the most will be here for a while, and it's necessary to take a step back and see what this means for everyone involved.

## Chapter Notes

this chapter is a little less angsty than the previous three! thank god!

still a bit sad tho.

I wrote like,,, 75% of this chap while blaring "sleeping powder" by gorillaz.

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Hand on his arm, Maria led him away from the living, guiding him more than she should've had to. As they turned through the doorway, she leaned towards him.

"You know," she whispered, glancing back at Lydia, "if you try anything, I'll send Sandy up to keep watch."

Lawrence snorted, laughing as he said, "Sandworms can't be tamed, Maria."

"Well, she listens to you, does she not?" The corner of her mouth quirked when he looked at her, and he began to smile as well.

The pair passed through the house, making their way to the oak door at the front. Once they arrived, Maria pulled her coat closer to her body, tying it tight, and he opened the door for her.

She spoke as she looked out into the night. "I know you have to stay up here," she said, "but it'll be odd without you down there."

"I know," he replied, "who else would be there to steal your pens?"

"I'm serious, Lawrence," she said. "I'll get this sorted out as soon as I can. I'm not sure how, but I will."

"You don't have to." He moved to stand beside her, shoulder to shoulder. "I could always -"

"No," she said, voice firm. "I'm not having this conversation again. Just," she sighed, "try not to cause too much of a ruckus up here. The last thing either of us needs is to have you banished back into the Netherworld without warning."

"They don't know they can do that," he said. At her confusion, he shrugged, suit stiff over his body. "I never told them, and they never cared to ask if there was a way to send me back."

“Oh,” she said, surprised. “That’s good, that’s really good.”

For a moment, they stood in silence, watching as the trees swayed in the breeze. With everything that had happened in the past few hours, it was nice for him to feel some measure of calm again.

“You know,” she said, turning to him. She combed her fingers through his hair, grimy as it was, and smiled. “Green’s my favorite color.”

He raised an eyebrow. “Narcissist much?”

“Shush,” she said. With a hand, she gestured as she spoke. “I didn’t choose this. It just sort of happened.” She stuck her hands in her pockets. “I’m glad it did.”

“It suits you.”

She ducked her head, bashful at the compliment, and behind her, the clouds began to pour, shifting from a small trickle to a harsher pour in the blink of an eye.

At the crack of thunder, she closed her eyes. “I should get going.”

“Need me to draw the door?”

“No, I’ve got one out here already, but thank you.”

“Okay,” he said. Moving away, she stepped out into the dark, coat darkening as it caught water in its fabric. “Let me know when you get home.”

“I will,” she said. Before she walked away, she hesitated. “Lawrence?”

“Yeah?”

“I’m going to miss you.”

-

Inside the house, Lydia, along with her parents, sat in the living room, trying to figure out what the next course of action was. The Maitlands had retired to the attic as fast as they could, if only to avoid whatever came next.

Swinging her feet against the chair she was in, Lydia watched her parents. Her dad was on his phone, presumably trying to see if there was a WikiHow for their situation, and Delia reclined next to him, legs crossed and smile ready for when their guest came back inside. Lydia could feel the excitement encasing her heart as she tried to keep still.

*He’s going to stay!* she thought, smiling to herself. Even if it weren’t what she’d planned, she’d be lying if she claimed this wasn’t what she really wanted. There were so many things she’d thought of showing or doing with him in the living world over the past few months. She wasn’t sure what the differences were, with the only knowledge she had of the Netherworld consisting of a procession of ghosts trying to convince her to leave it, but she assumed that it couldn’t be nearly as fun as her world.

With summer coming up, she’d have all the free time she needed to show him around town, to bring him with her family to the pool, or the movies, or the mall, or the theme park, or -

“Lydia,” Delia said, breaking her out of her thoughts, “is the guest bedroom still clean?”

“Yeah! I haven’t been in there since we cleaned it after Dad’s friends spent the night back in April.”

“Alright, well,” she said, drumming her fingers on the arm of the chair, “is the fridge stocked?”

“I went to the store earlier today, dear,” her dad said, looking at Delia. “You’re worrying over nothing.”

“I know, I know,” she said. “I just want to make sure everything is nice.”

Lydia spoke from across the room. “If it helps, I doubt BJ has the highest standards.”

“That,” Delia said, thoughtful, “actually does help. Thank you, Lydia.”

“No problem,” she said. Right as she began to let herself get lost in her thoughts again, she heard the front door shut. Her eyes grew wide, and she rushed out of the room, parents hot on her heels. “BJ!”

“Hey, kid,” he said. He gave a halfhearted smile when he saw her. “Looks like I’ll be here for a while. I -”

His voice cut off as Lydia slammed into him, hugging him tight.

“Whoa, okay, personal space isn’t a thing anymore?” His eyebrows scrunched as he looked down at her, face buried in his shoulder. “Lyds, you might not want to do that.”

Pulling her head away, she asked, “Why?”

“I, honest to God, can’t remember the last time this suit got washed.”

She launched herself off of him. “Gross, gross,” she mumbled under her breath, “so goddamn gross, okay.”

“Speaking of which,” Delia added, a good distance away, “you need to clean up if you’re going to be here.”

“There’s an ensuite in the guest bedroom,” her dad added. “I suggest you start there.”

Beetlejuice tilted his head. “If there’s a guest bedroom, why do the Maitlands live in the attic?”

“They didn’t want it,” Lydia supplied. “Said it’d be weird.”

“Of course they wouldn’t want to be ‘weird,’” Beetlejuice said, rolling his eyes. “Polite little suburban couple like them.”

“I’ll show you up.” Lydia grabbed his wrist, dragging him after her as she raced up the stairs. She saw him stumble at the sudden movement, but she was too elated to register it.

“Fuck, slow down, kid,” he wheezed, wincing after he’d been hip-checked by the baluster. “Just let me walk behind you.”

“Oh, okay!” She dropped his wrist and motioned for him to follow. They climbed the stairs together, reaching the top and turning left. Down the hallway, a set of three doors were together, and with that, Lydia stopped. “First door is the guest bedroom! I’m next door, and the stairs to the attic are at the end.” She opened the door and flicked on the light.

As a result of Delia's modernistic phase, the room itself was sleek and minimalistic. Lilac walls encased dark mahogany wood that formed the furniture. A large four-poster bed in the center of the room, with a wardrobe and dresser nearby, with a framed skyline of New York as a token decor piece. A door found its way as well, leading to the ensuite.

She turned to Beetlejuice, a smile on her face. "What do you think?"

"It's," he paused. "It's really nice, Lydia."

"I know, right? And the ensuite is cool as hell, too." She opened the door, ensuring that everything was in place before ducking out of the ensuite. "You, uh, you know how to shower, right?"

Beetlejuice looked at her, sighing. "Yes, Lydia, I know how to shower."

"Okay! Just wanted to make sure. You can chuck your suit on the bed and we'll see what we can do about that whole situation."

"Alright," he said.

"Towels are under the counter, shampoo's in the shower, I think there's a brush in one of the drawers, -"

"Lydia," he said. "I've got it. You can leave."

"What if something happens? I can stay in here if you want!"

"I'm a grown man, kid. There are few things that I'd need help with, and this ain't one of them."

She took a step back, not willing to meet his eyes. "You're not going to leave, are you?"

"I, and I can't stress this enough, literally cannot leave. I'll still be here after you leave the room."

Quiet overtook them for a moment. Everything in Lydia made her want to believe him, that he'd still be there even after she left, but part of her was afraid that this was all a dream, that the second she closed his door, she'd wake up in bed, or, even worse, that he'd vanish without saying goodbye. A quick glance around the room showed her that there wasn't anything he could use to get out, but uncertainty kept its foothold. He was a crafty guy, and she'd have to be willfully ignorant to think that he couldn't leave if he really wanted to.

"Kid." She snapped out of her thoughts at his voice, stern as it was. "I can't get anything done if you're in here, and frankly, I want to get this over and done with ASAP." With a fluid motion, he swept his jacket off of his shoulders. Underneath, the striped shirt he wore was caked in substances she didn't even want to know about.

She nodded her head. "Yeah, I get it. I'll, uh," she pointed a thumb over her shoulder, "head out."

He breathed a sigh of relief, shoulders heavy. "Thanks."

With that, she turned her back on him and walked out, shutting the door with a *click!* behind her.

-

In the master bedroom, Delia rummaged through her partner's dresser, pulling out t-shirts and the like as Charles walked in.

"What, pray tell, are you doing?" he asked, a smile on his face.



“It isn’t another wardrobe overhaul, I promise,” she said, looking over the gray hoodie she’d found wedged between a pair of socks and the side of the drawer. *This could work*, she thought, and placed it next to her.

“I’m glad to hear it,” he said, “I don’t think I could throw out last month’s shopping spree just yet. I like the flair it has.” He sat on the bed behind her, head cocked to the side. “If it isn’t that, though, what is going on?”

“The shops aren’t open this late, and I’ll be damned if a guest of ours sleeps in a suit.” She stood up, gathering the clothes she’d deemed worthy of her venture, and deposited them on the bed. “Help me look through these.”

“Alright, dear.”

“You two are close in size, although he’s quite a bit shorter than you are, so anything long on you is a no-go for him.” She lifted a t-shirt, cotton worn soft after a year or so of use. “This?”

“That’s good.”

“Could you look for some jeans? I couldn’t find any,” Delia said, folding the t-shirt. A small pile began to form next to her, with an assortment of shirts, a hoodie or two, and a few pairs of joggers that hadn’t been too worn out.

A quiet knock on the door told them that someone had made their way to the room. “What’s going on in here?” Barbara asked, Adam trailing behind her. They looked upon the scene before them with a sort of apprehension, although it wasn’t the first time they’d seen Delia in one of her trend-induced frenzies.

Charles answered, allowing Delia to continue her judgement of the jeans he’d tossed on the bed. “She’s putting some clothes together for Beetlejuice.”

At the mention of that particular entity, they could hear something, most likely a bottle, fall in the shower. They looked at each other.

“Maybe,” Adam said, eyes wide, “we should figure out something else to call him.”

“He’s got to have a regular name, right?” Barbara asked, joining Delia in her task. “I mean, who looks at a baby and says ‘yeah, that absolute trainwreck of vowels is perfect’?”

“The green woman called him Lawrence,” Charles added. “What if that’s his name?”

“He doesn’t look like a Lawrence. He looks like a,” Adam said, “well, what he calls himself, but I think I remember him mentioning something like that when we, uh, first met him.”

“I say we try it out,” Charles said, “at worst, we try something else. At best, we’re right.”

“I’m with him,” Delia said, squinting at the hem of a pair of joggers. “Charles, does this have a rip in it, or am I seeing things?”

“Let’s hope it does,” Barbara said. “Otherwise, he won’t be able to wear it.”

Delia, halfway in the process of handing the pants off, dropped them. “What?”

“It says so in the Handbook,” Adam said. “The dead can’t wear the clothes of the living.”

“What’s that supposed to mean?”

"It means," Barbara said, "that 'dead' clothes are the only clothes we can wear."

"Ripped, torn, or otherwise mutilated," Adam supplied. "Lydia went to the thrift shop a few months back for us. Did you two really never wonder how we changed clothes?"

"I always thought it was a ghost thing," Delia glanced at the pile of clothes beside her, frowning. "Charles, can -"

"Already on it, dear." He handed her the sewing kit she'd left in the nightstand, having predicted what she was about to do.

Picking out a small pair of scissors, Delia asked, "so, just to be sure, if I 'kill' the clothes, he'll be able to wear them?"

"That's what we did," Barbara said, nodding. "Even a small tear will do."

"Well," Delia said, "here goes nothing." She cut a short way into sleeve of a hoodie, wincing as she did so. "Is this good?"

"Let me see," Adam said. She passed the item to him, and he stuck an arm through it. When it clung to his form, not falling through the air, he smiled. "That'll do!"

"Alright," Delia said, "new goal, fuck up these clothes!"

-

The rain-like sound of water from a showerhead hadn't been something Lawrence had heard in a while. Over the past few centuries, he'd been consumed with retribution, then apologies, then retribution again, in a shitty cycle that hadn't given him time for something as trivial as cleanliness, even if, much to what appeared to be mass opinion, he didn't mind being clean. There was always something more important, and he didn't have time to waste standing around for minutes when something else could be done.

He stripped, laying the suit out on the bed as he waited for the water to heat up, and closed the door to the ensuite as he walked in. It was a good-sized room, with one of the fancier showers that reached from floor to ceiling. Swiping the brush from the drawer Lydia'd mentioned, because hell, he was probably going to need it, he stepped into the steam.

Almost immediately, the water turned near-black as it passed through his hair, leaving him a vaguely grossed out. The first round of shampoo and conditioner, some expensive brand that smelled like the woods, but cleaner, didn't do much, and he resigned himself to what could be over an hour to get himself in order.

On the third round, he felt a pull in his chest, and the bottle slipped out of his hand, slamming against the tile floor with a deep *thud*. For a moment, he stilled, knowing that he had no time to get himself together other than wrapping a towel around himself if whoever it was calling his name was really intent on it, but after a minute passed, he deemed it a fluke and continued. If he got summoned, that was someone else's problem.

Once his hair stopped feeling like hay cemented together and more like, well, hair, he moved on towards the soap, scrubbing his arms for what felt like half an hour until he couldn't see grime anymore. Torso came next, along with legs. By the end of it all, the bar of soap, formerly new, was next to nothing, whittled down to a shell of its former self.

Turning the water off, he got out, wrapping a towel around himself. Brush in hand, he made sure

his hair would dry right, but honestly, he wasn't even sure of what it would be like. It had been many, many years since he'd seen his hair in its natural state, and frankly, he wasn't sure if its usual style was normal or a result of everything holding it up.

The door outside his room opened, and he froze, checking to make sure that the ensuite was locked. Whoever was in the main room worked quick, dropping something onto his bed with a *thump!* before pausing, then running right back out, closing the door behind themselves.

After a beat of silence, he opened the door, slow in case anyone was still out there, but no one was to be seen. He slinked out, trying to make out the shape on his bed in the light coming from behind him. Stretching out a hand, he felt fabric underneath his palm, and picked something up.

It was a sweatshirt, dark gray, with a small rip in the hood. It was soft in his hands.

There was a note laying on top of more clothes, all neatly folded.

*"We found some of Charles' old clothes and thought you might enjoy them. I had Lydia grab your suit, and I'll see if it can get dry-cleaned sometime soon. She doesn't have school tomorrow, so I suggest sleeping if you can; I'm sure she has something planned for you two.*

*Have a nice night.*

*-Delia"*

He -

He didn't know how to feel.

Obviously, he was thankful, but -

It'd been a while since he'd worn anything other than the suit for more than a quick moment.

He still remembered when he first made it, sometime back in the eighteenth century with cloth he'd bargained for from all of the men who died in dark suits that were all the rage back then. Nights spent dying strips of fabric from whatever shops he could find, alone after one of the nastier feuds he'd had with his mom, but finally proud of something he'd made himself. The stitches had been the most difficult part of it all, and he'd had to take them out and redo them in the years since, but they were off-kilter because he'd done it, not anyone else. It was fucked up and shitty and half-torn apart, but it was his.

Now, though, the prospect of wearing anything else seemed daunting, as if he was betraying himself, but he knew he didn't have a choice, and at the end of it all, it was worth it. He'd be able to repair the suit from the inevitable popped stitches and rips it'd accumulated since he fixed it last, and he'd be in something comfortable while he did it.

He sorted through the pile, finding a pair of black joggers, and a dark purple t-shirt. Making his way back into the bathroom, he took those, and the hoodie, with him.

The mirror'd finally cleared, and for the first time in years, he saw himself without any grime, dirt, or anything else on him.

His skin was a hell of a lot pinker than he'd thought it would be, and he didn't have the heat to blame it on. Ash from a fire back in 1906, probably from his time in San Fran', had been on his skin ever since, making it seem dustier and lighter than it was, and it was jarring, to say the least. His hair, half dry, was softer than he thought it could ever be, framing his face nicely. Even the

skin on his hands was cleaned up, and the black polish he'd grown accustomed to hadn't even chipped yet.

Ripping his gaze away from himself, if only to prevent an existential breakdown, he left, moving the clothes from the bed to the top of the dresser. The AC in the house was cranked to high heaven, and he pulled the hoodie on over himself before climbing under the covers.

The windows, left open, showed him a view of the stars, and, under a duvet that must've cost a fortune in a house that he never planned on coming back to, Lawrence fell asleep.

## Chapter End Notes

so. since my last update, the following things have happened: I caved and bought BJ tickets! nov 16th matinee babey. got my car rear ended and totaled. bought a new car. took an SAT. saw joker [fantastic, btw]. debuted my bj cosplay at a halloween event and got a shit ton of compliments. slept for twelve hours straight.

I'll actually be in NYC once a month for the rest of the year for various reasons, which brings my total time in NYC to four trips, all this year! NYC is wild, especially for a southerner like yours truly.

I Can't Remember where I first read the whole "kill the clothes via wrecking them so the undead can wear them" trope and it's pissing me off. it was years ago and just,,, >:(

fun fact - the only people in this fic who use the word "love" are lydia, delia, and junio. use that info how you wish.

another fun fact - while researching for my cosplay, I found out that, for the bway production, the stitches on the suit are done upside down, which would only be like that if bj had mended it himself [found via a playbill article w/ william ively]

also, if anyone's curious about this fic's timeline - events of the musical happen in january, and this fic starts in early may of the same year. speaking of time, though, I've got a personal little headcanon that aging can happen in the Netherworld if you kick the bucket under the age of eighteen, but it just takes a while. for bj's age, he's around a millennia old, but for his emotional age/real world equivalent I'd put him somewhere in his early to late twenties. he's still young enough to be wildly insecure and emotional, but old enough to be an adult and have the general pessimism that my millennial teachers embody. if I had to give it a measure, maybe around 50 or so years in the netherworld = 1 year aging on earth. aging for them would stop after 18/whenever they choose. it's a form-filled process that maria hates dealing with.

I'm just clarifying that this fic? no beetlebabes. like,,, at all. you do you, everyone has their ships, freedom of speech, etc. etc. but it isn't my thing. lydia's excitement here is written like how I get excited when my siblings come home from college. there's no aspect of her at all that thinks of BJ like that, and vice versa.

literally Please Send Me Asks I am 100% willing and capable of rambling about beetlejuice 'till my keys fall off.

like something? hate something? want to see something happen? want to see me eaten by a sandworm? let me know! comments are great, especially when I've been writing this all day instead of packing for NYC tomorrow, and I'm leaving at four am.

as always, my tumblrs are always open! @strawberryicebreakers on main and @bisexualbeetlejuice for BJ-specific content.

# pancakes and personas

## Chapter Summary

in which breakfast is made and shopping trips occur.

## Chapter Notes

okay so, holy shit! I have no clue as to how to properly link something in the chapter notes but @wormsinmyskull on tumblr drew part of chapter three and :)!!! I love it so much y'all. it means the world to fic writers when we see people enjoy our fic. but uh,,, I'm In Love with that art. so, so much ♥♥♥! words can't even describe how happy it made me, and you know that's intense, because I'm a damn writer. words are supposed to be my forte but I can't find the right ones to say how over the moon I am!!!

link to the art - [<https://wormsinmyskull.tumblr.com/post/188605245325/fanart-for-take-me-where-my-soul-can-run-by>]

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Sunlight, streaming in through an open window, coated the kitchen as Delia entered, maroon robe pulled tight around her. She smiled at the picture it made, a beautiful, suburban home that she never thought she'd allow herself to have. For years she'd kept her head high and her aspirations even higher, never allowing herself to dawdle on frivolous things like her friends from high school had. No, she'd thrown herself into the wonderfully wicked world of art and refused to look back. She'd dreamed of high-rise penthouses and fifty-thousand dollar gowns, and if her younger self could see her now, standing in suburbia with a robe she'd found at the local Target, she's sure that past-Delia would wonder where everything had gone wrong.

She bent down to grab a mixing bowl and got to work, gathering ingredients for the pancake recipe one of the neighbors, lovely Ms. Tunt from three doors down, had suggested. It wasn't too complicated, which is why Delia had hope for herself in making it right. Eggs and egg substitutes in hand, she shut the fridge door and yelped.

From across the kitchen island, Beetlejuice [*Lawrence?* her mind supplied] stood, looking vaguely confused. "What?" he asked. His voice was just as she'd remembered it, sounding as if he had a permanently sore throat.

"Oh, it's nothing," she said, waving it off, "I just got a bit startled, that's all." She set her items on the counter and turned to look back at him. In a hoodie and joggers, he seemed almost harmless, even if she knew he was anything but. She was pleasantly surprised to see that he'd showered, if the lack of grime was anything to go by. All together, it made him look younger, like less of an immortal entity hellbent on chaos and more of a college student on his weekend home. It made her proud to know that he'd taken her requests to heart, though, and she knew she had to show it as a method of positive reinforcement, something she'd learned about early on in her training after art

hadn't worked out as well as she'd hoped. "Thank you for cleaning up," she said, watching for his reaction. "You look nice."

"Uh, thank you," he said. He broke eye contact, ducking his head down, but she saw the tips of his hair, previously a solid forest green, shift a shade lighter than the rest of it. She watched him for a moment, drumming his fingers against the side of his thigh, before she spoke.

"What's the situation with your hair?" She strode to the other side of the kitchen to get to the oven, trying to appear nonchalant even when she saw him shift away from her as she came close. "I mean, when you first came, it was like, neon green, but it was also red? And last night it was black, and now it's back to green? What's the story behind that?"

"There really isn't one," he said. When she turned to look at him, she found that he'd hopped onto the countertop, perched on the edge with his legs dangling off the side of the marble. "It's always been that way."

"Even when you were a kid?" She paused, setting the bowl down. "You were a kid, right?"

He huffed, closing his eyes. "Of course I was a kid, D, and if I had photos of mini-me, I'm sure he'd have the same hair going on."

Delia hummed as she processed the information. *So, she thought, picking a whisk out of the drawer and mixing her ingredients together in different bowls to keep the vegan recipe separate from the normal batch, he was a kid. One mystery down, countless more to go.* She dropped the whisk into the sink, running water through its wires, and cranked the stovetop on. "What's the Netherworld like?"

He narrowed his eyes at her, which would usually be frightening, but without all of the dirt and decades-old suit, he just looked like Lydia did when she woke up for school after a late night. "I'm not stupid," he said, an orange tinge beginning to show in his hair, "I know what you're doing."

"Forgive me if I'm overstepping," Delia said, setting a pan onto the stovetop, "but I'm just a bit curious, that's all."

He stayed silent for a moment and took a deep breath. "It's like how it is here, just longer."

"When you say it's like how the world is up here, what does that mean?"

"It means," he said, swinging a foot in the air, "it's literally like how it is for you guys. Like, the exact same thing. We've got the same countries, same issues, same everything. Only difference is that everyone's dead."

"Wouldn't that get crowded after a while, though?"

"We roll with it," he said.

"Alright." Delia labeled some of the batter onto the pan, smiling as it sizzled against the heat. She busied herself with the cooking, keeping a close eye on the man behind her as she did so. Halfway through the batter, she thought of something. "If you don't mind me asking -"

"I probably will."

"How did you die?"

The fidgeting stopped, and he looked at her. "I didn't."

“What?”

“I didn’t die. To die, you have to be alive, which, technically speaking, I’ve only been once, so I mean, I guess I’ve died once, but I never initially died. It’s tricky.”

*The wedding.* The shitshow of an event that resulted in her and Charles having to scrub dried blood off of floorboards, when Lydia wouldn’t go into the living room, and the Maitlands tried to help, even if it was hard. “I’m sorry,” she said, unsure of what else she should say.

“Don’t be. I was going through some shit and took it out on everyone.” His hands found the edge of the counter, and he tapped black nails against it. “Lydia and I talked about it already.”

“I’m sure that, whatever she said, I agree with. It takes two to tangle, Lawrence, and we definitely aren’t innocent in the matter.” She shook her head. “There are very few times in life where only one party is completely at fault.”

“Delia?”

“Yes, Lawrence?”

“Why are you calling me that?”

She cocked her head to the side. “Isn’t that your name?”

“I mean, yeah, but,” he said, uncomfortable, “why are you calling me it?”

“Do you want us to call you ‘Beetlejuice’ instead?” He flinched when she said it, which did nothing but escalate her confusion.

“Usually I’d say yeah, but when it’s said by the living, it sends an alert of sorts,” he said. “It’s a way to know when someone’s trying to contact me.”

“And when we aren’t trying to summon you?”

He looked sheepish, shoulders bunched up behind him. “It can’t really tell the difference. I hadn’t ever gotten that far with the whole system.”

“System?”

“I had to know when someone was trying to bring me somewhere.” He chuckled to himself. “I had a few close calls that I wanted to avoid again. I mean, there was this guy who -”

“Okay,” she said, cutting him off. “If calling you *that* would be unpleasant for you, wouldn’t it make sense for us to call you by your real name?”

He shrugged. “I guess it would. It’s just kind of weird for me.”

With a flip, she finished cooking, setting the last of the pancakes onto the empty plate she’d laid out earlier. “How so?”

“Not many people call me that.”

“The woman last night, Maria, she did. And, uh,” she stumbled, trying to find a way to phrase the next part, “Juno did.”

“Yeah,” he said, pushing himself off of the counter, “she does.”



“‘Does?’ Didn’t she, well,” Delia said, “pass on?”

“Nah,” Lawrence said, waving a hand. “Can’t kill someone who’s already dead. Believe me, I’d know if you could.”

*That’s concerning*, she thought, but she knew when to cut herself off. There were conversations that needed to be held, but Saturday morning wasn’t the time to coax them out. She smiled at him and took note of the hair color, a muddy green. Even if he wouldn’t admit it, she was sure there was something about it, some sort of reasoning behind the colors. “Could you go get Lydia for me?”

“Why?”

She gestured at him with the plate. “For breakfast. I need her down here before it gets cold.”

“And I’m getting her because?”

“Charles doesn’t eat pancakes, and the Maitlands can’t. They’re for you two, and myself, of course.”

“I-,” he said, stumbling over his words. “I’ll, uh, I’ll go get her, then.” He scooted by her, and, with a quick glance behind himself, made his way up the stairs.

With that, Delia set the breakfast bar, not even hesitating when she added one more set of dishes than she usually did.

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When her door cracked open, Lydia shuffled deeper into her covers, intent on getting at least a few more hours of sleep during the two days of peace she got per week. Light spilled into her room, hitting the top of her head, and she groaned. “Delia,” she mumbled, eyes screwed shut, “I’ll get up in a little bit.”

“Lyds,” a voice began, scratchy in all of the places she remembered it to be, “you should get up now. D made pancakes.”

She threw the covers off of herself as she sat up. In the darkness of her room, her eyes weren’t adjusted to the light, but despite that, she still saw the silhouette she was looking for.

“Kid, if you don’t get up, I’ll -”

“I’m up, BJ,” she said, swinging her legs over the side of her bed, trying not to tumble onto the floor as she stood up. She walked over to him, and as her eyes adjusted, she was taken aback by what she saw. “Huh,” she said as they walked towards the stairs.

He looked at her, confused. “What?”

“You smell good. I didn’t know that was a thing you could do.”

“Shut up,” he said, no ill intent behind his words. He ruffled her hair, just a bit rough, and she smirked, batting a hand up at him. Before she even saw him move, he caught her wrist with an alarmingly strong grip, wagging a finger of his free hand at her.

“Now, Lydia,” he said, faking sophistication as he let go, “it’ll take a lot more than that to win when you’re against the ghost with the most.”

“Like what?”

He snorted. “Why would I tell you?”

“Fair enough.” She paused as they entered the kitchen and gave him a once-over. She hadn’t really been confident that he’d actually get clean, but he did, and she was pleasantly surprised by it. The hoodie was one of her dad’s, and she assumed the pants were the same, as she doubted that he’d had enough time to bring his own clothes when he was unexpectedly summoned last night.

“Seriously, though, it’s nice to see you cleaned up.”

“It feels nice,” he replied. “Haven’t really had the time for it in a while. Last time I tried to get clean up here, Feetham’d just made the modern shower, and you wouldn’t believe how shitty those things were back then.”

“I think I can imagine it,” Lydia said as she sat down on the raised seat. Delia swept into the room a minute later, carrying a plate in either hand.

“It’s nice to see you up on time,” Delia said, placing one plate in front of her, with the other plate placed next to her. “I almost forgot that was a possibility. Oh, and Lawrence,” she added, glancing at him, “these are chocolate-chip. Lydia likes them that way, but if you don’t, I can figure something else out.”

“They’re great, D,” he said, sitting down next to Lydia.

There was nothing, barring the sound of silverware clinking, that happened for a few moments until Lydia’s curiosity got the better of her. “Uh,” she asked, watching the man next to her for his reaction, “‘Lawrence?’”

“It made the most sense,” Delia said. “Referring to him as, well, the other name, makes him think he’s being called up. And on that, we don’t want to accidentally summon him by using it, so we decided his actual name would be the best, y’know?”

“I guess,” Lydia said. She stared down, pushing half-eaten pancakes around her plate before looking over at the man in question. “Is it okay if I still call you BJ?”

“Yeah, kid,” he said, meeting her eyes, “that’s alright. Just try to refrain from the full word unless shit’s going down.”

“Oh, like what?” Her eyes went wide, thoughts of breakfast forgotten as she turned her attention to Lawrence.

“Something like,” he said, gesturing his hands out as he spoke, “a fire, or some lunatic trying to kill you. Or if someone from my place came up, ‘cause you’ve got to let me know if that happens.”

“Who would try to come up?” Delia moved to the other side of the bar, watching the pair talk. “Like Maria, or someone else?”

Lawrence scratched the back of his neck as he thought of the people he knew. “Maria might try again, yeah, but she’d let me know beforehand. Plus, she isn’t exactly a threat to anyone. There are a few guys who might try to start something, but they wouldn’t be able to get up here unless someone summoned them, so I’m doubtful that they’d even make it here.”

“And Juno?” Delia asked gently. Even if she didn’t know the full story, she knew there was something off about the other woman, and tried to be careful when she spoke of her. “What about her?”

“She,” he said, “she might. It’s a possibility.” He drummed a hand against an empty plate, nervous. “If she pops up, don’t even hesitate.”

Lydia spoke up. “What if we could make her leave? Like, trick her into thinking you aren’t here or something like that?”

He barked out a laugh. “Kid,” he said, “she’s older than either of us, or anyone else you know. There’s no chance in the fuckin’ world that you could fool her, especially when even I can’t.”

“What about your father, Lawrence?” Delia asked, head cocked to the side. “Could he do something about her?”

“I mean, probably.” He ran a hand through his hair. “It’d probably help if I knew the guy.”

“You still haven’t found him?”

“Didn’t have the time. Getting my abilities back was the first goal, and Maria and I only finished about a week and a half ago. I hadn’t even had the chance to Google the bastard before,” he waved a hand at the kitchen, “all this happened.”

“About that, again,” Delia started, but he cut her off.

“It was for the best,” he said. “Frankly, I don’t know what would’ve happened if I’d stayed down there for any longer.”

“I guess we’ll have to make your time up here count, then,” Lydia said. She pulled out her phone from the pocket of her pajama pants and went into her notes. “I’ve got a few ideas for today!”

-

“Remind me again, exactly, why we’re here?”

In front of them, the store loomed against the bright blue sky, and it was, on all accounts, a wonderful day to be out and about. Delia had dropped them off in her CRV with a smile and no other explanation, which was ominous enough on its own. Lydia tugged at his arm as she raced in front of him, black turtleneck absorbing all of the sunlight that hit it. “Delia wanted me to grab some stuff for the project the Maitlands are working on, and the cashiers always look like they think I’m stealing something if I don’t have an adult with me.”

“Why didn’t you bring your dad?”

“He’s busy, plus, I thought it’d be fun to bring you out of the house!” She smiled at him, leading him through the automatic doors. Inside, the floor was made up of stark white tiling that had its color extend to the walls and ceiling, with red accents scattered throughout the entire store. She grabbed a cart. “Follow me,” Lydia said, “and try not to touch anything if you can help it. If it breaks, we have to buy it.”

Lydia pushed the cart, periodically picking up her feet as its speed increased to let herself drift in the air for a moment or two. Behind her, Lawrence followed, staring at everything he could see.

It had been a while since he’d been in a store that wasn’t in the Netherworld, and while it wasn’t too different from those he was accustomed to, the people were. No one had slashes across their arms or held their head in one hand while another grabbed products from a shelf. There was no overworked teenager who had to help the man with a metal bar sticking out of his thigh find pants that could be tailored to work around it or a section of cleaning products that all had the uniform

purpose of getting blood out of fabric. The sheer normality of it all, of simple families going to get groceries or twenty-somethings trying to find a hangover cure, baffled him.

Lydia quickly turned around a corner, ducking into an aisle that she knew by heart. “Okay,” she said, pulling her phone out, “we need like, all of the paint colors, and one of those brush sets up there.” She pointed far above her head to where she couldn’t reach. Lawrence grabbed it for her and passed it into her hands. She looked it over, making sure it had everything she needed, and nodded to herself as she chuckled it in the cart.

While Lydia tried to find the right kind of paint, Lawrence watched the people around them go about their day. One girl caught his attention, mainly due to her bubblegum-pink hair, tightly coiled, that surrounded her head. He passed over her, though, and less than a moment later she was forgotten, replaced by two fathers and their son sorting through stickers at the end of the aisle. He listened to them debate between dinosaurs or dogs, something so inane and harmless that even Lawrence couldn’t find a way to twist it into something nasty.

He felt a tap on his arm, pulling him out of his reverie. “Found them!” Both of her hands were full of tubes, each a different color of acrylic paint, and she dumped them in the cart next to the brushes. With that, she’d found everything she was looking for, and wheeled the cart over to the self-checkout towards the front. Lawrence watched as she scanned each item, and, as she tried to get one stubborn tube to scan, a girl walked up to them, a bounce in her stride as she smiled brightly at Lydia.

“Lydia!” Her voice was an amplification of her demeanor, bright and bubbly.

Lydia’s head jerked up. “Oh, hey Angie,” she said, caught off guard. She glanced up at Lawrence, and Angie followed her gaze.

“Who’s he?”

“I, uh,” Lawrence said, unsure of what to say, but Lydia cut him off.

“He’s my brother, Lawrence.” Her head was high, confident in her words even if they were a complete lie, but with the normal clothes, it wouldn’t be entirely unbelievable for them to pass off as a family. “He’s home from college for the summer.”

“That’s so cool! I’ve been trying to think about where I want to go, but we still have a bit of time. Senior year’s going to be insane!” She paused in her rambling, and her eyes grew wide. “Holy shit! That’s why you were so cagey on Thursday!”

Lydia’s face grew hot. “What?”

“Dude,” Angie turned to Lawrence, “my hair was like, the exact same shade of green on Thursday. It must’ve been freaky to see it on someone else!” She laughed, nose scrunched on her face. “Where do you go, man?”

“He goes to Julliard,” Lydia said. “Drama major.”

“That’s sick! I’ve always been a STEM kid, but major props to anyone going into the arts.”

Lydia chatted with her for another minute or two before Angie bid them farewell, complaining about having to get her brother’s allergy meds, which, apparently, were impossible to find. Once they were alone, Lydia began to laugh. “Beej,” she said, snickering as she used Delia’s card to pay for everything, “did you ever even go there?”

“Where?”

“Julliard, duh,” she said. She rolled her eyes when he didn’t seem to get it. “You mentioned it, back then. When you -”

“Possessed the Maitlands, yeah.” He smiled to himself at the memory, remembering how Lydia’d flipped her shit when she saw what he could do. “I did. Granted, I went back in the early 1900s, but I did graduate. You were right about the major, by the way. Lucky guess.”

“I know how to read people,” she said. She pulled out her phone, sending a quick text to Delia that they were done, and they waited outside for her car to pull up. In the light breeze, Lydia raised her arms, plastic bags crinkling as they moved. “Do you have weather like this down there?” She nodded down towards the earth below them.

“We do.”

“That’s nice to know,” she said. She twirled in the empty air, moving about in the way only a bored kid would. “It’s kind of comforting to hear that the Netherworld isn’t too bad.”

“It was, in the beginning,” he said. “At least, from what I remember of it. It gets better every year, kid, so by the time you’re down there, I’m sure it’ll be a paradise.”

She stopped, opening her eyes to look at him and see if he was lying. “You really think so?”

“With all the tech guys down there? I’m sure of it.” He toed at the concrete with a sneaker he’d found in his room after breakfast had concluded, white with black stripes, which fit his overall theme. Soon enough, the honk of Delia’s car startled them both, and they climbed in, Lawrence in the front and Lydia taking up the back row, stretching her legs out and refusing to move them, even when Delia chided her.

“So,” Delia said, pulling out of the lot, “anything interesting happen?”

Lydia looked to the front, and Lawrence raised his eyebrows at her. “You can tell her.”

“Oh God, what did you two do?”

“It’s nothing, Delia,” Lydia said. “We just bumped into one of my classmates. I told her BJ was my brother.”

“That’s,” Delia said, slowing down as they came to a red light, “oddly sweet. I figured someone would start to ask questions, but I didn’t really think of a plan of what to say. I guess that’ll work for now.” She turned her head to look at the man beside her. “What do you say about being ‘Lawrence Deetz’ for the next month or so?”

Lawrence swallowed, throat tight. “I think,” he said, “I think I’d like that.”

## Chapter End Notes

lowkey I'm laughing my ass off bc this fic is turning into such a niche little thing like,,, if bj acting like a regular guy is your thing, here it is!

I'm a dumbass who can't count! for some reason, I've thought millenia = two thousand

years, even while knowing that the prefix means thousand. anywho. for clarification purposes, just in case anyone was confused, bj is the equivalent of like,,, a twenty-something. I'll go back and edit my notes for last chapter to fix it up!

also I uh,,, have something Really Not Nice planned. it'll take a while to pop up, and I want at least two or three "nice" chapters before shit goes down, but! >:)

speaking of planned stuff, though, I have a few one-shot ideas for this series. refusing to let myself write them until I finish this but my main plot for one is "the one where the gang meets bj's dad" because Holy Shit as an angst writer that is a damn goldmine.

bj's threat @ lydia ["if you don't get up..."] was completely empty. he had no idea where he was going with it.

bj, as well, is the ultimate history buff, mainly because he lived through it all, and because I am also a history buff. references to william feetham [inventor of the modern shower, 1767], the californian fire of 1906, and more will be sprinkled throughout any beetlejuice fics I write.

I've had to research so many fancy people things for this fic. balusters. breakfast bars. why do the deetz have to be rich.

bj referring to delia as "d" :) love their relationship so much. I feel like delia's in a weird area where she's like,,, half adopting him as her grungy college-aged son and bj is Totally Fine With It. for now, at least.

speaking of names, though, I'm exceedingly specific with how I use them. not sure if anyone caught it, but the narration refers to lawrence/bj by whatever the character its focused on refers to him as, hence it referring to him by no name with delia's pov until she starts using lawrence. lydia's is going to be odd, as she almost exclusively refers to him as beej/bj in dialogue but as Lawrence in her poves, but everyone else's will probably shift over to lawrence sometime soon.

since the next chapter or two will just be nice things happening, is there any situation/anyone y'all want to see? I know that a lot of people love the maitlands, and I know I haven't really written them, so if y'all want that, I can write it in!

like something? hate something? want to see something happen? want to see me eaten by a sandworm? let me know! comments are great, especially when I'm having an existential crisis because I just got hired for the first time ever and Holy Shit, Am I Really Growing Up?

as per usual, my tumblrs are always open! @strawberryicebreakers on main and @bisexualbeetlejuice for BJ-specific content. hit me up!

# models and maitlands

## Chapter Summary

in which the maitlands bounce theories between themselves, and delia has a garden.

## Chapter Notes

siri blast "no reason" from the beetlejuice soundtrack.

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

“Adam, could you pass me the red?”

“Which one?” He glanced over the tubes scattered throughout the tabletop. Barbara waved the piece she was painting, the wooden fire truck he’d made for the station near the river. “Ah, got it.” Passing her the paint, appropriately titled “Fire Truck Red,” he took a step back to admire their work.

For two people who’d never really tried their hands at miniatures, Adam thought they’d done a pretty good job. Making them wasn’t tricky once he got the hang of it, and Barbara was able to get a good layout of the town through Lydia’s laptop, which they’d occasionally steal while she was at school, Googling their suburb until they could figure out where everything went. Once they’d planned it all out and the figures were made, they could finally start painting.

Thin brush in hand, he worked on the roads, painting dashes of white and yellow where each lane was. A light tune filtered in through the open attic window, some song Delia had her left her radio turned to before she left for the day. Barbara and he hummed along to it, familiar with the song. The Top 100s seemed to all sound the same nowadays, but Adam could always distinguish each song from its counterparts.

Above him, he noticed that Barbara had gone still, paintbrush paused in its stroke. “Barbara?” He looked at her, not worried, per se, but curious to see where her mind had gone to. It wasn’t entirely uncommon for her to get lost in thought, and he had a feeling he knew what was on her mind.

She shook her head, clearing her head. “Sorry, it’s just,” she said, pursing her mouth, “It’s just kind of odd, don’t you think?”

“What’s odd?”

“Him.” She pointed to the floor, where their new houseguest’s room was. “Whatever his name is now. He’s,” she paused, choosing her words carefully, “different.”

“I personally think he’s better this way,” Adam said. “There’s been no weirdness, or harassment, which I’m thankful for.”

“I know,” she said, “I’m grateful for it, too, but you’ve got to admit there’s something unnerving

about it all. I mean,” she flicked her paintbrush, and a fleck of red found its way onto one of the homes near the school, “it makes you wonder, y’know?”

“I’ll admit, I’m curious about it all,” Adam replied, picking a wet cloth up and wiping the red away. “He reminds me of one of my friends from college.”

“Who, Brett?”

“Nah,” Adam said, waving a hand. “Brett was more of a wreck than the guy downstairs ever could dream of being. I think he reminds me of Tim.”

“Huh,” she said. Setting down her paintbrush, she found the tube of tan and got to work on the wooden fence that encased the dog park. “I never thought about it that way.”

Tim, his roommate in his sophomore year at Virginia Tech, had been a bit of a rude awakening for Adam. He’d known that not everyone grew up in a well-off family, monetarily or otherwise, but it was the first time he’d ever actually interacted with someone. In the town he grew up in, no one ever had to worry about anything like that. All of the adults were nice, the kids were respectful, hell, even the squirrels knew not to drop nuts on the roofs of cars.

Tim. He was, to put it lightly, a handful. He was from some small town in Tennessee, lived with his mom, dad, and two younger brothers. He was athletic, at the university on an athletic scholarship for football, and he was a sweet guy in a giant, terrifyingly muscular body. For the first few months, he’d tried to avoid him, sure that a guy like him would never want to be friends with a scrawny Biology major, but after a while, they eventually began to talk.

He learnt a lot about Tim, heard stories of how his brothers always tried to get him to play this sport or the other, how his mom insisted on tying his tie for senior prom, how his girlfriend, Laylah, went to a school back in their home state and he missed her with every fiber of his being.

There were a few odd things about his roommate - a hesitant way of speaking where every action sounded like a question, as if he needed Adam’s approval for whatever he wanted to do, even if he was a fully grown adult - that Adam just brushed off as personality quirks, but as the months went on, there were issues. Tim’s mood would switch with the minutes, joking with Adam about what the guys on his team had done during practice one second, and going silent the next, not speaking for hours. He’d get angry, properly angry, at seemingly small slights only to let something major slide like water off of his back, unwilling to confront anyone about what hurt him. It was confusing, and Adam hadn’t known what to do until he mentioned it Barbara, who, at that point, was just a girl he’d talked with once or twice during study sessions.

Back in the present, Barbara looked at her hands, twisting them in her lap. “That’s a pretty serious theory to propose.”

“I’m not saying it’s a definite fact,” Adam said, hands up in defense, “just that a lot of it is lining up. I don’t think it’s out of the ballpark to assume he had,” he swallowed, “issues, growing up.”

“Tim’s dad was a piece of shit,” Barbara said, glaring at the model. “The guy -”

“Just say Lawrence. Calling him ‘the guy’ makes it sound like a shitty 80s bro-film.”

“Alright,” she said. “Lawrence never had a dad to begin with.”

“Moms can be shitty,” Adam replied, raising an eyebrow at her. “I know we both lucked out on that front, but not everyone does. You saw her when she came up; I don’t really think she’d be winning *Mom of the Year* anytime soon.”



“She might just be a tough-love kind of woman.”

“Barbara.” He looked at his wife, voice stern. “I know it’s uncomfortable to think about, but if he’s like Tim, or Shawna from the library back in Alexandria, we need to accept the fact that there might be a legitimate reason behind why he is the way he is.”

“I know, it’s just,” she said. “It’s hard to conceptualize. He’s not human, Adam. He never was, and he never will be. I can’t help but wonder if his brain is even like ours are, or if childhood down there is like ours is, or -”

The slam of a car door interrupted her, and she stood up, moving over to the large circular window that faced the street. Adam followed suit, and they peered outside. On the front lawn, the doors to Delia’s CRV were wide open. They watched as Delia stepped out, red heels coming out first, followed by the rest of her, and she walked to the back of the car, opening the trunk. Lydia popped up, grabbing plastic bags until she couldn’t fit anymore, and the man that had appeared alongside her did the same.

“Holy shit,” Adam said, baffled. “He’s kind of cute when he’s cleaned up.”

“I hate that you’re right,” Barbara replied, unable to tear her eyes away. “I didn’t really think he’d do it.”

Outside, they could hear the voices of the trio mix, although they couldn’t decipher exactly what they were saying. Lawrence had his hands waving, gesticulating wildly, and they could see Delia begin to laugh at whatever he was saying.

“His hair’s green again,” Barbara mumbled. “Is that a good thing? Last time it was green, it wasn’t a good sign.”

“I think it’s good in this context. He seems happy, and not in a ‘do crimes’ way.”

“I need to remember to ask Lydia about the hair,” she said. “I think it’s connected to his mood.”

“That makes sense,” Adam said. “Green for what, happy? Anger’d be red, obviously, and I’m assuming blue or something of the like would be sad.”

Barbara turned to him, eyes wide. “Adam,” she asked, voice quiet, “what would black mean?”

He thought to last night. It couldn’t be anger, when he’d gotten angry it’d began to turn red, and there was no shot in hell it could indicate anything positive. “I don’t know,” he said, “but I don’t think it’s something we want to find out.”

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“But seriously, though,” Lawrence said, watching Lydia for her reaction, “school sucks in the Netherworld. You think high school up here is bad?”

She nodded her head so fast it became a blur, trying to hold in her laugh.

“Yeah? Try having a classmate from the 1300s. Poor fucker had to learn he died because of a flea. A damn flea!”

Lydia lost it, full-out cackling at the idea of the guy’s face. “A flea?”

“Haven’t you already learned about the plague? Fleas caused that shit.”

“BJ, that was rats.”

He shook his head, smiling. “Nah, kid, it was fleas. They hitched a ride on the rats like an Uber ‘till they got to Europe.”

“And then?”

“They committed one of the most iconic-yet-heinous acts of medieval times.” They followed Delia as she walked into the house, two bags balanced on her wrist, and made their way to the living room. Lydia sat the bag that they’d gotten from Target down on the table and collapsed into the armchair nearby. Amused, Lawrence asked, “You’re already tired, kid?”

“I had to go to school for the entire week, BJ. I’m tired!” She dragged out the syllables, turning the end ‘d’ into a groan as she went limp, legs hanging over the arm of the chair. Phone in hand, she checked her texts before switching over to Twitter. “Hey,” she said, reading something Kevin from her homeroom had retweeted, “have you ever gone to a Panera?”

He raised his eyebrows. “Kid, I’m going to let you ask yourself that one more time.”

“Alright,” she huffed, “fair point. Do you want to go? It’s a food place.” Lydia sat up, typing in the directions on her phone. “We can walk there; it’s like ten minutes away.”

“I’m down,” he said. “When are we heading out?”

She peered around the edge of the room, gauging to see who was nearby. When she couldn’t see anyone, she looked back at Lawrence and jerked her head in the direction of the main door. “Now,” she said. “Delia’s out gardening, and if we can get out without her seeing, she won’t be able to stop us!”

“Consider me interested,” he said, mischievous grin across his face. “On three?”

“On three,” she agreed. She slid out of the chair and beckoned for him to follow her. Together, they crept towards the door. “One, two,” she said, and when she threw open the door, she yelled, “three!”

-

Outside, Delia moved about the garden that had made its mark on the side of the house that faced the sun. In the front of the house, she’d planted peony bushes which added beautiful pops of pink and white in a sea of green. In the mornings, she always made sure to look over them, trimming any dying blooms and giving others room to flourish. Lining the long end of the home, however, was a grocer’s dream, as she’d cultivated her own garden of produce that seemed to never fail. She’d never had much of a green thumb growing up, but she remembered her aunt’s tales of fresh fruit she’d grown and decided to try it out for herself now that she lived somewhere where she could. New York City was a lot of things, but it was not spacious or green in any possible way.

Radio cranked up, she let herself get lost in the motions of it all, overpriced gloves atop her hands as she plucked at weeds and pests that tried to stop her zucchinis from growing. Even after she’d planted the marigolds and catnip on the edges of the garden, something Charles had mentioned to her when she’d voiced her problem, it seemed as though the little bugs were intent on ruining her hard work. The only positive of it all was that Audrey II, the small Venus flytrap Lydia’d found at Home Depot and lovingly named after the plant from the musical her school put on, had a steady supply of food.

She managed to salvage a good amount of food, placing it in the basket she’d brought out with her,

and moved onto the next plant, a minuscule blueberry bush she'd been trying to coax out of its shell. On the porch nearby, the Maitlands made their way out, walking over to her as far as they could while still standing on the floor of the main building.

"Hey, Delia," Barbara said, leaning onto the railing. "How's the garden coming along?"

Standing up, Delia brushed the dirt off of her hands and hoisted the basket onto the rail. "Take a look for yourselves," she said, proud.

Barbara made a noise of approval as she looked it over. "Looking good!"

"Thank you," she said, smiling. "What are you two up and about for?"

"We were hoping to talk with you," Adam said. "Do you know where Lydia and," he hesitated for a moment before continuing, "Lawrence are?"

"They snuck off to the Panera down the street," Delia said, rolling her eyes. "I swear, she must think I'm blind these days if she thought she could get out without me realizing it."

"Ah, okay," Barbara said, sitting down on the porch swing. Adam sat down beside her, and Delia walked up the short stairs to meet them.

"Why did you guys want to know?"

"I just wanted to make sure they wouldn't hear us," Barbara said. "It's not something I want them to take out of context."

"I'm intrigued," Delia said, facing them as she leaned against the rail, sun shining on her back through the t-shirt she wore. "What's the sitch?"

"Adam has a theory he wanted to propose, just to see what you think about it."

"Alright," she said, looking at the man in question. "Lay it on me."

"I think," he began, twisting his hands in his lap, "that there may be more to Lawrence than what meets the eye."

"In what way?"

"I think I know why he is the way he is." He placed his palms flat on his lap, trying to avoid letting his nervousness show. "I think, in some way, he's been hurt, and it's caused him to act out."

Delia gave herself a moment to think about it, but the more she thought about it, the more it made sense. "Okay," she said, voice slow, "and why are you telling me this?"

"If there's a reason behind his behaviour," Barbara said, "there's a way to help him with it. I don't think he can be 'fixed,' y'know, but it wouldn't hurt to try to work through whatever's made him the way he is."

"And if he works through it, it would prevent any further issues concerning his actions," Adam added. "Therapy would be the best choice, but since that isn't an option, it makes sense to try to help on our own."

"If you don't mind me asking," Delia said, "what, exactly, do you think happened to him? Shitty girlfriend?"

“No, I don’t think that’s it,” Adam replied. “I think it was Juno.”

“His mom?”

“You saw her when she came up. There’s something off about that woman; you can’t deny it.”

“And if they’ve been together ever since he was a child,” Barbara said, “that means he’s been hurt by her for hundreds of years in a never-ending, horrible cycle.”

“That,” Delia said, bewildered, “would definitely fuck someone up.”

“Even the green woman mentioned her.” Taking his glasses off, Adam stared at them as he continued. “She said something about Juno, and about how she was going off the wall knowing he was up here. If she’s the cause of it all, it would make sense for her to be a control freak about where he is.”

“I just think it’d be worth trying to ask him about,” Barbara said. “Even if it isn’t what happened, it wouldn’t hurt.”

“Okay,” Delia said, “but how are we going to do that? We can’t just go up and ask him about it out of the blue.”

“He seems to trust you and Lydia the most,” Adam said. “I think you two should try to talk to him about it.”

“So, you’re basically using us as bait for this whole thing, huh?” Delia crossed her arms, huffing in annoyance. “Like a damn Scooby-Doo episode.”

“I’m sorry, Delia, but you know he’s been cagey around us,” Barabara gestured at herself and her husband, “and God knows how he’d react if Charles tried to do anything. You’re the best option right now.”

“I’ll do it,” she said, “but I need a few days to figure out how to get him to talk. I need to plan it out.”

“The sooner the better, but at this point, anything would work.” Barbara stood up and gave a small smile to the redhead. “Thank you, Delia.”

“Don’t thank me yet,” she said. “This could end up turning into a wreck.”

“We trust you not to do that, but even if you do, you tried your best.”

“I’ve got to ask, though, why now?” Delia asked, curious. “He hasn’t done anything recently.”

“That’s why,” Adam said. “The fact that he’s not doing anything, especially when you think of how he was when we first met him, is what’s so unnerving. I couldn’t help but wonder why the change happened, and I think that, if the wrong thing happens, he might revert back to how he was.”

Barbara shuddered when she thought about it. “That’s what we want to avoid, Delia. If he starts acting like that again -”

“I know,” Delia said. “Believe me, I know.”

Lydia and Lawrence returned an hour later with a bag full of bagels as a peace offering for leaving without asking which Delia, of course, accepted. The pair went up to Lydia's room, as there was something she wanted to show him.

"Just give me a sec' to find my laptop," she said, searching for it. She spotted it atop her desk, half-hidden by an Algebra textbook, and she took it over to her bed, sitting down as she opened it up. When she saw her friend in the doorway, unsure of what to do, she patted the spot next to her. "C'mon!"

Cautious, Lawrence joined her, sitting next to her and watching as she typed with a frankly alarming speed. "What're you looking up?"

"It's an old show I watched in like, fifth grade. Honestly, though, I don't really get how it got cleared as a kids' show with all of the raunchy shit it's got in it."

"That's all you had to say," Lawrence said, eyes glued to the screen. "What's so bad about it?"

"Oh, the usual," she said, smirking. "No nudity or anything, but it's definitely risky."

"Put it on, young grasshopper," he said, and she did just that. Within moments, he got the gist of the show. *Teens on an island*, he thought, *what could go wrong?*

-

Outside of the door, Delia stood, listening in as Lawrence and Lydia watched their show. There were a lot of things she had questions about, especially after the events of the past day, and she felt as though they each needed to be answered in their own time, no matter the urgency others pressed upon her. She's well aware of the situation at hand, that she's grown alarmingly attached to him in such a short amount of time, but that in and of itself isn't unexpected. It's always been a problem for her, wanting to adopt any stray she found roaming the streets or stuck in a shelter, and she knows, she *knows* the same thing is happening now, and that it won't lead her to any happy endings, especially if she finds the truths that the Maitlands, and her as well, need to know.

At the same time, part of her doesn't want to know. Part of her wants to keep living in the little story they've created in a day, the idea that, in the end, everything could work, that they could function as a makeshift family just adding another into their fold. She wants it to work, and she wants to believe that it will.

Somewhere deep inside of her thoughts, she knows that it won't, that life is rarely so kind as to allow for something so sweet to happen, that the possibility of nothing going wrong and of everything going right is nonexistent, but for once, she's unwilling to take that at face value. Lawrence was brought back for a reason, hell, he was brought to them all those months ago for a reason, and she's not going to let the ending she wants to slip out of her hands without a fight.

## Chapter End Notes

I considered waiting to post this until the night before my birthday, but I'm too excited to write the next chapter lol.

speaking of birthdays, mine is on november sixth and I'm turning seventeen babey!  
dancing queen and all that.

charles will have a pov next chapter! it'll be,,, quite the event. literally starting it now bc I'm excited to write it lmao.

in misc. news, mcr is back and. holy shit! I've been a fan since 2014, and I'm pissed as hell because I live on the east coast and their concert is in LA. c'mon! I hope they're planning on a tour.

I absolutely adore writing delia; she's quickly become my favorite character [aside from the b-man himself] and I just love how I can write her.

the pieces are being put together! adam/barbara/delia are now believing they know what's going on, and to be fair, they do, but it'll be interesting to write delia confronting bj about it all. there's no right way to go about it.

I'm planning this fic out, chapter-wise, and uh,,, it'll be more than I thought it would be. a lot more. I hope y'all are ready to be in this shit for a while!

just a warning - I fucked my dominant hand up back in March, and it just never really healed right? so if it starts acting up, it might put me out of commission. I doubt it'll happen, but if it does I'll keep y'all updated so no one thinks this just got abandoned or anything.

like something? hate something? want to see something happen? want to see me eaten by a sandworm? let me know! comments are great, especially when I'm trying to plan out just how angst-y I want to drive this fic to be.

as per usual, my tumblrs are always open! @strawberryicebreakers on main and @bisexualbeetlejuice for BJ-specific content. hit me up!

# trust and truth

## Chapter Summary

in which charles is at his wit's end, and some conversations should be held in a more private manner.

## Chapter Notes

i'm sorry, y'all.

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

He didn't trust Beetlejuice; there was nothing in him that made him want to trust the other man, and frankly, he wouldn't even be here if it was up to Charles, but it wasn't. He would've had to be blind to not see how much his daughter missed her friend, even if said friend had caused more trouble than he was worth, and if it made his daughter happy, he was willing to give it a try, but with each passing day, his resentment at the situation grew.

It was as if no one remembered what had happened in January, and if they did, they were unwilling to bring it up. Charles remembered. He could easily recall the sheer terror he'd seen in his daughter's eyes, how he himself had to act as though he was alright with having his little girl be a goddamn child bride, and how everyone else had to act as well, unwilling actors in the piece of shit's play at normality.

He thought he could deal with it when Lydia asked to bring him back. Charles believed that it would be a small ordeal, a quick catch-up between friends that would bring his daughter some sense of closure that she needed to get on with her life, but he should've known that it would never be that simple, especially when Delia got involved. He'd had half a mind to send him packing once it was evident that he would be there for more than a night, but Delia's sheer faith in him sedated his anger, leaving it to simmer instead. He helped find clothes without a word of complaint and didn't even try to speak against it when she'd mentioned dropping his daughter and Beetlejuice off on their own, even when that situation rang every alarm bell found in his mind.

Delia was a wonderful woman with a caring nature that was so horrifically misplaced in the wrong creatures, and this was just another example of that. He knew that the other man was manipulating his fiancée, that he knew her caring nature would've made her take him in, and every single time he saw Beetlejuice roaming about the house Charles bought as a home for his family, it made the blood in his veins boil, reaching the critical point and flying even higher until all he could see was a sheen of red.

He'd been at their house for a week, spending every moment he could with either his daughter or his partner, crawling into their lives like a parasite, and Charles knew that when he eventually left, it would ruin them. It would turn into a cycle of them bringing him back until it blew up, when someone would scream and someone would cry and it would leave no one for the better.

He needs to nip this in the bud, and soon.

-

Everything was going well. There hadn't been a single instance of harassment on anyone's part, and with that, no arguments, even from Lydia. Within the past week, she'd managed to grow happier than she'd ever been before, tripling the progress she'd made since Delia first arrived, and she knew exactly why.

Lawrence was a good influence on her, surprising as that was. With him around, Lydia talked more, she came out of her room more, and interacted with her schoolmates more. Just that morning, Delia received an email from her English teacher conveying his excitement that Lydia was participating during class of her own violation, something she'd never done before. Lydia had friends, that wasn't an issue, but having a sibling was beneficial to her. It gave her someone to talk with, to hang out with, someone who she knew was always available to be with.

On the home front, Lawrence was a nice houseguest, keeping himself clean, staying out of trouble, even chatting with her as she gardened and keeping her entertained as she went through her daily routine. Once or twice, she'd brought him with her as she went into town, and when that happened, when one of her neighbors would ask who he was, she was happy to tell them of the story she'd created with Lydia, that he was Charles' son, Lydia's brother, who came home from college for the summer.

With Lawrence playing his part with ease, it was all too easy to fall into the facade.

He fit seamlessly into her life as another person to take care of. She helped Lydia with her homework, Charles with his papers, the Maitlands with their project, and, without hesitation, answered the questions Lawrence had about the land of the living, the kind of questions that Lydia was unable to answer.

Once, late at night, she found him roaming the house, and she brought him into the kitchen and had him sit down as she fixed herself some tea, adding an extra cup for her guest. They stayed together for hours, and Charles found them like that, early Wednesday morning, but he didn't say anything, instead going about his own morning routine, watching them out of the corner of his eye while they chatted amongst themselves.

Of course, that didn't mean that everything was perfect. The Maitlands, still waiting for Delia to investigate for them, continued to be uneasy around him, reluctantly speaking to Lawrence when they saw him, and Charles was barely better, although she thought he'd been more pleasant about it recently. He seemed to at least tolerate Lawrence's presence, which was a relief for Delia.

If Charles didn't like him, she wasn't really sure what she would do.

-

Friday evening, one week after he'd been summoned, Lawrence found himself looking through the library, just a room away from Charles' study. It'd been a while since he'd been able to read, and yeah, while he'd never been the best at it, he still liked to read if he could find something that interested him. He wasn't looking without direction, though; he was searching for a book Lydia'd mentioned to him the night before, something she mentioned that she thought he'd like. All he remembered is that it had dinosaurs in it, which was enough to interest him, and he flicked through the shelves as he sought it out.

When he found it, he held it under his arm as he made his way over to the oversized armchair near the window, falling into its cushions with a groan. He'd helped Delia carry around baskets of tomatoes after she'd harvested them all, scared that a hornworm would ruin them if she left them



outside for even a minute longer, and his arms hurt like hell. He pulled his legs close to himself, hooking them in a way as to fit his entire body in the seat, bare arms against the leather.

In the sky outside, the sun set against the horizon, burning orange into the expanding night as it refused to leave without making its mark on the world. He let the last few minutes of sunlight act as his guide, cracking open the book and reading the first few pages. It seemed interesting enough, and he let himself get lost in it as he waited for Lydia to finish her homework.

After ten or so minutes, the light from the sun had gone out, and even Lawrence couldn't make out the words on the pages anymore. Reluctantly, he got up, setting the book down on the chair as he trudged over to the wall where the light switch was. As he moved closer to the wall, he began to hear something from the room next door, and when he hit the wall, he recognized the sound to be voices, although the thickness of the insulation concealed their identities.

Curious, he left the library, bare feet making no noise as he walked, landing outside of the door to Charles' study, which was cracked open enough for him to see inside. Charles himself stood in the center of the room, and after a moment, he realized that Delia sat atop his desk. Neither of them seemed to be in the best of moods, so Lawrence kept himself out of sight.

"Delia," Charles said, voice heavy with exhaustion, "I just don't get it. Why is it so important for you to keep him here?"

*Oh.*

Delia threw her head back, letting out a groan. Her hair was unraveled from its usual bun, spilling against her shoulders and standing up towards the ends as a result of one too many hands pulled through it in stress. "He hasn't done anything wrong," she said, "and it isn't his fault that he has to stay here."

Charles scoffed, shaking his head. "I find that hard to believe. I don't trust him, Delia, and frankly, I can't begin to comprehend why you do."

"I have hope in him, Charles," she said. She stood up, walking over to him, but he stepped away from her.

"You shouldn't. He's not human," he said, growing frustrated as he spoke, "and you can't just treat him like he is and hope that he'll act accordingly. You can't make him something he's not."

Delia's eyes narrowed, and she crossed her arms over her chest. "And what, Charles, do you think Lawrence is?"

Something inside Charles snapped, and he took a breath. "That's it, that's exactly the problem. Delia, that's not his name."

"It's his name just as much as 'Lydia' is your daughter's name," she said.

"Don't bring my daughter into this more than you already have," he said, a low growl in his voice. "She's already been ruined by this enough."

Something in Lawrence's chest turned cold when he heard that.

"Are you blind?" Delia stalked over to the desk again, leaning against it. "You've got to be fucking blind, Charles, if you think this is 'ruining' her. If anything, him coming here has managed to help her more than I ever did, and you're not even paying him."

“She’d be happier with friends her own age, friends that won’t abandon her at the soonest possible moment.”

“She has friends her own age, and he’s not going to abandon us, Charles.” She ran a hand through her hair, twisting strands of it between her fingers. “He won’t.”

“Delia, I don’t know why you’re so goddamn attached to him, but he isn’t here to stay. He’s going to leave you and Lydia, and I know you two are going to be in a wreck when it happens.” He set a hand atop Delia’s shoulder, meeting her eyes. “I’m just trying to make sure you won’t lose yourself when it does.”

“Stop it,” she said. She brushed his hand off of her, glaring up at him. “Stop talking about him like he doesn’t care about Lydia.”

Charles looked as though he was barely holding himself back from yelling, face red as he tried to keep his voice steady. “He doesn’t. He isn’t human, Delia; he’s incapable of caring about any of us. He’s using you.”

“He’s not going to leave unless we make him.”

“Then we should,” Charles said. “How hard would it be?”

“Don’t you dare,” Delia said, voice quiet. “Don’t you dare go behind my back and force him out.”

“Why not?” He threw his hands into the air, exasperated as he paced the floor. “If he leaves, the problem solved itself. There’s got to be a way to send him back in that book the Maitlands have, and I’m sure they won’t object to it.”

“Charles?”

“Yes?”

“I think I’d have to give myself a few days away if you pulled something like that.”

Charles stopped in his pacing and turned to look at her. His hands clenched into fists at his side, knuckles white. “He’s not your fucking son, Delia.”

Delia swallowed, eyes wet. “I’m well aware of that, Charles.”

“You say that,” he said, growing louder, “but you’re willing to throw away our entire relationship for him.”

“No,” she said, fury radiating from her entire being as she spat her words out, “I’m not going to throw our relationship away over him. I’m going to throw it away if you can’t act like an adult and show basic fucking compassion for another human being!”

“He’s not human!” Charles roared, at his wit’s end. “He’s not a goddamn human! He’s a demonic *thing* that has caused nothing but trouble and hurt since he came up here!” Eyebrows furrowed, he glared at Delia from across the room, refusing to let himself get any closer. “And he needs to leave, whether you can admit it to yourself or not.”

“You’re being unreasonable. If you give me enough time, I can fix him and -”

Whatever came out of Delia’s mouth was muffled, as if underwater, to Lawrence. He picked himself off of the wall, and as he stood up, he saw something shift in the dimness of the hallway.

Her black hair had camouflaged her in the lack of light, but when she moved, Lawrence saw Lydia hiding, listening in on the conversation as well, but she wasn't looking inside. She'd been watching him, and he didn't know how long she'd been there. Her eyes were wide as she noticed that he saw her.

Her mouth moved, but he couldn't hear what she was saying.

He knew what he needed to do.

Before she could do anything to stop him, Beetlejuice turned on his heel and walked away into the night.

-

She didn't run after him, as much as she wanted to.

Lydia watched him as he walked away, and once he was out of sight, she ducked into the study.

"He's trying to get better, Charles," Delia said. "I think we can help him."

"It doesn't matter if we can help him," Charles replied, "what matters is that he leaves before anyone gets hurt."

"Dad?"

Charles' head snapped towards her, and Delia's followed suit. They stared at her in shock.

"Lydia?" His voice sounded strained, uncomfortable at the thought of her hearing what he'd said.

"What are you doing in here?"

"Why do you hate him so much?" She bit down on her lip in an effort to try to keep herself together. "Why -," she said, hiccuping in the middle of her words, "why do you want my best friend to leave?"

"Sweetheart, I -"

She couldn't hold it in any longer. "He makes me happy! He's -, he's like a weird older brother and he makes me laugh!" She felt her eyes grow wet, but she kept going. "Why do you hate him so much if he makes me happy?"

"Lydia," he sighed, "I just want to keep you safe." His motions were awkward as he tried to bend down to her, to hold his daughter close.

Lydia placed each of her palms on his chest, pushing him away. "No!"

"Lydia!"

"I don't -,," she said, breathing hard, "I don't want you to apologize to me! You need to apologize to BJ!"

"Wait," Delia said, slowly walking towards the two of them. "Lydia," she said, voice careful, "why does he need to apologize to Lawrence?"

"Because he heard you!"

Charles swore under his breath, standing up to full height. "Where is he now?"

“I don’t know!” She wiped her cheek with her hand, scrubbing away the wetness she felt on her skin. “He just,” she said, “he just left.” The last of it came out in a hush.

“Charles, Delia?”

Lydia looked up to see the Maitlands standing in the doorway, uneasy as they watched the scene in front of them. Delia acknowledged them, as Charles was still at a loss for words. “Yes, Barbara?”

“You might want to see this.” She gestured to the hallway and stepped out of the way. Lydia rushed over, Charles and Delia hot on her heels.

“Oh, Christ,” Charles said, voice low.

The hallway leading up to the bedrooms was a wreck. One of the lamps had been knocked off of its stand, thankfully still intact, but casting an angled glow upon the rest of the area. Two of the rooms at the end of the hall had their door brutally thrown open, hinges strained by the force behind their movement, with Lydia’s room being the only one untouched.

Lydia rushed towards the guest bedroom. It wasn’t harmed, overall, with only a short maroon t-shirt and a pair of jeans lying on the floor.

In the master bedroom, Delia found clothes thrown about the place, and each of the drawers was ripped open and emptied. With a hand over her mouth, Delia walked over to the wardrobe, stomach sinking at what she knew must’ve happened.

The hangers in front of it had been thrown somewhere else in the room, the clothes they held scattered on the floor, and the suit, the striped monstrosity, was nowhere to be seen.

Lydia found the other woman staring into the now-empty wardrobe. “Delia?”

“He’s gone.” Her voice was weak, as if she couldn’t believe what she was saying. “He -, he took his suit, and he’s gone.”

-

The front door slammed behind him as he made his way out onto the street, slipping the jacket of his suit onto his shoulders as he walked. He felt as though he was ripping apart with every step he took away from the house, energy crackling underneath his skin, but he kept going, Oxfords hitting the pavement as the house grew smaller and smaller behind him.

Humidity found its way swirling throughout the mid-May air, just uncomfortable enough to be a nuisance, but not enough for it to be full-blown summer weather. It left his dress shirt sticking to his back and his suit pants clinging to his thighs, but it wasn’t as if he had anything else to wear. He’d almost forgotten what it felt like after a week of t-shirts and jeans, but he’d known he’d have to get used to it again at some point.

When he got to the end of the street, he kept walking, and when he got to the end of that street, he looked around. He hadn’t really wandered around outside without -, without one of them, but he was sure he could find his way around somehow, even if he didn’t have an end destination in mind just yet. Feeling the right-hand side pocket of his pants, he found his phone and pulled it out, calling the number that, at this point, he knew wouldn’t lead to a shitstorm.

It only took three rings for her to pick up the call. “Lawrence?”

“I’m leaving,” he said. “They don’t want me there, and I -, I don’t want to be there if they’re just

going -, if they're just going to hate me the entire time."

"Lawrence, are you okay?" Maria's voice sounded worried over the phone, carefully picking apart his words. "You don't sound so good."

"They think I need to -, that I need to be fucking *fixed* , like some broken piece of shit and I'm not broken, Maria, I'm fine and -"

"Lawrence, what can I do to help you?"

"I need to leave. Where can I go?"

"I really don't think I like what you're thinking of doing."

He snapped. "Just give me a fucking address, Maria!"

For a moment, she said nothing, until, "I'll send you one."

He let out a sigh of relief, hand grasping at the pole of the street sign to hold himself up. "Thank you."

"Are you sure you're good to be alone right now? I can stay on the line, or -"

He ended the call, shoving the phone deep into his pocket, and as he did, he felt his hand hit the marker he'd kept in there for as long as he could remember. No one ever checked for it, no one ever thought he'd be smart enough to stash something in such an obvious place, and while it was a last resort, he sure as shit felt like he'd need it soon.

He kept walking, waiting for the phone to buzz, and found his gaze lifted to the sky above.

It wasn't hard to find Orion in the maze of the other constellations. Back when he was a teenager, he remembered one of his neighbors showing it to him after he'd told him his middle name. His neighbor, some English guy named John, had been an astronomer before he died, and he'd brought Beetlejuice out into the night to show him the star that shared his name, making sure to tell him how to find it if he ever felt the need to.

It was the second-brightest star in the constellation, something that he had to admire his mother's boldness for naming her son after. Even in name, he'd never reach the top spot, but at this point, he was so numb to it all that it barely mattered anymore.

He found it, though, and stopped in his tracks for a moment, staring up at it the same way he always did, halfway between wonder and regret.

His phone buzzed in his pocket, and he checked it. Maria'd texted him the address of a house she knew was empty some ten or so miles away, and he loaded the address into his phone, finding directions to it with the ease of someone who was used to the motions of it all. He didn't check the other messages he'd received, three from a guy he'd had a thing with a few months back, two from Irva, one from Helen, and fifty-two from a blocked number that he didn't have to guess the origin of.

He took a breath and looked at his directions. Straight for three miles, and turn right.

He could do that.

The house was silent.

Lydia'd locked herself in her room hours ago, refusing to speak to any of them. The Maitlands stayed downstairs with Delia as she sat on the couch, unable to go back to the master suite. Charles had left, gone off to try to find Lawrence somewhere in the night, but she knew that he wouldn't be successful. If he didn't want to be found, he wouldn't be found, simple as that.

"Do you," Adam said, looking at his wife, "do you think he'll come back?"

"I don't know," Barbara answered with a shrug. "I honestly don't know."

"Delia?" She looked up at Adam when he spoke to her. "How, uh, how are you holding up?"

"I'm doing fantastic," she said, voice bitten with sarcasm. "Do you really have to ask?"

"Sorry."

She hung her head, hands clasped over the back of her neck. "Don't be. I know I'm being bitchy, but I just," she halted, voice shaking, "I just don't really know what to do right now."

"He'll come back," Barbara said, forcing confidence into her voice. "He's got to. He cares too much about you guys to not."

"He thinks we hate him, that he needs to be fixed," Delia said. She sat back up, eyes red as she stared forward, hair falling to close off her face from the couple. "Why would he ever want to come back?"

## Chapter End Notes

surprisingly quick chapter update! this is a gift to myself, if only for the fact that I'll be able to see y'all's reactions to it

also!!! I got another beautiful fanart, this time from @upperstories! I don't have a link to it [as it was sent via dm] but!!! I love it so much!!! y'all are going to make me cry at this point with all of the wonderful comments/kudos/art tbh :')

I want to make it clear that Charles is not a villain in this; he isn't even an antagonist. he's just a father and a fiance who is trying his best to keep the people he loves happy.

bj was reading Jurassic Park.

Irva and Helen are the office assistants Maria mentioned earlier! they don't have any literal backstory, but they might pop up in a future fic.

speaking of future fics, I've got a direct sequel to this planned [ish], and I'd like to make a "scenes that didn't make it into the main fic" collection, starting with the Panera scene. possibly including the scene of bj tearing through the house looking for his suit as well.

just in case it wasn't clear, the switch between bj referring to himself as Lawrence v. as Beetlejuice is intentional. use that information how you wish.

like something? hate something? want to see something happen? want to see me eaten by a sandworm? let me know! comments are great, especially when my birthday is tomorrow ;)

as per usual, my tumblrs are always open! @strawberryicebreakers on main and @bisexualbeetlejuice for BJ-specific content. hit me up!

# numbness and never-again's

## Chapter Summary

in which forgiveness won't come easy, and charles tries to right his wrongs.

## Chapter Notes

sometimes even the best dads mess up, but when they do, they right their wrongs as if life depended on it.

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

He reached the house around eleven o'clock, delayed by a few mishaps with directions leading him into dead ends, but the sight of the steps leading up to the small building was enough to sap him of any remaining energy he had left. With a hand on the rail, he pulled himself up the few steps and up to the front door, finding it unlocked as per usual.

The interior was plain, with everything a house would need to sell, but none of the personal markers that would turn it into a home, a blank slate for any future movers to make their mark upon. He did the mandatory checks needed, making sure that no breathers were hiding amongst the bedsheets, and when everything came up clean, he swept his jacket off of his shoulders, sitting on the edge of the bed and digging through its pockets until he found a small box.

Cracking open the case, he dug into it until he found a needle, sifting underneath it until he found a spool of thread he kept with it. He laid the jacket over his lap as he threaded the needle, searching for any new rips and tears. As he found each imperfection, he wove the needle between the fabric, sewing it tight with rapid, uneven stitches. He did the same process for the suit pants, keeping them on while he did so and wincing each time he inevitably nicked himself. Once finished, he took the jacket over to a full-body mirror that lined one of the walls of the bathroom, flicking the fluorescent lights on as he did so.

In his reflection, he noticed that the suit jacket appeared to be fixed, and he couldn't find anything wrong with the pants, either. The only issues he could find were those he found on himself.

He was dirty, sweat drying on his neck, shoulders, and back, with flecks of mud finding their way across the side of his face. After walking ten miles at night and stepping in more than a few puddles, it wasn't a surprise, but after a week of seeing himself put-together, it was a bit weird to see all of the grime back on him. His hair, a shade of gray that grew darker as it reached its roots, had fared a bit better, a bit knotted, but thankfully hadn't matted itself down. He rubbed a hand across his jaw, feeling the scrape of an overgrown five o'clock shadow that he hadn't gotten around to shaving, but he was too tired to care about it anymore, at least for the night.

Finding his way back to the bedroom, he toed off his shoes, feet upon soft carpet instead of the hardwood floors he'd had for the last few nights, and, without a thought, he untied his tie. He took a hand to the top button of his shirt, already reaching for one of the shirts D-,



He stopped himself. Sliding the button back into place and lowering his hand, he brought himself back to reality. *That's not happening anymore*, he thought. *I don't want it to happen anymore; I'll be fine right here on my own. I'm not letting them back in. Not letting anyone else back in, not when it always ends like this.*

*Never again.*

He laid down on the bed, on top of the comforter and sheets, with his suit jacket overtop of him, and tried to fall asleep.

Until he got word from Maria that Juno was back to her full strength in the Netherworld, he'd stay in this house. If someone came by, he'd leave and find another, and he'd continue with that until it was safe to go back home.

Just like old times.

-

When she woke up on Saturday morning, she wanted to believe that the night before had been nothing but a terrible dream. Lydia swung her feet over the edge of her bed, hopping down to the floor, and made her way over to her door, opening it as quietly as she could, mindful of the early hour. In the hallway, she padded over to the guest bedroom, resting her hand on top of the doorknob.

As she turned, she prepared an apology, ready to tell Lawrence that it was nothing, that she hadn't meant to wake him, even if she knew in her heart that it was for nothing. She opened the door, pushing her way inside, and came to face an empty room, devoid of the man she was looking for. Even though she'd known that was what she'd find, it still hurt to confirm it.

She walked inside the room, running a hand over the still-rumpled bedsheets and bumping against one of the pillows. Taking it in her hands, she held it, hugging it close to her chest, and if she closed her eyes, she could almost imagine that he was here, that she'd just told him something good that had happened during school, like when she'd passed her math test on Tuesday, and that she was hugging him after she'd told him about it. He would've laughed at what she said, done something stupid like ruffling her hair just because he knew she'd protest, and then hold his arms out as an apology.

She tucked her head into the pillow, giving herself a moment to fall apart before she'd have to put herself back together again. The fabric grew wet under her face, catching the drops that fell from her eyes as she buried herself in its softness.

"Lydia?"

She ripped her face from the pillow, keeping it locked between her arms as she looked at the doorway. When she saw who it was, she lowered her face, setting her chin atop the pillow. "What do you want, Delia?"

The older woman had her hair tied back in a low ponytail, and she wasn't wearing the robe Lydia assumed she always wore. Instead, she had an old shirt on, the logo from the college she'd gone to faded over the years, and a pair of loose pants. Her voice was hoarse when she answered, sounds scraping together in her throat. "I wanted to see how you were doing."

"I'm fine," she mumbled, refusing to look at her.

"I know you're not, sweetheart," she said, moving over to sit next to her on the bed. "Please don't

lie to me.”

“Where’s Dad?” She switched the subject, unwilling to talk to Delia about something so personal.

“He came in around midnight and went straight to sleep,” she replied. Her hands twisted against each other in her lap as she spoke. “He, uh,” she said, trying to avoid her conclusion, “he couldn’t find Lawrence.”

“It’s not like he could’ve,” Lydia said, feeling anger begin to slip back between her bones, gripping the pillowcase tighter. “If BJ saw him, he would’ve run away as fast as he could.” She stared ahead for a moment before adding, “do you think he’s still here?”

“Still where?”

“Here,” she said, motioning a hand around her. “Up here. Not where he usually lives.”

Delia said nothing, taking in the idea of it. If he was truly gone, somewhere where none of them could go, there was nothing they could do to bring him back. “I don’t know, Lydia.”

“What if,” Lydia said, slowly stretching out the question, “we summoned him back here?”

“No.”

“What?” Lydia stood up, dropping the pillow as she spoke. “Why not?”

“Lydia, if he comes back here, he needs to come back on his own terms.”

“That’s stupid!” She felt her face grow hot as her cheeks flushed in rage. “He needs to come back! Why won’t you guys just let him be happy?”

Delia swallowed, clenching her jaw hard enough to feel her teeth protest. “As much as we want him back, we can’t force his hand. It isn’t fair to him.”

“It isn’t fair to us that he left! It’s not our fault that Dad hates him!”

“He needed to get away from the situation,” Delia said. “Sometimes, people just can’t stay in the environment they’re in, and they run from it. It doesn’t mean that nothing about it was good, just that,” she paused, biting her lip, “just that they couldn’t handle what was bad.”

Lydia hung her head, trying to hold herself together. “Delia?”

“Yes, hon?”

She picked up her head, and she couldn’t stop her tears when they spilled from her, emotions overwhelming her. “What if,” she hiccuped, “what if he never comes back?”

“Oh, Lydia,” Delia said, voice soft. She reached a hand out and pulled the girl closer to her, sitting her down beside her. She wrapped her arms around Lydia, rubbing her back as she felt her breathing shudder. “I’m sure he’ll come back.”

“What if he doesn’t? He -, he thinks we *hate* him and I don’t, but he doesn’t know that and -”

“I’m sure he knows how much you care about him, Lydia.” She pulled the young girl under her chin, holding her tight. “We just need to give him time.”

It was well into the afternoon when Charles woke, neck cricked to the side from the angle he'd slept at, hunched on the armchair of the library. He'd made the decision to not sleep with Delia when he came in that night, and based off of the fact that she hadn't woken him up at any point, he realized that it was probably the right choice. He got himself out of the chair, cracking his back to relieve the tension that had built up during his sleep, and found his way into the hallway.

The lamp had been set back upon its stand, still slightly askew but stable nonetheless. All of the doors ahead of him were shut, but he made his way about them, checking each.

He found the first door unlocked, and it was empty when he looked inside. The only oddity of the room, other than the lack of someone inside, was a pillow missing from the bed. He wasn't sure what to make of that.

The second door, Lydia's, was locked. He knocked upon it, calling inside. "Lydia?"

Silence greeted him.

"Lydia," he said. He didn't try to force it open, knowing that it would only make the situation worse for both of them, but he wanted to. He wanted to make everything better for her, to fix it and make her happy again even if he knew that there was no way he could, at least at the moment. "I know you're mad at me." When she still refused to speak, he took a breath, leaning his back against her door. "I'm sorry about last night. It wasn't fair of me to speak like that; if I'd known he could hear me, I would've kept my mouth shut, but I can't do anything to change the past. I know I have to fix this, but I don't know how to. If he's really gone, I," he paused, grimace twisting his mouth, "I don't really know how I could get you to forgive me, but I'll try, sweetheart, I promise."

For a moment he stood there, staring ahead at the empty hallway in front of him, trying to find whatever it was he felt was missing. "And it was unfair of me to judge him. I'll admit that I haven't been the most enthusiastic about him staying here, but I'm just trying to keep you safe and," he stopped himself, "not the point." He pushed himself off of the wall, taking a few steps forward before turning to face the door.

It still had the chips in it from January, when the house had barely made it out of the ordeal intact, but past that, past his own goddamn bias, he saw that it'd changed. At some point, she'd started drawing on it, minuscule spider webs spiraling out from behind the door handle and into the edges, disappearing where it met the wall. As he followed it, a small detail caught his eye.

In the corner, right where it hid itself in shadow when no one searched for it, there was a picture of a man in a striped suit, crudely Sharpie'd in with unsteady lines, next to a neater, more detailed drawing of the girl that resided inside the room, and it didn't take a genius to figure out that it wasn't the same artist, nor was it difficult to realize who drew what.

He didn't know when they'd found the time to draw themselves in between the screams of neighbors and the end of their paper-thin partnership, but they had. Lydia and B-,

Lydia and Lawrence had made their mark on this house, not as separate entities but as a duo, a friendship, doodling on the walls the way children do with the confidence that nothing would ever come wrong from it, that they were inseparable.

"I'm sorry, Lydia," he said, voice soft. The drawing stopped there, but that was all he needed to see. "I promise I'll make this right."

His car, the Tesla given to him by his company, was halfway charged, warning him against making longer trips without powering up, but he got in anyway, clearing off the passenger seat. If Lady Luck was on his side, he wouldn't be returning alone.

The garage door opened, and he pulled out, arm over the back of the seat as he glanced down each side of the street. He went down, past his street and onto the next, scanning the surroundings around him for any indication that Lawrence had been there, but there was nothing. None of the signs were ripped from their ground posts, and none of the roads were cracked. The lack of destruction made him uneasy, as if it was a sign that he had never been there to begin with.

He drove into town, intent on scanning the crowds that turned out on Saturdays. To his knowledge, Delia'd taken Lawrence out with her a few times during the week for her errands, and Charles theorized that it was the most likely place to find the other man. The shopping centre was flush with action, families running in and out of stores in droves, and once parked, he walked a circuit 'round the parking lot before entering the stores.

The first store, a little bakery run by Jenna from across town, was packed with young couples, but no sign of the man he was looking for.

Next door, the hardware shop was empty other than a few fathers from the area searching for whatever they needed to finish their projects.

After that, the Target, and after that, the grocery store. Both turned up blank, and with a heavy heart he walked into the last shop, the Starbucks at the edge of the lot. A bell rang above his head as he entered, trying to seem unassuming. He knew a few of the people in there, two baristas, Jerry and Trish, as well as some of the customers, and he didn't want any of them questioning his actions.

He ordered a drink and waited, standing against the back wall as a flood of students from the nearby community college came in, textbooks clasped between arms as they shielded them from the rain that had just begun. They chattered amongst themselves, and from the snatches of conversation he heard, they weren't excited for the week ahead, but they filed in line like elementary school students going to lunch, digging into their pockets for cash or cards. As one of the girls moved to the front of the line, ducking between two of her friends nearby, Charles saw a familiar face amongst the students.

He shot forward, knowing that the second that he was spotted, Lawrence would run. Mumbling apologies to the students he bumped into, he weaved amongst them until he reached the other man, clasping a hand on his shoulder to keep him in place. The man jumped a bit, startled at the contact, but Charles' relief at finally finding him overthrew it. "Lawrence," he said, "we can talk later, but I need for you to come with me right now. Delia and Lydia are scared out of their minds, and -"

"Sir, I'm really sorry to hear that, but my name isn't Lawrence."

"I know, but it's - wait."

His heart sank as he looked over the man he had in his grasp. The features were similar enough, brown eyes and scruff, body on the softer side with thick eyebrows, but his hair was neatly combed with no hint of anything other than its' natural brown. With a second glance, he noticed the jeans and hoodie with the logo of the college stamped on it front and center.

"I, uh," he let go of the man, backing up, "I'm so sorry, you just, I -," he stumbled, embarrassed at his mistake.

“It’s no worry, dude,” he said, waving a hand. “Shit happens, y’know?”

“Yeah,” he said. “It does.”

“Look, I’ve got to order,” he pointed behind his shoulder at the counter, “but I really hope you find your guy.”

“I hope so, too.”

-

He grabbed his drink and left, intent on slipping out without another incident. Walking back to his car, he tried to figure out what the hell he was supposed to tell his family. Delia would understand that he tried his best, but Lydia?

She would never forgive him; he’s sure of it. He was at fault for the situation, no doubt about it, and unless he could find Lawrence, he could never make up for it. All of the apologies in the world wouldn’t bring her friend back, no matter how much he meant them. It would ruin the tentative relationship they’d managed to coax back ever since Emily passed, and he couldn’t lose her, not after losing Emily. He wouldn’t be able to live with it.

“Chuck!”

He stopped in his tracks, turning on a heel to face the source of the shout. The owner of the hardware shop, an older gentleman named Doug, ran towards him, huffing while his apron fluttered in the wind. Coming to a halt under Charles’ umbrella, he stopped himself before he could run into the taller man, taking a moment to catch his breath. “Doug, what’s wrong?”

“I was hopin’ you could tell me that,” he said, voice wheezing out of him. “I saw your boy last night walkin’ ‘round in the dead of night, and I was wonderin’ why that was.”

“You saw him?” *Don’t get your hopes up*, he thought to himself, even though he already felt himself pick up. *It was probably that damn college kid you saw earlier*.

“Yeah, crazy hair and all. What’s with that, by the way?”

*Crazy hair. The college kid didn’t have weird hair, so that must mean* - “Doug, I promise I’ll tell you when I figure that out myself, but you need to tell me where you saw him.”

He waved a hand at the street in front of them, rain pattering upon his arm when it went out from the umbrella’s protection. “Runnin’ right up this street. I was closing up when I saw him, and he’d left my sight before I could ask him myself. Seeing you this mornin’ brought it back to my mind, and my curiosity got the better of me.”

“Delia and I, uh, had an argument last night and it got a bit nasty,” he scratched the back of his neck with his free hand. “I didn’t realize he’d left until it was too late.”

“I get that. It’s hard work, y’know, marryin’ into a family with kids, but it’s worth it. I did the same, back in my day, and I haven’t regretted it since, even when it was hard. Delia’s got her work cut out for her, but she’s a strong woman. She shouldn’t be worried about it, especially when your boy’s taken to her as well as he has.”

“He has?”

Doug looked at him, chuckling to himself when he saw Charles’ expression. “You really thought

they wouldn't? They came in, I think it was Thursday, when she had to get a new shovel or somethin' for her garden, and he trailed after her through the store like a damn pup, askin' her what he could do to help."

"I-,," he said, voice thick, "she never told me."

"Well, now you know! I just thought it was somethin' sweet."

"Doug, did you see which way he went?"

"If I remember correctly, he went all the way up Cherrywood Avenue, up to the stoplight. I didn't see which street he turned onto, but they both turn into dead ends."

His chest felt lighter, lifting away the constriction he'd felt ever since the argument the night before, and for the first time all day, Charles smiled. "Thank you, Doug. I've been worried all day about him."

Doug waved it off. "It's nothing. I've had the same happen to me."

"Do you want me to walk you back to your shop?"

"A little bit of rain won't hurt me, Chuck, but I thank you for the offer." He stepped out from under the umbrella. "Go find your boy."

"I will."

Doug smiled at him, and shuffled away, picking up his stride as the rain hit him. Charles watched as he went back inside his store, staying in the doorway for a moment to wave to him before ducking inside. The second Doug was out of sight, Charles opened his car door, collapsing his umbrella and throwing it in the backseat. He sped out of the lot, windshield wipers turned onto their max setting as the rain began to dump from the sky as if the Heavens had thrown buckets of water into the world.

*Straight up Cherrywood*, he thought to himself, gritting his teeth when a car swerved into his lane, narrowly avoiding the hood of his car. *Straight up Cherrywood*. Part of him wanted to turn on the radio, anything to break the silence in the car, but he knew he needed to concentrate. He couldn't say the wrong thing, not again.

As he pulled up to the stop sign signaling the end of Cherrywood, he took a right, pulling onto Fleet Street. The houses here were smaller, fit for young couples and families who needed a starter home, but they were lovingly designed by the town's architect in an effort to bring new families to such a small area. All of the houses looked similar, rails on their steps with triangular roofs, and he almost left, resigning himself to have to search the other exit, until something caught his eye.

One of the homes at the edge of the cul-de-sac had a "For Sale" sign stuck in its front lawn, slowly sinking into the muddy grass beneath it. Upon noticing it, Charles parked his car under a nearby tree, not even reaching back for his umbrella when he all but leaped out of the vehicle. He strode over to the house, walking up its steps, trying to find something, anything, that would indicate that Lawrence had been there. For a moment, that was all he could do, scanning every inch of the building, and he saw *it*.

A handprint, made of dried mud, was on the side of the rail, barely covered by the house's overhang. If it had been any closer to the road, it would've been washed away in the rain, but it wasn't. It was there, and when he looked closer, he saw another on the doorknob, and a footstep in the shape of a dress shoe on the welcome mat. He placed his hand on the doorknob overtop of the

print already there, and turned it.

It clicked, and he pushed the door open, walking inside.

*If he isn't here, I could never explain why I'm inside an empty house at the edge of town .*

He walked up the stairs, watching as the handprints began to taper off as they approached what he assumed was the main bedroom. Holding his breath, he went up to the door and opened it, stepping inside.

There, lying fast asleep, was Lawrence, hair sprawled against the bed, suit jacket atop of him as if it was a blanket itself.

*Thank God , he thought, letting out a breath. Thank God he's here, that he's safe.*

He stood against the wall, rainwater dripping off of the edges of his sleeves, but he couldn't bring himself to care. After hours of searching, of combing the town, he finally found Lawrence. He didn't know what he was going to say, or how the other man would react upon seeing him, but that wasn't what mattered. What mattered was that he was here, that he hadn't left them all behind, that for some reason, he stayed where they could find him.

Against the wall of the bedroom, Charles got comfortable. The adrenaline in his system finally began to taper out, and while he felt the edges of sleep start to creep behind his eyes, he kept himself awake.

He wanted to be there for Lawrence when he woke up.

## Chapter End Notes

fun fact - one of the songs I listened to while writing this chapter was "half a person" by the smiths. I went through a few different lyrics for this fic's main title, and while "take me where my soul can run" eventually won out, "do you have a vacancy" was the working title for a while!

charles unknowingly sleeping in the chair bj was in the night before? [chef's kiss].  
charles and bj have a lot more in common then they'd like to admit.

y'all don't even know how fuckin' tired I am recently. literally started working on this in class bc I'm dead asleep the second I get home lmao.

this is real goddamn niche but the song "scene eight: the spirit carries on" by dream theater from their album metropolis pt 2: scenes from a memory, fits bj so well [esp. the chorus] it's scary. like the ~mood~ of it all is just really reminiscent of how I write him, esp. the scene in the beginning of this chap. it's weird to think that a song my brother showed me in like,,, eighth grade is helping me now lmao.

"just like old times" i :'(

"hey sherrie, why are chapter updates happening so goddamn quickly?" funny you should ask! I'm attempting [keyword - ATTEMPTING!] to nanowrimo the shit out of this. and uh. nano = 1.6k words a day. when my chapters are around 3.5k or so,,, that means finishing a chapter every three days or so after editing is taken into account, as I

self-beta. I've had a few blips of business where I couldn't write, but they're being written very quickly. I had a twice-weekly schedule for posting all planned out, but That Ain't Happening because I thrive off of feedback lmao. so! chapter updates from here on out will be a bit of a trainwreck, but that means more for y'all to read lmao

fun little scavenger hunt - spot the references! I'm trying to contain it to just musicals, and as of now, there's references to Little Shop of Horrors, Waitress, and Sweeney Todd!

also, the college student? alex brightman lookalike.

I believe this is the longest chapter so far which,,, didn't expect that.

like something? hate something? want to see something happen? want to see me eaten by a sandworm? let me know! comments are great, especially when my wrists are fuckin' Dead after eight days of nanowrimo. only twenty-two days to go!

as per usual, my tumblrs are always open! @strawberryicebreakers on main and @bisexualbeetlejuice for BJ-specific content. hit me up!



# fear and forgiveness

## Chapter Summary

in which lawrence isn't having a good day, cars are examined, and the maitlands misspeak.

## Chapter Notes

we've got an official chapter count now! it might change +/-1 or so, but as of now, it's twenty, which. holy shit, y'know?

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

He woke slowly, dragging himself out of unconsciousness as if pulling himself by rope into the waking world. Pushing himself up into a sitting position, he rubbed at his eyes, trying to get rid of the lethargy he still felt, built up throughout the night even when sleeping was supposed to do the opposite. No matter how much he wanted to, he couldn't go back to bed; he had to check in with Maria before she got scared, had to clean up the mud he's inevitably tracked in, and had to make sure no one noticed his presence.

He stretched out one of his arms and cracked his neck, relieving the pressure that had built up overnight, and opened his eyes.

-

The speed in which Lawrence managed to slam his back to the wall, scrabbling to get away, astounded Charles. He watched the other man push himself off of the bed, a mess of stripes and shockingly white hair.

"Wait, Lawrence!" Charles snapped into action, but was too late; the other man had slammed the door behind him. It wasn't the door Charles had entered through, though, so he knew that he wouldn't be able to run off. "Lawrence, I need to talk to you."

A laugh, short and derisive, answered him, abruptly cut off after a moment.

He walked up to the door, placing a hand on the smooth wood. "Lawrence, I need you to talk to me, face to face." When he tried the door handle, it was unlocked. "Can I come in?"

He heard the other man groan as he noticed that, in his rush, he'd forgotten to lock the door. Weakly, Lawrence asked, "do I really have a choice?"

"You always have a choice." He kept his hand on the door but didn't open it, not yet. "If you don't want me to come in, I won't."

"Just," he said, muffled by the door, "just come in. Get it over with."

"Thank you," Charles replied, and turned the handle, letting himself inside. The bathroom was

small, much smaller than any of the rooms at his own house, but he closed the door behind him, sitting on the edge of the bathtub. In the corner, wedged between the end of the counter and the wall, sat Lawrence, watching him, chest rising and falling at an alarmingly rapid pace. "How are you?"

His eyes narrowed. "I'm fine."

"Alright," Charles said, refusing to let the other man phase him. He'd spent too long trying to find him for a snarky comment to drive him away. He needed to get him comfortable. If anything, he needed Lawrence to know that he wasn't mad at him, that he was here to help. "Are you hungry? I have -"

"Chuck, stop it." Lawrence brushed a hand through his hair, pulling it out when it hit a knot. His voice was low, rougher than usual. "Can-," he stumbled over his words, "can we just skip to the part where you tell me that you don't want to see me again, leading me to make some shitass comment about how I'm already on my way and leave?"

"What?" He sunk down onto one knee. "Lawrence, I want you here. We all do." Charles watched as the other man's mood flipped, red sinking in through the tips and replacing the white of his hair.

"Don't fuck with me, Chuck; I'm tired of it."

"I'm not fucking with you, kid. I don't spend hours searching for things just to tell them to disappear again."

"Just-, just shut up," he mumbled, ducking his head between his knees. "I know you're lying. I've been through this fuckin' rodeo more times than you could count. I know bullshit when I hear it."

"Lawrence," he started, moving over to sit beside him, but he couldn't. In amazement, he felt as if there was a wall between them, something stopping him from getting within two feet or so of the other man. "Are-," he asked, trying to make sense of the situation, "are you doing that? Is that something you can do?"

"I'm not doing it again," he said, voice quiet. His hair had gone stark white again, barely visible from his position. "I can't-, I'm not doing it all over again."

"Not doing what?"

His hands crept into his hair, tugging as he spoke, frantic energy running through him. "This-, this fucking cycle, I'm not doing it again, I can't do it again, I-"

"There's no cycle, Lawrence," he said, speaking softly to the other man. Something was happening, and Charles really didn't want to see the outcome if it played itself out. He placed a hand against the barrier he couldn't even see but ripped it away after less than a second. Whatever he touched, whatever energy formed the boundary, burnt. "Lawrence, you need to let me close to you."

"No," he said, sounding as if he was going to be sick. "No, I'm not going to let you. Not again, never again, you're not getting close again."

He tried to meet the other man's eyes, but couldn't, not when he was hiding his face. A thought came into his mind, the implications of what was happening, and he didn't like it, not in the slightest. "Lawrence, I need you to listen to me. Whoever you think I am, I'm not."

"If-, if I let you in, you'll just get worse and worse and worse until I can't-, until I leave and then

that's even worse for both of us because you're mad and I'm desperate and-

"Lawrence -"

He kept going, voice trailing after his thoughts as they came out. "And you let me come back 'cause you're nice and I help you and you-, you help me and care about me and love me until I mess up again, I always mess up again, and then it goes back to the beginning and I-, I can't do it anymore." He shuddered, trying to breathe. "I can't do it anymore. I can't-, I can't fucking do it anymore!"

Charles watched, unable to do anything as Lawrence worked himself into hysterics, voice shrill as he spoke. He saw the other man rip at his hair as if he wanted to pull it out by its very roots, and all he wanted to do was help, but he couldn't, not when he physically couldn't get closer. All he could do was watch.

"I'm not doing it again! I'm not doing this shit again!" He coughed, hard and painful, trying to do something, anything, to get rid of the thickness in his throat that scraped against every word that came out. "I can't fucking do it again! I can't, I-, I can't do it again." His voice broke at the end, and in a whisper, he said, "I won't I'd make it out if I do." He turned his hands inwards, scraping at his skull with chipped nails.

It felt as if something broke around him, and with a tentative movement, Charles stuck his hand out, feeling for the barrier. When he was unable to find it, he moved closer, inching towards Lawrence. "Lawrence," he said, "I need you to stop hurting yourself."

When the other man didn't move, Charles reached forward, kneeling against the bathroom tile. He threaded each of his hands under Lawrence's, pulling his fingers away from his scalp and setting them down at his side. Holding his biceps, Charles pulled him to his feet. For a moment, the room was silent, save for Lawrence's breathing. Charles looked down at the shorter man before he realized what he had to do.

Like he'd done with Lydia more times than he could count, the one thing he always knew would make her feel better, he drew Lawrence into his arms, holding him tight against his chest. He felt the other man bury his face into his shoulder, gripping him back as if it was his only chance at survival, like Odysseus and the remainder of a boat long destroyed in the wake of Scylla and Charybdis' torment. "Lawrence," he said, quiet, "you're going to be okay."

"Please tell me you aren't lying," he whispered, "please, I ne-, I need to know you aren't trying to trick me again."

"This isn't a trick. I would never be that cruel, Lawrence."

"I-," he said, and Charles hugged him tighter.

"You don't have to talk if you don't want to."

He buried his face even further into Charles' shoulder, letting out a hoarse shout, unable to speak.

"I'm sorry," Charles said, rubbing a hand on his back. "I'm sorry for judging you and not even trying to see you as a person. It wasn't fair to you. I," he tried to find the right words, pausing for a moment, "I'm not going to act like I know everything about you, but I want to. I want you to feel comfortable around me, and one day, if you're okay with it, we could talk about what caused this, but for now," he said, holding the other man in his arms, "all I need for you to do is to come home."

Muffled against his jacket, he heard Lawrence test the word out as if he couldn't comprehend it. "Home?"

"Yeah, kid. Home, with Lydia and Delia. The Maitlands, too," he added, "can't forget about them. Don't tell them I did," he said, chuckling.

"I-," he stammered, "you-, you're okay with that? With me staying?"

He pulled back, looking at the other man with an eyebrow raised. "Lawrence, I wouldn't've spent my Saturday searching the town if I didn't want you to come back with me."

"And-, and Delia's alright with it, too?"

"I don't think she'd let me back in the house without you in tow." That startled a laugh out of Lawrence, small and weak, but it was there, and that's all Charles needed to hear. Smiling at him, Charles let go and gestured to the bathroom door. "My car's outside, if you're ready to go."

Lawrence looked around at the tile and lilac walls before turning back to face Charles. He wasn't fine, not in a long shot, and probably wouldn't be for a while, but he was better than he'd been, and that's all either of them needed right now. "I think I am."

-

When they got inside, Charles watched as Lawrence prodded at the various screens and buttons in the car, waiting for their response. As his hand crept near the gear shift, Charles held back a laugh. "I wouldn't touch that if I were you," he said, "especially not when I'm driving. It wouldn't end well."

He pulled his hand back, head cocked to the side. "Why does yours look different?"

"What?"

"I've been in Delia's car, but yours isn't like it at all. It has a lot of screens."

"That," he said, pulling out of the driveway and onto the main road, "is because Delia, as much as she loathes to admit it, is a bit of a technophobe when it comes to her cars. She refuses to get any car with a rear camera."

"Why?"

"She thinks it'll make her forget how to drive without it, and that she'll get dependent on it."

"Why?"

"You've got a lot of questions, huh?"

Lawrence flushed, tips of his hair turning from the light green it had been to a pale yellow. "I'm not in cars a lot."

Charles thought it over for a moment before asking a question of his own. "Well, how do you get around?"

"Walking, mainly. I occasionally use taxis, but I don't really trust them all that much."

"That's understandable." He waited at the stop sign for a moment before continuing. "Are cars not something you find in the Netherworld?"

Lawrence perked up, excited that Charles remembered the name of his world. “Nah, they’re pretty common! I just never learnt how to drive.”

“You can’t drive?”

Lawrence shook his head. “Never had anyone teach me. Plus, cars weren’t a thing ‘till I was like, nine hundred. I’d already gotten used to walking around by then. Didn’t feel like changing it up.”

“About that,” Charles said, turning into his neighborhood, “how does ageing work, down there? You don’t act like someone who’s lived a millennium.”

“Oh, Maria talked to me about that a while back,” he said. “There’s some formula or something, I don’t really know the specifics of it, but I’m pretty sure the rough estimate is like, fifty years or so down there equals one year up here.” He prodded at the window, trying to see how to roll it down.” People age slower in the Netherworld ‘cause they’ll be down there for longer.”

“So that means,” he said, calculating it in his head, “holy shit.”

Lawrence cocked his head to the side. “What?”

“You’re twenty. Oh my God, you’re twenty?”

He shrugged, attention caught by a woman’s neon yellow umbrella outside. It had flamingos on it. “I guess?”

“You’re literally a kid,” he said, trying to focus on the road ahead instead of staring at the man beside him. “Oh my God.”

“What? It isn’t that big of a deal.”

“Delia’s going to kill me,” Charles said, voice small. “She’s going to murder me for driving out some barely-legal kid from the house.”

“I’ve had worse,” he said. “Honest to God, this doesn’t even break my top five shittiest days.”

“That’s concerning,” Charles said, turning onto his street.

“It’s true,” he said. “You would never believe some of the things I’ve seen.”

“Like?”

“Personally, or just in general?”

“Whichever you’re comfortable with.”

“I once saw a man who had to wear turtlenecks to keep his head on.”

“Christ,” Charles said. “Beheaded?”

“Yeah!”

“That’s the only thing that worries me about dying, barring the fact that I’d leave my family behind. Now that I know that the way I die is the way I’ll stay for eternity, I’m a bit cautious when it comes to daring situations.”

“That’s one of the better things about being born dead. I never had to worry about that whole

shitfest.”

Charles pulled the car into the driveway, opening the garage via the controller he kept in his car.  
“Born dead?”

Lawrence nodded.

“I didn’t know that could happen,” Charles said, interested in the science of it.

“No one did.” Huffing out a laugh, Lawrence fiddled with the hem of his sleeve as he spoke.  
“Wasn’t even supposed to be something that should happen, but,” he gestured at himself, “here I am.”

He finished parking, taking the key out of the ignition and unbuckling his seatbelt. Lawrence followed him out of the car, walking with him through the garage to the interior door. “If it’s any consolation,” Charles said, looking at him, “I’m glad you’re here.”

Beside him, Lawrence smiled.

-

Inside the house, Lydia sat in her room working on homework when she heard the garage door close. She was still furious with her dad, at his actions and what they caused, and she planned on staying in her room for a bit longer, knowing that when she saw him, all it would cause is an argument.

That was, until, she realized that her dad wasn’t alone. Downstairs, meeting her dad’s voice, was one she’d thought she’d never get to hear again.

She shot up, dropping her history textbook onto the floor in her haste. Tearing open her door, she rushed downstairs, socked feet almost slipping on the hardwood. Her sleeves billowed behind her, narrowly avoiding getting caught on the baluster as she turned, heading straight into the kitchen.

There, chatting with her dad, was Lawrence, striped suit and all. He seemed to notice her right as she found him, opening his mouth to speak before she cut him off.

She ran to him, grabbing him tight around the waist. “Never,” she said, not even caring when she felt the grime on the suit, “never do that shit again, BJ.”

“Language,” her dad said, raising his eyebrows. She looked up at him, debating within herself as to forgive him or not. On the one hand, he’d almost ruined her life by driving her friend away, but on the other hand, he fixed it.

He was forgiven, at least for now. She rolled her eyes at him, smirking. “Whatever.”

Charles let out a laugh at her before cutting himself off, looking somewhere over her shoulder.

Behind her, Delia entered the kitchen. Her hair was still a wreck, half-thrown into the low ponytail she’d seen earlier, and she hadn’t changed out of her pajamas, even at such a late hour. She walked over, placing a hand upon Lawrence’s face, as if checking that he was real. “You came back,” she said, voice hushed.

He looked at her from overtop Lydia’s head. “I did,” he said. “Charles brought me home.”

Delia shut her mouth, swallowing hard, and looped her arms around his neck, pulling him close.

Trapped between the two women, Lawrence looked to Charles for guidance.

Charles shrugged, trying to hold back his laughter at seeing Lawrence so out of his depth with Lydia and Delia hanging off of him.

"I'm so glad you're back, sweetheart," she said, whispering in his ear. She let go quick, pulling herself away before she got emotional, went over to Charles, talking to him quietly. With that, Lawrence looked down.

"Lyds," he said, "I need to shower. Do you think you could peel yourself off of me for a few minutes to let that happen?"

Lydia glared up at him. "You don't get to leave and then tell me to stop hugging you when you get back. That's illegal."

"Is it?" He chuckled, unhooking her hands from his torso.

"It is," she said, nodding her head. "You're a criminal, Beej."

"Ain't the first time, kid, and it won't be the last."

-

From the stairwell, hidden out of sight, the Maitlands watched the scene before them unfold. For the past day, they'd been unsure of what would happen, but they'd kept to themselves, not wanting to further anyone's hurt.

"How do you think Charles got him to come back?" Barbara asked. She saw the aforementioned father lay a hand on Lawrence's shoulder, speaking to him too low for the spirits to pick up on.

Next to her, Adam tried to think of an answer other than the admission that he had no damn clue. "Maybe he made a deal with him?"

"Nah," Barbara said, waving a hand in dismissal. "Doesn't seem like something Charles would do."

"Fair enough. What do you think?"

She put a hand to her chin, tapping in thought. "I'm not sure," she answered, mouth twisted on her face. "Maybe he realized that this place is his best bet."

"See, I'd believe that," Adam said, "but Charles would never let him back if it was for something so business-y. There's got to be something else."

"Like what?" She leaned a bit further to the left, trying to see more into the kitchen. They didn't want to be spotted, but she had to see for herself what was going on.

"I think Charles found something out," Adam said, pushing his glasses up as they dipped down on his nose. "I think that, whatever he found out, whatever Lawrence told him, would confirm or deny my theory."

Barbara looked at him, eyebrows furrowed. "Why would he tell Charles?"

"Pity, maybe?"

"That'd be shitty of him," she said. "Do you really think he'd stoop that low?"

"He's him," Adam replied, monotone. "What do you think?"

"He's changed, though." She stopped trying to look into the other room, turning back onto the stairs and gesturing for Adam to follow her back to the attic. "If this had happened with how he used to be, it would've gotten nasty. Like, crashed cars or ripped-up trees nasty."

"You're not wrong."

Barbara smirked, looking over her shoulder at her husband. "I know."

Adam laughed at her response. He pulled himself together, adopting a serious nature once more. "Honestly, though, how do we find out? The curiosity is going to kill me if we don't find out."

"I say we just go up to Lawrence and ask him."

"Ask me what?"

Barbara let out a squeak, coming to a halt on the top step. Adam almost ran into her, catching himself at the last minute, and together, they looked at the bottom of the stairs.

On the floor below, Lawrence looked at them. The suit was still on him, fresh mud staining the bottom of the pant legs, but his tie was loose. He didn't seem unhappy, but something about his presence made the Maitlands uneasy. They didn't know how long he'd been there, and were frankly afraid to find out.

"Uh," Adam started. "We, uh, we wanted to ask you -"

"If you'd lend a hand on our model," Barbara said, cutting him off.

The statement didn't help clarify anything for Lawrence. "Your model?"

"Oh, we've been working on it for months!" Adam forced a laugh, trying to break the tension in any way he could. "It's of the town."

"And since you've seen more of the town in person," Barbara added, "it would only make sense to ask for your help! After all, we might be missing something."

"We've had to rely on Google so far, and you know how finicky that can be!"

The look of sheer confusion on Lawrence's face told them that no, he didn't really know what that meant. "And you want me to help you?"

"Of course!" Barbara smiled at him, showing a few too many teeth to be comfortable. "Whenever you're free, we're ready for you!"

Lawrence glanced off to the side. "I've got to shower, but I could come up tomorrow morning if you want."

"That'd be perfect," Adam said. "Around noon?"

"Sure," Lawrence said, shrugging. "I've, uh, -"

"Oh!" The Maitlands went up the rest of the steps, freeing the way.

"Thanks," Lawrence said, slipping past them and retreating into the guest room. He glanced at them before he left, unsure of what to make of them.



The second he was out of sight, the couple looked at each other, eyes wide.

Adam turned to his wife, face flushed. "That went well."

"I guess we have plans for the morning," Barbara said, voice quiet.

He looked back at the door, grimacing. "I guess so."

## Chapter End Notes

another fanart popped up! the fantastic @none-of-us-are drew two scenes from this fic, and I'm in love!!! I absolutely love everything about it :) thank you so much!!!! [here's a link! - <https://none-of-us-are.tumblr.com/post/188918977015/i-said-i-like-it-here-can-i-stay-i-like-it-here>]

bj takes comfort in fitting himself into small spaces - the armchair, the corner of the room, etc.

also - the long, strung out sentences are a favorite of mine to write. very "train of thought"-y

charles, unknowingly, is acting a lot like junos here, and it isn't helping bj in the slightest. post-arguments, she'd be very "oh, I'm not mad, just tell me what's wrong!" and then flip that shit on him the second he messed up.

this is where we begin exploring bj's powers! they might not come up for a few more chapters, but he's easily one of the most powerful beings in the netherworld. poor guy never got trained, though, so it just kinda,, happens instead of him specifically doing things.

bj using the word "love" in the context of saying that junos loves him,, breaks me to write.

it wasn't planned out, but the way delia and charles handle bj is very reminiscent of adoptive parents who get a troubled child. they don't really know how to handle his blow-outs other than trying to comfort him and trying to get him to realize that he isn't "there" anymore.

again, everything is very music-oriented when it comes to my writing, especially the intense scenes. this chap. was written while blaring "the sharpest lives" and "this is how I disappear," both by my chemical romance. two songs I loved as a twelve-year old that fit the scene well. interestingly enough, the second part of the chapter, from post-make up to the maitlands, the song choice was "I don't know my name" by grace vanderwaal.

part of me feels mad @ myself for giving this scene to charles, but hell, he needed it. I've been referring to this scene as bj's "break" and I really, really wanted to give it to either delia or one of the maitlands, but charles won out.

as an alliteration fanatic, the fact that lydia and lawrence both start with L's has made me So Happy, y'all.

also uh,,, I'm a big odyssey/beowulf/tolkien/general old shit geek and finally, finally being able to reference that in my writing is making me go feral!

y'know how stories have the small event before the Main Event? this ordeal,,, is that. this shit ain't over yet, babey!

like something? hate something? want to see something happen? want to see me eaten by a sandworm? let me know! comments are great, especially when this damn fic isn't even halfway over. christ.

as per usual, my tumblrs are always open! @strawberryicebreakers on main and @bisexualbeetlejuice for BJ-specific content. hit me up!

## precautions and popcorn

### Chapter Summary

in which delia and charles discuss the steps they need to take, and lydia tries to have a movie night with her sort-of brother.

### Chapter Notes

siri play "halfway there" by big time rush because we're officially halfway over!

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

In the kitchen, Delia turned to face Charles, arms crossed over her chest. Lydia glanced up at her, adopting a similar pose as she watched her father. “So,” Delia said, “you got him to come back.”

Charles smiled at her, trying to soften the lecture he knew was coming. “I did.”

“And how, pray tell, did you manage to do that?”

“Before I say anything, I’ve actually got a question of my own,” Charles said, “and I think it would take a shorter explanation than yours would. Did you know he could make force-fields?”

Delia raised an eyebrow at her fiancé. “He can what?”

“Force-fields. Wish I was kidding.”

Lydia snickered, watching her dad’s face. “Did you guys forget the clones? Possession? All of that stuff?”

“I tried to,” Charles mumbled under his breath.

“Lydia,” Delia said, turning to her, “is there anything else you know he can do?”

“Nothing that I’m aware of, but I doubt that that’s it. BJ’s had hundreds of years to work on it all; he’s probably got a whole selection of abilities.”

“Christ,” Charles said, bringing a hand to his face. He scrubbed the side of his face, tired from the day’s events. “Someone remind me to ask him about it.” Turning to leave the room, he said, “I’m going to head to bed.”

“Oh no, Charles, you aren’t.” Delia grabbed the back of his shirt like a kitten’s scruff, bringing him back to her. “You never answered my question.”

He groaned, dragging his feet on his way back. “I don’t think it’s something Lydia needs to hear.”

Delia turned to the young girl, waiting for her to leave.

“Nope, not leaving,” she said, raising her chin. “I want to hear what happened.”

“Lydia,” Delia said, “trust your dad’s judgement on this one.”

“I’m just going to ask BJ about it, you know that, right?”

“Don’t,” Charles said. His voice had lost any sense of humor he’d had, deadly serious as he spoke. “If he wants you to know, he’ll tell you, but Lydia, I’m asking you not to push this. It’s not something you need to know right now, sweetheart.”

She huffed, rolling her eyes in annoyance. “Fine.”

“Thank you, Lydia,” Charles said. “Do you still have any homework?”

“A little bit of history, and the last few slides of my English PowerPoint.”

“Go do it, then,” he said. “If you finish it tonight, you’ll have all of tomorrow to do whatever you want.”

“Alright,” she said. “On one condition, though.”

“What is it?”

“One of you has to drive us to the mall tomorrow. I need new clothes for summer,” she said. “I grew out of all the ones from last year.”

“I think we can arrange that,” Delia said. “The one near the lake?”

“Yep!”

“Okay,” she said, smiling at her. “Now go upstairs and do your work, please.”

Lydia nodded and left the room. Charles waited until he could hear her footsteps retreat upstairs before he spoke.

“Okay,” Delia said, moving to sit down on one of the breakfast bar’s stools. She rested her chin in one of her hands as she watched the man in front of her squirm. “What’s so important that Lydia can’t hear it?”

“Something fucked him up,” Charles said, saying the words quick as if he thought they were being overheard. “Really, really badly.”

“Barbara and Adam have the same idea,” Delia said. “What made you think of it?”

“You know how Lydia used to get before she started seeing Doctor Anderson? The freak-outs she’d have when she got overwhelmed?”

Delia’s expression turned dark, uneasy at what Charles was implying. “I remember.”

Looking off to the side, Charles rubbed at his arm, uncomfortable. “Turns out, he’s like that, too.”

“How bad was it?” She thought back to all of the attacks Lydia used to get, trying to catalogue the levels she’d seen her at.

“It was horrible, Delia,” he said. “He just kept mumbling to himself, curled up in the corner of a bathroom and hiding his face from me.”

“Jesus,” she said, taken aback. The concept of Lawrence acting like that unnerved her, as if it was fundamentally against his nature, even when she knew otherwise. “What color was his hair?”

“White,” he answered, “pure white. Like a damn ghost. I think it was because he was scared.”

“You think the hair’s connected to his mood?”

“It makes sense. What other explanation can you think of?”

“Fair enough,” Delia said, stumped.

“The only question now is what, or who, fucked him up.” Charles’ eyes turned to slits, staring at something she couldn’t see. He was angry, silent fury embedding itself in his skin.

“The Maitlands told me that they think it was his mother,” she said, “and I think they’re right. His father isn’t in the picture, and I don’t know of anyone he’s been, uh,” she trailed off, “he’s been with, in the biblical sense. All that leaves is Juno.”

Charles blew out a breath, leaning against the countertop. “It would make sense,” he said, “especially considering his age.”

“How so?”

He snapped up, any trace of lethargy gone when he realized his slip up. “Uh,” he started.

“Charles,” she said, looking him dead in the eyes, “what do you mean by ‘considering his age?’”

“In my defense, I didn’t know,” he said, trying to save his back. “Turns out that, if you convert everything from his world to ours, he’s -”

Delia’s eyes narrowed. “How old, Charles?”

The answer came out in a squeak, with Charles ducking his head. “Twenty years old, give or take.”

She pinched the bridge of her nose with her free hand, attempting to calm herself down. “He’s twenty,” she said, matter-of-fact. “Twenty.”

Charles nodded. He took a step back, distancing himself from Delia. “Twenty.”

“Charles,” she began, closing her eyes, “as much as I want to get angry about that right now, and as much as that information raises many, many more questions than it answers, we need to get back onto the subject at hand.”

He sighed in relief, moving closer to her once more. “Okay,” he said. “If it is his mother, what do we do about it?”

“The most we can do is try to get him to talk about it,” she replied, tapping manicured nails against the counter. “This sort of stuff needs specifics. We can’t just try to treat it like any other issue, and we can’t help at all until we know more.”

“How do you think we should ask him, though?”

“I’m not sure,” Delia murmured, glancing up at Charles. “Barbara and Adam both thought I should be the one to do it, but now that you two have talked your issues out -”

“Nope,” Charles said, waving his hands. “No way. I’m not having that conversation with him until

he comes to me about it.”

“Fuck, okay,” Delia said. “I just-, I don’t want to be the one to do it. If I mess it up, it’s my fault, but I’m not going to let Lydia try to help. God knows she’d end up trying to bring him to therapy with her, and we can’t let that happen.”

Chuckling to himself, Charles smiled. “That’d be quite the event. Imagine Anderson’s face!”

The mental image of the doctor, ever the professional, having to confront Lawrence during a session coaxed a smile out of Delia. “As interesting as that would be, we can’t let that happen either.” She sighed, dropping her shoulders. “I’ll do it.”

“Thank you, dear,” Charles said, sweeping around the side of the counter to take her hand. “I’m sure that whatever you end up doing will work wonders.”

“Is it bad that I kind of want to just leave it?” Delia asked, standing up. “Like, if we just didn’t acknowledge it, it could go away?”

“Delia,” Charles said, voice gentle, “I know that would be easier, but it has to be done. We can’t just ignore it because it’s uncomfortable.”

At his words, she nodded. As much as she wanted to pretend that they could be a regular family, that wouldn’t ever be the case, and she had to own up to it. “I’ll figure something out,” she said, sturdy in her assertion. “I won’t let him keep hurting the way he is now, however that may be. No one deserves that kind of pain.”

-

Upstairs, Lydia finished her homework, closing out of the PowerPoint she’d been working on. Angie had sent her the slides she’d worked on earlier that day, and all she had to do was wait for Sean to put his in, which, if he was anything like he usually was, would be sometime around ten PM the night before it was due. She pulled up Netflix and picked up her laptop, bringing it into Lawrence’s room.

The room was empty, but a quick look around told her that he was in the bathroom, and if the noise was anything to go by, taking a shower. Outside, the rain still pattered against the windows, typical of May weather. It made her want to curl up and watch a movie, which was precisely what she planned on doing, albeit not alone. She had a few options to choose from, but she wanted BJ’s opinion on it before she decided on anything. Whatever they watched, she wanted it to be something new for him, if only to see his reaction to it.

Running through her mental checklist, she thought of what else she needed. She had her pajamas on, and there were plenty of blankets on the bed already. Her laptop was fully charged, speakers working fine. She planned on making popcorn but didn’t want to until they started the movie, as she knew she had a tendency to snack on it beforehand until barely any remained during the movie itself.

Hearing the shower turn off, she waited, draping one of the blankets over her body as she flopped onto the bed, checking her Twitter while Lawrence got dressed. She checked the trending page, seeing an article about climate change at the top, and sent the tweet to Angie. Less than a minute later, she responded, a string of emojis that made Lydia smile. She sent back a response and conversed with her on the website.

She almost didn’t notice the door open, but the light spilling into the room caught her attention.

She turned her head to face Lawrence. "Hey!"

With his face turned away, he hadn't noticed her hidden amongst the blankets. "Shit," he swore, whipping around. Light crackled at his fingertips, buzzing with a sense of ferocity that freaked her out.

"BJ, it's just me," she said, increasing the brightness on her laptop. She looked at him, worried. "I'm the only one in here."

"Fucking hell, kid," he said, voice weak. "Don't pull that shit again."

"What was that?" Her eyes were wide as she looked at his hands, wondering what he'd been about to do.

"What was what?" Lawrence asked, defensive. He noticed her gaze and hid his hands behind his back.

"The sparks!" She wagged her fingers at him, mimicking the vague electrical noise she'd heard when he'd done it. "What's it for?"

"It's a defense thing," he said. "Didn't know who-slash-what you were, and I didn't want to take any chances."

She patted the space next to her, and he sat down on the edge of the bed. The light pink of his t-shirt oddly paired with his hair, currently a pale green, reminding her of the fairies on a show she used to watch as a kid. He laid out on his back, head facing forward while he watched her out of the corner of his eyes.

She peered at him, hair falling as she leaned towards him. "Why do you need a defense thing?"

"Because, Lyds," he said, folding his hands atop his stomach, "people are mean."

"Like your mom?"

He closed his eyes, taking a deep breath before he answered her. "Yeah, kid. Like my mom."

"I heard the Maitlands talking about it earlier," she said, thoughtful. She thought back to what she'd heard when she'd gone up to the attic earlier. They'd been chatting about BJ, and she might've eavesdropped for a bit before she announced her presence. She'd heard them mention Juno, though, amongst other things.

Lawrence sighed. "And I'm assuming that you don't know why they were discussing my personal life?"

She shook her head, hair flying back and forth. "Nope."

"Great," he said, dragging the word out. "That's great. Love it when people do that."

"I'm sorry, Beej," she said. "It's rude of them to talk about your life when you aren't there."

He cracked his eyes open, looking at her with a small smile on his face. "Thanks, kid."

"You're welcome," she said. She moved from her previous position to mimic him, laying on her back next to him. He laughed when he saw her. "How do you do that, though? The spark-y thing."

Raising a hand above him, he waved his palm through the air. For a moment, nothing changed,

then in an instant his hand was alight with electricity, sparks contained on his hands but formidable nonetheless. “I just do,” he said. “Don’t really have to think about it. I want it to happen, so it does.”

“That’s so cool! Can you teach me how to do it?”

“Can’t,” he said. “As fun as that would be, you literally can’t. It’s a dead person thing.”

She rolled her eyes, huffing in annoyance. “You’re not really dead, though. You’re just not alive. If you can learn it, why can’t I?”

“I’ll tell you what,” he said. “You give me a reason, a legitimate reason, not just some random bullshit, as to why you’d ever need to know how to electrocute people, and I’ll try my damn best to teach you.”

Lydia thought to herself of different scenarios, but everything she came up with could be solved by using a taser just as well as it would with her hands. Groaning, she threw her hands up in the air in defeat.

“That’s what I thought.”

Annoyed, she glared at him. “I still don’t get why I can’t just learn it for fun.”

“Kid,” he said, looking her in the eye, “this isn’t the kind of thing you want to learn for fun. It’s a last resort.”

“For?”

“Haven’t we already been over this? Mean people.”

“Like Juno.”

“Yeah. And anyways, that isn’t even the coolest thing I can do,” he said, smirking at her.

Her curiosity got the better of her, and she asked, “like what?”

“Like this,” he said, and before she could stop him, he snapped his fingers, and two more of him popped onto the bed out of thin air, sitting with their legs crossed, watching them.

“I already knew you could do that, BJ.”

“Alright,” he said, snapping once more. The clones disappeared, leaving the two alone. “What about this?”

To her delight, a raccoon dropped onto the bed, bright red like the shade of Delia’s tulips in the flower garden. It looked at them for a moment before scrabbling away, only to be caught by an unseen hand. It floated into the air, lazily rotating, moving closer and closer to her.

Lydia laughed, snorting at the raccoon’s face. It looked confused, as if it had no idea what was happening. In its defense, neither did Lydia. “That’s more like it!”

“Clones don’t impress you, but something you’d find in a dumpster does? Tough crowd.”

She stuck a hand out to pet it, only for it to vanish a moment later.

“Don’t touch it,” he said, baffled. “It probably had rabies.”



“Gross,” she said.

“Gross indeed,” he said. “Now, what did you even come in here for?”

“Oh,” she said, sitting up, “I had a plan for tonight!” She dragged her laptop towards her, sitting up as she woke it up. “Want to watch a movie?”

Lawrence pushed himself up, peering over her shoulder at her screen. “Which one?”

“Which ones have you seen?”

“Out of these?” He watched as she scrolled through the films she’d found, and he didn’t recognize any of them. “None.”

She gasped, feigning offence. “BJ! How have you never seen any of these?”

He smiled, ruffling her hair to mess with her even more. “I’m busy! I have a job, y’know?”

“And that means you can’t ever just chill out?”

“Yep,” he said, popping the “p.” He faux-sighed, dropping his chin into his hand, propped up against his knee. “I got a job at the young age of seven-hundred and fifty years old. Haven’t looked back since then.”

“Young?” She laughed at the idea, the fact that someone like him would consider that to be anything other than ancient.

“You callin’ me old?”

“Uh, yeah,” she said, giggling. “I mean, you don’t know modern movies, you hate your job, and oh, your age is in four digits. If you pulled up the dictionary and looked up ‘old,’ there’d be a photo of you underneath the definition.”

“Lydia Deetz,” he said, pressing a hand to his chest, right above where his heart would be, “I am hurt! Truly scathed! Wounded, I tell you!”

“Wow, where do you store that thesaurus?”

“The what?”

“A-,” she started, about to make a joke of it before she saw his face. Lawrence was legitimately confused at the word, staring at her with no sense of humor apparent. “You know what, that’s not important.”

“That one looks cool,” he said, pointing at one of the movie thumbnails on her screen.

“The spy movie?” She clicked on it, reading the summary. “I don’t know how it got on my playlist. It’s one of the movies my dad likes.”

“I think it’d be interesting,” he said. “Action, mystery, cute guys, what more could a teen girl ask for?”

“Cute girls,” Lydia said, side-eyeing him.

“Well, I’m sure they’ll have those in here, too,” he said. “I say we watch it.”

Right as she was about to click play, she paused, eyes wide. “We need to get snacks first!” She shot off the bed, turning the flashlight on her phone on as she moved. Waving for Lawrence to follow her, she walked out of the room, creeping down the stairs. When they got to the kitchen, she went over to the pantry, pulling out a box of microwave popcorn bags.

“Alright,” she said, “how many do you think we need?”

He looked at the bags, curious. “Three?”

“Three?” She was a popcorn fiend, but even then, she barely made it through a bag on her own in one sitting. Three was a bit of a stretch for her to think about.

His eyebrows furrowed as he watched her face. “Four?”

“I think three would work,” she said. She tore open the packaging, tossing the first bag in the microwave and waiting to hear it begin.

The very first pop came out less than half a minute later, startling Lawrence. He jumped when he heard the noise, caught off guard, but he quickly regained his composure, peering into the electronic with an increased level of curiosity. Head cocked, he watched the bag rotate, holding himself back from jumping when the pops increased in frequency. “How does that work?”

“The microwave?”

He placed a hand on it, feeling the vibrations under his palm. The soft glow of the light cast his face in a slightly golden hue. “Yeah, whatever it is. How does it do that?”

“Electricity,” she said. “It shoots heat at what you put in it to make it edible.” She looked at him, puzzled. “Do they really not have these in the Netherworld?”

“Nah, we have ‘em,” he said, “but I just never got around to learning how they worked. I got curious.”

“I get that,” she said. The timer beeped, and she reached a hand around him, pulling the door open. “One bag down, two to go! Can you get me a bowl?”

“Yeah,” he said, and ducked down, rummaging in the cabinets and drawers, checking between every area he could, only finding Tupperware and silverware. “Lyds?”

“What?” She turned around, having put the second bag in the microwave. At first, she didn’t seem to realize what was wrong, but she took note of the general lack of bowl in his hands and realized that his search had come up empty. “Oh, sorry! I forgot Dad put the bowls up there,” she said, pointing at the uppermost cabinet.

Lawrence looked at her, and then up at the cabinet. “How do you get it down?”

“Like this,” she said, and she lifted herself onto the countertop, walking over until she was directly under the cabinet she needed to open. Standing on her tip-toes, she leaned over to open it, but it wouldn’t budge under her force. “Hey, BJ, could you help me with this?”

“Already on it,” he said. He copied her movements, hoisting himself onto the counter before standing, a bit unsteady, on the marble. Taking the handle into his hand, he wrenched it open with all the force he could muster.

The cabinet door flew open, cracking against itself. Without warning, the bowls it had held back,

precariously stacked and fit inside of it like a game of Tetris, tumbled out.

Instinctively, Lydia and Lawrence took a step back to avoid the flow of dishes, only to remember where they'd been standing a moment too late. Lawrence pitched backwards, with Lydia not far behind. The edge of the island poked out, and, helpless to do anything about it, Lydia realized her arm was right on course for it. She closed her eyes before it hit her, afraid to see what the force of the marble hitting her arm would cause.

A moment passed before Lydia realized she wasn't falling anymore, and she cracked open her eyes to see what had stopped her, as she felt neither the floor nor the counter against her body.

"BJ?"

"Yeah?"

She was floating, although she had no idea how. Right below her sat the island, and to her right, Lawrence remained a solid foot above the ground, one arm still thrown out to break his fall. With an unsteady voice, she asked, "why are we hovering?"

"I-," he said, eyes wide, "I think that's on me." He reached out a hand, brushing it against the floor. "Can you move?"

She stretched her arm out, waving it through the empty air. "Yes."

"Try to push yourself away from the counter," he said.

One hand splayed flat against the counter acted as her base to push off of, and slowly, she felt herself drift away. The second she was out of reach of the island, she let out a sigh of relief.

"Okay, I'm going to try something," he said. Lydia watched as he thought to himself, and slowly, she felt herself drift down to the floor. Once she got close enough to touch it, the hold on her released, and she dropped to the ground, though it was from a distance that couldn't hurt her if it tried. She watched the tension drain out of Lawrence's shoulders, even as he was still in the air. "I'm so glad that worked."

"Me too," she said. She walked over to him, smiling at the odd picture he made. If it weren't for the fact that he was floating, he almost looked like someone's older brother who passed out on the floor after a night out. "Are you going to come down anytime soon?"

"Oh, shit," he said, and with a jerk, he dropped out of the air, hitting the floor with a *thud!*

She stuck out a hand, helping him to his feet. "You alright?"

"Never better," he said. "Did we get the bowl you needed?"

Lydia looked at the tens of things that spilled out from the cabinet, scanning for the one item she needed. "Oh, you've got to be kidding me," she drawled, annoyed.

"What is it?"

"That," she said, pointing up. At the back of the cabinet, barely visible, was the popcorn bowl in all of its red and white glory.

Lawrence turned to her, smirking. "Second time's the charm?"

## Chapter End Notes

"oh, like your mom?" lydia babe I love you but holy shit, learn some tact.

with that, though, I love how all of the adults are trying to carefully plan this shit out to make sure nothing goes wrong, and they don't involve lydia because they don't think she could handle it, which just leads to her taking the initiative in it all.

part of me - "stop writing "s/he smiled!"

other part of me - thank fuck everyone's finally happy for ONCE

personally hc BJ as bi [hence the tumblr url lmao] and lydia as a lesbian. as of now, at least for this story, I don't think any romance will take place, so those are just interesting little tidbits about my 'verse.

I've got a few "darker" hc's about bj's childhood that might pop in over the next few chapters. nothing bad will happen from the info, though; it'll just be there for the others to learn about.

I Do Not Like writing domestic scenes. obv. they're cute and all but as I've said before, I'm an angst writer. for original fiction I almost exclusively write mystery/thriller w/ veeeery little dialogue, so cute/dialogue heavy scenes? not my forte lmao.

fun little dialogue trick for writers - say it out loud as you write it. it helps.

lydia is to jack stauber as bj is to bill wurtz.

lydia + bj's scenes are written while I blast songs that remind me of teenage movies. examples - new light [john mayer], 8teen [khalid], tongue tied [grouplove], and 19-2000 [gorillaz]. honestly tho gorillaz just,,, really suits them?

currently working through the chapters and finishing the cross-formatting issues. ao3, I love you, but can you not merge my paragraph breaks together?

my editing software has a gun to my head and if I ever use the non-american variant of a word again it'll pull the trigger. it isn't my fault most of the fic/actual books I've read aren't written by americans! >:0!

like something? hate something? want to see something happen? want to see me eaten by a sandworm? let me know! comments are great, especially when I have a shit ton of AP homework that I've been ignoring :P

as per usual, my tumblrs are always open! @strawberryicebreakers on main and @bisexualbeetlejuice for BJ-specific content. hit me up!

# questions and quests

## Chapter Summary

in which the maitlands get answers to their questions, and delia goes on a quest for keys, amongst other things.

## Chapter Notes

content warning for [unwillingly] restricted eating/general Not Good relationships with food. juno's shitty parenting habits/their effects are discussed in this chapter, and while it is sort of brief, it is there, so be aware!

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

The Maitlands awoke early Sunday morning, tangled in the sheets of the bed that the Deetz family had brought up for them. Light shone in through the window at the front of the house, and its glare brought Barbara reluctantly out of sleep, with Adam joining her shortly after she woke. She got up, walking against a wooden floor that she could barely feel over to their model.

One of the buildings near the town center bothered her, although she couldn't quite put her finger on exactly what was wrong. It could be the shape of it, slightly too large or small, or the roofing, slanted towards the street to accommodate the snow that the northern states got during the winter. It couldn't be the color, as they hadn't painted it yet, but she needed to figure out what was wrong with it before it was glued down.

Adam approached her, picking the piece out of her hands to look at. "Something wrong?" he asked, looking over the minuscule door at the front of it.

"I can't tell what's off about it," she said, frowning at the rest of the model. Next to the now empty spot where the building stood, a small deer stood, forever frozen in place as it peered at the flowers inside the grocery shop window. "What do you think?"

"Well," he said, stifling a yawn, "we'd have to get Lydia's laptop to check, and that isn't something I want to do while she's sleeping. If you want to, go ahead, but I'm not waking her up. Especially not on the weekend."

She huffed out a laugh, narrowing her eyes at him. "If I did that, she'd kill me."

"That's the bright side - you can't kill a ghost!"

"Fine, I guess I'd be," she thought for a moment, "dead squared?"

"Love that," he said. He trudged over to the bookshelf, trying to find the book he'd been reading last night to give him something to do with his hands. Nervous energy thrummed within him. "Do you know when he's coming up?"

"I'm assuming he'll come up when he's awake," she said, staring at her hands. "He and Lydia had a late night."

Adam turned, concern written across his face. "What were they doing?"

"By the sound of it? Movie night."

"Oh," he said, relieved, "that's a lot tamer than I thought you'd say. Could you hear what they watched?"

"I think it was Kingsman, if Free Bird was anything to go by."

"The Lynyrd Skynyrd song that Charles likes?"

Barbara nodded. "Yeah, that's the one. He loves that movie."

"I see why Lawrence would like it," Adam said. "Fast-paced, humorous, -"

"Exceedingly violent?"

"That too, yeah," he drawled, rolling his eyes. "Is violence even his style?"

"He killed people, Adam."

"Wasn't he going off the fritz back then, though? I'm talking about on a day-to-day basis."

"Why don't you just ask me?"

Barbara swore, dropping the building onto the table. It knocked into the streetlight, causing it to fall over into the pond. At the bookshelf, Adam slammed his book shut, white-knuckling its spine.

"I mean, ask me if you want. From what I've heard, you two have a lot of questions." Leaning against the wall near the attic door, Lawrence stood, watching them with an unreadable expression. He walked over to them, gray joggers swishing as he moved, running a hand along the model's edge. Plucking one of the cars off of the highway that led out of town, he looked it over, prodding at the wheels. "Cute."

"Hey, Lawrence," Adam said, keeping his distance. "Didn't see you there."

"Most people don't."

Barbara looked at her husband, worry written across her face. "How, uh," she said, "how long have you been there?"

He looked at her, entirely unimpressed at her attempt at nonchalance. "Long enough."

"Alright," Adam said. "Are you here to help with the model?"

"Yep," he replied. "What am I doing?"

"We'd just like you to look it over, tell us if anything's wrong or out of place," Barbara said, grabbing the glue bottle. "I want to make sure everything's right before I make it permanent."

Lawrence knelt down next to the table, tracing over each roof and mailbox with a finger, freshly painted black nails shining in the light from outside. "This section looks right."

“What about this?” Adam picked up the building Barbara’d dropped, passing it to Lawrence.  
“There’s something off about it, but neither of us can figure it out.”

“Give me a minute,” he said. He moved to sit down, crossing his legs and searching the model for the fault.

“Uh, Lawrence?”

His gaze flicked up, viewing Adam from under heavy-set eyebrows. “Yes?”

“When you said ‘from what you’d heard,’ what did you mean by that, exactly?”

He sighed, running the edge of a nail over the faux bricks. “I’ve gotten the impression that you two have been chatting about my personal life,” his voice was low, slightly gruffer than usual, though if it was from sleep or displeasure, Barbara couldn’t tell. “I don’t like that.”

“We’re just curious,” Barbara said, trying to justify it, but he cut her off, not even giving her a chance.

“Everyone’s curious about me; I’m well used to that by now. My issue with you two is that,” he closed his eyes, taking a breath to calm himself, “that you decided to theorize about shit you had no business in, and you did it all where Lydia could hear you.”

“Lydia?” Adam asked, flushed. “How much did she hear?”

“I’d tell you to ask her yourselves, but you obviously have an issue with that.” He set the piece down, tapping a hand on his thigh to give him something physical to do, anything to get his energy out. “She heard what you two think about my mom.”

Adam broke eye contact first, ducking his head down.

“I’m sorry,” Barbara said. “I know it’s overstepping, but we,” she gestured between herself and her husband, “we just need to know.”

“And I’m fine with that. What I don’t understand,” he said, gritting his teeth, “is why you never just asked me. There are things Lydia doesn’t need to know, and this shit? Top of the list.”

“Why not?”

“Adam,” Barbara said, glancing at her husband. She was still on edge, but it didn’t seem like Lawrence was going to blow up at them, and she wanted to keep it that way. “Don’t push it.”

“No, let the man ask his question,” Lawrence said, corner of his mouth turned up as he anticipated what he’d be asked.

“Why can’t Lydia know? What’s so bad that you don’t want her to know about, even after everything she’s been through?” He frowned, confused. “She isn’t delicate.”

“I don’t think she needs to hear about just how nasty things can be in the world. All she needs to know about me is what affects her, and my personal life isn’t apart of that.”

Barbara looked at him. “Lawrence, that directly affects her.”

“No, it doesn’t. I keep my shit separate.”

Adam moved over, sitting beside him. “It does, though. The way one is raised determines how they

interact with their environment as they mature.”

“You read that in one of your child psych books?”

“Yes,” he said, slightly proud of himself for remembering that excerpt. “What I’m trying to say, though, is that we’re curious about you; what makes you, you, and all of that.”

“And I can help you with that by -?”

“What was your childhood like?” Barbara asked, refusing to let Adam try to evade the question they both needed answers to.

“Right into the deep end, okay.” He drummed his fingers against his leg. “I grew up. Single-parent household, obviously. I went to school and got a job. What else?”

“That doesn’t tell us anything, Lawrence,” Adam said, trying to get him to open up. “Give us details.”

“Like?”

“Firsts, you know?”

“Okay,” he said. “First girlfriend, I was six-oh-eight, first boyfriend, somewhere around eight-hundred. First day of school, two-fifty on the dot.” He smiled to himself. “It was my birthday. Interesting for everyone involved.”

“When’s your birthday?”

“November sixteenth. I started later in the year.”

“Why?”

“I got sick, and they didn’t know if it would spread. Didn’t want to risk anything.”

“You can get sick?” Barbara’s eyes grew wide. “People still get sick even when they’re dead?”

“Nah,” he said, waving off her concern. “I can get sick, no one else can. Born-dead shit is weird.”

“That’s unfortunate,” Adam said. “So, in a way, you’re biologically alive?”

“In a way,” he agreed. “Frankly, though, I don’t really know anything specific. You’d have to cut me up to find that out, and newflash, been there, done that. It sucks.”

“I -,” Barbara said, swallowing down whatever tried to come up, “why?”

“Docs were curious, and I was too dumb to say no.”

“Christ,” Adam said. “How, uh, how old were you?”

“About four hundred, and it wasn’t just me. My mom’d gotten the same treatment. Ended up drawing a blank, and they called it a day.” He picked up one of the cats that they’d placed near the park. “Hey, I think I’ve seen this guy before! I think his name’s Tony.”

“Lawrence,” Barbara said, delicate in her tone, “that’s horrifying.”

He paused in his actions, accidentally setting the cat down in the faux pond. “I mean, not really.”



He shrugged, uncaring. "They wanted to see if there was something that made me exist, but they couldn't find anything out of the ordinary. Plus, I was knocked out for the whole thing. Hospital staff was nice, though; they gave me some snacks while my mom was still out cold. For the record, hospital food back has nothing on the food today, but it was still a nice gesture on their part."

"On that," Adam said, unnerved and trying to find something a bit more positive to talk about, "what biological functions do you have to do?"

"None, really," he replied, moving the ducks in the pond around, arranging them into shapes. "It's better if I do things like sleep or eat, but I don't technically have to do any of them to survive."

"What's the longest you've ever been without doing that sort of thing?"

"Barbara!"

"What, Adam?" She huffed, crossing her arms. "I'm curious!"

"Fifty-eight," he said, matter-of-fact. "Give or take a few."

"Days?"

"Nah," he said, shaking his head. "Years. Granted, I'd fucked up pretty bad for that. That was the longest I'd been consecutively without eating, but I've also had to do the whole four on, four off schtick. It actually kind of worked, though; ever since I stopped doing it," he gestured to himself, "shit just kind of snowballed."

Adam swore under his breath, breaking the cool he'd been trying to keep. He clenched a fist at his side, trying to keep himself under control. "Who made you do that?"

"My mom," he said. "Like I said, I fucked up, so I got punished. That's how it works, y'know?"

"No, Lawrence," Adam said, "it's not. That's really, really not 'how it works.'"

"She never fucked with my sleeping, though!" He smiled at them, hair shifting from its forest green to a more neon shade, but it did nothing to comfort them. "I'm practically useless if I'm tired, so sleeping was a requirement."

"You're -, Christ, Lawrence, no one is ever useless. Don't call yourself that," Barbara said, serious.

"It's true." With a finger, he messed with the grass on the median of the highway that led out of town. "My energy goes on the fritz if I'm tired. No warnings or anything, it just goes off. Never ends well. Once, I -"

"Lawrence," Adam said, cutting him off, "you realize that none of what you're describing is normal, right?"

"Duh," he said. "Nothing about me is. Why would you raise someone not-normal in a normal way?"

"Your uniqueness has nothing to do with this," Barbara said. She moved over, placing a hand on his shoulder. Feeling him solid, seemingly doing alright, brought her a bit of comfort, but it didn't help the feeling of dread she had in the pit of her chest.

She didn't understand how anyone, let alone a mother, would do the sort of thing he was talking about.

“Was there anything else like this?” Adam asked. “Any other ways she raised you that you want to talk about?”

“Not really,” he replied. “I mean, I made it this far. Why dawdle on the past?”

“The past shapes us into who we are today,” Adam said. “It’s important to know what made someone the way they are, especially if it was rough on them.”

“I needed the discipline,” he said, shaking his head. “I was a wild card. Still am, honestly, but I needed to be kept in check. That’s just how she and I operated. I knew what would happen if I screwed up, but I’d still do it anyway. If I knew the punishment, it’s fair.”

“You were a child, Lawrence,” Barbara whispered. She reached out her hands, pulling one of his palms into her own. “You were just a kid.”

“Stop -, stop acting like that,” he said. He pulled his hand away, uncomfortable with the way Barbara was treating him. “It was normal for me. Don’t act like it’s weird.”

“We can’t just act like you never told us this,” she said. “I won’t.”

“You need to heal, Lawrence,” Adam said, voice soft. “You can’t do that if you refuse to acknowledge your past.”

“What do you want me to say? I know my mom was a shitty parent, but it worked out in the end. I just want to move ahead, and I have, for the most part.”

“Recognizing her faults and fixing behaviors that came from them are two separate things,” Barbara said. “You need to do both parts if you want to heal.”

He groaned, hands palm down on his lap, pushing down. Soft cotton folded between his fingers. “You guys don’t get it,” he said, growing irritated. “The things she taught me helped me out in the long run.”

“How -,” Barbara asked, “how on Earth could anything that woman taught you be beneficial?”

“Well,” he started, “I know my limits. Shouldn’t go more than twenty-five without food, or three without sleep. It helps when I’m on a job; I don’t have to worry about finding food if I know I can survive without it. Sometimes I’ll be on the move for a while, so it’s nice to know that I don’t have to worry most of the time.”

“You could’ve learnt that in a safe, healthy environment,” Adam said, “or better yet, not at all.”

“Yeah, but I wouldn’t have,” he said, rolling his eyes. “It was better to just have it happen.”

“Lawrence, it isn’t shameful to admit that what happened to you was wrong; you know that, right?”

“I can deal with it on my own,” he said. The joking manner he’d adopted throughout the conversation dropped away, leaving him sober as he spoke. “I don’t get why you guys are so hellbent on psychoanalyzing me.”

Barbara reached for his hand again and was surprised to see that he allowed her to take it. “We want to help you, Lawrence. You’re apart of the family now, whether you like it or not, and we don’t want our family to be hurting when that hurt is preventable.” She threaded her fingers in between his and squeezed.

He looked up at her. "I'm perfectly happy with the way I am, Babs."

"I know, sweetie," she said, "but what matters is that you could get better."

"And we want to be with you when you do," Adam said. He leaned over to his wife and Lawrence, placing a hand on both of their arms before drawing them in, fitting a head over each of his shoulders. "I know it's weird, it's weird for us, too, but we want to get to know you better, Lawrence."

"There's only so much of my tragic backstory to go around," Lawrence mumbled, quietly laughing.

"I guess we'll have to learn the happier things about you as well, then," Barbara said.

Adam released them both, looking at the two. Both were smiling, and Adam felt his face respond in kind. "Thank you for talking with us, Lawrence."

"Glad to help," he said. "Just like, ask me next time instead of trying to sleuth it out. I'm not going to break because of a question or two."

"Of course," Adam said. "We'll go straight to you."

"And Lydia doesn't need to know about this," Lawrence said. "Seriously, I don't want her to know about it."

"What about Charles and Delia?" Barbara asked, chin propped up against her hand. "Do you want us to tell them about this?"

"No," he said, "no, I want to talk to them myself. I don't know when, but I will."

"Okay," Adam said. "We'll respect that, but they have to know at some point. It won't make anything better if you hold everything away from the people you care about most."

"I know."

Downstairs, they heard one of the bedroom doors open, and a feminine voice call out. "Lawrence?"

The Maitlands looked at the man in question. "It seems like you've been summoned."

Lawrence chuckled at the joke. "So it seems," he said. He stood up, brushing down his legs to dispel the dust that had settled there during his time upstairs. Right as he turned to go down the stairs, he stopped. He leaned over, looking over the unfinished piece. "There's supposed to be a chimney on this," he said. "Right side, middle of the house." With that, he opened the door and disappeared down the staircase.

Barbara stood up with such a speed that her head would've rushed if it still had blood within it. She snatched the piece off of the table, scanning it. "Fuck me," she said, "he's right."

"How did we miss the chimney?"

"I don't know," she said, baffled. "How did he catch that?" She looked over at her husband, and all they could do was stare at each other in amazement.

"Remind me to have him check this over when it's done."

"Oh, Adam," she said, voice low, "if you don't, I will."

-

Delia searched for her car keys, shuffling through the other keys in the drawer that she really needed to remember to clean out. She tossed the shed key to the side, and the key to the basement found a new home in an empty glass it'd managed to fly into. Even though they were on a bright purple lanyard, she still couldn't see hers, and she was beginning to get fed up.

"D?"

She turned around, looking behind her. Lawrence was sitting atop the breakfast bar, watching her. "I wasn't sure if you'd be free," she said, returning to her search. "I didn't know how long you'd be up there with Adam and Barbara."

"Not too long," he said. "We talked, and I helped with their model."

"That was kind of you," she said. "I was thinking of running out for doughnuts before Lydia wakes up, and wanted to know if you'd like to tag along."

"Yeah!"

"Alright," she said, pleased at his enthusiasm, "I just need to find my keys. Can't exactly drive without them, obviously."

"Weren't they on the dinner table?"

"I -, " she said, cocking her head to the side. "Were they?"

"I'm pretty sure I remembered seeing them there last night."

"Give me a sec," she said. Walking into the dining room, she looked around, and lo and behold, her keys were sitting atop of the wooden table in full view. She twirled them around her finger as she walked back into the kitchen. "Good eye!"

"So I've been told," he said. He followed her out of the house and into the garage.

She clicked open her CRV and got in, and he sat next to her in the passenger seat. Turning the key in the ignition, she looked back, watching as she reversed out of the driveway.

When she went onto the main road, she glanced at him as he watched the town pass by. "Charles told me that you don't know how to drive, is that right?"

"Yeah," he said, fighting off a yawn. Even though he'd been awake for a while, he felt as though he could fall right back asleep in the sunshine that surrounded him through the window. "I never really had to learn."

"Do you want to?"

In an instant, the sleepiness left his body, and he stared at her with wide eyes. "What?"

"I said," she spoke with a smile, "do you want to learn how to drive? It'd be good practice for Charles and me for when we'll have to teach Lydia in the next year or so."

"It seems," he said, frowning at all of the gauges and knobs, "a bit overcomplicated."

"Oh, I promise it's not all that bad!" She switched lanes, checking behind her as she did. "I think you'd be a fantastic driver."

“Really?”

“Yes!”

Lawrence grinned, watching her movements with extra attention. “Who would I drive with?”

She narrowed her eyes, catty expression on her face. “Don’t tell Charles, but I want to try first. I mean, I am the better driver.”

He raised an eyebrow to that. “You are?”

“Of course! He relies on those damn cameras too much,” she said. “One day, all of those cameras are going to malfunction or get hacked, and all of the people who can’t drive an actual car will be shit out of luck. Us, on the other hand,” she said, laying a hand on Lawrence’s chest as they stopped at a stop sign, “will be perfectly fine!”

“Okay,” he said, laughing at her overdramatic speech. “I’ll try with you first.”

She whooped, pumping a fist into the air. “Great! Let’s start when you and Lydia get home from the mall.”

“What?”

“She didn’t tell you?” Delia pulled into the parking lot of the shopping center, swerving to find a spot. “Lydia asked me to take you two to the mall today. I’m just dropping you off, of course, don’t want to be the weird step-mom or anything, but she needs summer clothes, and I figured you two could find some clothes for you as well!”

“Are you sure?”

“About what? Giving Lydia free rein of my credit card? Not in the slightest. Having you two make the mall your personal playground? Hell yes.” She flipped open one of the compartments in the CRV, taking out the sunglasses that resided within it and placing them on her face before turning to face Lawrence. “I’m a cool step-mom,” she said, deepening her voice.

“You are,” Lawrence replied, snickering at the display. “The name Delia Deetz is definitely on the list of the top ten of badass step-moms.”

She placed a hand on her chest, gasping in faux offence. “Am I not number one?”

“Even if you aren’t number one on the list, I know you’re number one for Lydia.”

She smiled at him, and unlocked the car, getting out and checking her parking job, but in her haste to get out of the car, she didn’t hear Lawrence add, in a softer voice, “and for me, too.”

## Chapter End Notes

i am Very Sorry y'all got used to quick updates but life is crazy! I saw the musical on the sixteenth and. holy shit. hoooooooooooly shit. I literally can't describe how goddamn

amazing it was :')

i also dropped \$290 on merch but uh We Aren't Talking About That!

writing the maitlands is,,, difficult. there's something about them that really irks me to write. but - floor hugs w/ bj!

bj is like a hobbit; he moves unnervingly quiet when he wants to. it's a learned trait.

yes, y'all are going to end up getting a sick fic. it'll have to wait but it will happen. fuckin' love sick fics!

bj's bday is the same day I saw the musical. what are y'all going to do, stop me?

the convo about bj's trauma really fucks with the maitlands. they'd tried so hard to have kids, and the entire time, all they could think of is how beautiful it would be, researching child psych, thinking of how nice they'd raise their kid, etc., so to hear the opposite end of the spectrum really, really hurts. in a way, it's cruel to them, because all they can think about is how much better off he'd be if someone like them had raised him.

bj has a very unhealthy relationship with food. the line "[...] and you'll never reach your goal weight because you eat when you're sad!" from the musical is what brought this aspect into the fic, although he is getting a bit better with it. he equates food with comfort, hence why there've been scenes of him with one of the deetz's + food [gummy cola bottles, pancakes, panera, popcorn, etc.].almost everything I do is for a reason!

speaking of that, there's a throwaway line earlier in the fic that'll come into play soon. >:)

let bj be soft 2k19. please. for the love of god [I say, as the author of this damn fic]. soft, happy bj is the best bj! he's a very pillow-y kind of guy, and it's a bit of a missed opportunity on my part that this fic won't have that used romantically. might happen in a future fic, though! ;)

"I don't get why you guys are so hellbent on psychoanalyzing me." just calling myself out @ this point tbh.

like something? hate something? want to see something happen? want to see me eaten by a sandworm? let me know! comments are great, especially when it's two in the damn morning and I still have to shower and wake up at 5:30 :)

as per usual, my tumblrs are always open! @strawberryicebreakers on main and @bisexualbeetlejuice for BJ-specific content. hit me up!

## hellos and hot topics

### Chapter Summary

in which lydia and lawrence explore the local mall.

### Chapter Notes

I am,,, so goddamn tired. happy belated thanksgiving, y'all!

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

“Okay,” Lydia said, watching Lawrence to make sure he wouldn’t wander off, “Delia said to call her when we’re done, but we need to be home by six or so.” She pulled her phone out, checking the time. “It’s two-thirty, so we’ve got a few hours. Where do you want to go first?” When a minute passed, and he didn’t respond, she tugged on his arm, but Lawrence didn’t seem to hear her.

He watched as people rushed around him, mainly teenagers like her with nothing better to do on their weekend, and with the normal clothes he wore, he almost seemed like one of them, just another teen or twenty-something lost in the crowd. She patted his arm, drawing his attention to her. “Oh, shit,” he said, “what did you say?”

“Nevermind,” she said, excited, “just follow me.” She took off, and he walked behind her. “Objective, get some summer clothes for me, and get anything that you’d like for you.”

“What about what I already have on?” He looked over his jeans and shirt, confused. “Isn’t this enough?”

“BJ, five shirts and like, two pairs of jeans aren’t enough, especially when the weather gets warmer. Plus, I’m pretty sure my dad’s shoes are a size too big, and you’re going to end up tripping if you keep wearing them.”

Lawrence looked at her, wary. “Alright,” he said, “just don’t do anything too weird. I mean, I’m all for weird, but there’s a limit, y’know?”

“Got it,” she said. She came to a halt in front of a store that had people around her age milling about inside. “One last thing,” she said. Reaching a hand up, she patted his hair, checking its color. “Is there anything you can do to make sure it doesn’t change? If it flips in here, people are going to get freaked out ‘cause that’s not really something they see every day.”

“Not really,” he said. “I don’t have any control over it.”

“I guess we’ll just have to keep your mood stable, then,” she said. “BJ, if anything starts to mess you up, let me know and we can get out of here ASAP, okay?” She watched him nod his head, green hair bouncing with the movement. Satisfied, she took him by the hand and led him inside.

The store was packed, with barely enough room to move around the racks and shelves. She steered

him over to the women's section to help her pick out what to buy. "I'm going to go first; I know what I'm here to get, and it'll give us more time to look around for you!" Crouching down, she shuffled through the shorts, trying to find her size. While she was definitely grabbing the few pairs she found in black, she knew that Delia would be happy to see her trying out other shades, so she took a few pairs in varying shades of blue as well. Hanging them over her arm, she brought Lawrence over to help her pick out shirts.

She held up her first pick. "This?"

He scrunched up his nose. "Don't you already have a black shirt like that?"

Lydia rolled her eyes. "BJ, this one's different."

"How?"

"Short sleeves!" She shook the shirt, exemplifying the lack of sleeves. "It's perfect!"

"Whatever you say, kid."

"Loser," she said, sticking out her tongue at him. "Okay, what about this one?"

"It's," he said, hesitant, "nice?"

"I know it's weird for me," she said, grimacing, "but Delia wants to see me in pink, and there's no way in Hell I'm wearing hot pink. It's a compromise." The shirt in question, light coral, stood out against her pile of darker shades.

"Try it," he said. "You might end up liking it."

"Fair enough."

She flipped through the rest of her clothes, gathering his opinions, however helpful, on them before going back to the dressing rooms. "Stay out here," she said, pointing at the seating area in the back of the store. "I'll be back out in a sec."

"Okay," he said, taking a seat. Lydia looked back at him, watching out of the corner of her eye until one of the store attendants noticed her and brought her to an empty room. He looked around while he waited on her.

Without warning, another employee whose name tag proclaimed "*andre :P*" dropped down next to him, stretching his legs out. Lawrence felt his heart spike in alarm for a moment, and he forced himself to calm down, trying to keep his appearance stable.

"Hello," the man, Andre, said, "what're you up to?"

"I'm, uh," he said, taken aback, "I'm waiting for my sister."

"Ah, yet another man unwillingly dragged in here by a young lady on a mission," he drawled, smirking. His voice was warm when he spoke. "You're the eighth one I've seen on my shift, and I started an hour ago."

"How's that been for you?"

"Four dads, two boyfriends, a friend, and now," he smiled at Lawrence, "you."

"Which was your favorite?"



“So far?” He looked Lawrence up and down, lingering on certain aspects of him. “You.”

“BJ!” Lydia popped out of the dressing area, tags rattling off of the clothes she wore. “What do you think?”

“I-, uh,” he said, “I think they’re nice. Delia’s going to love them.”

She paused mid-twirl, head cocked to the side. Evidentially, she’d noticed that he wasn’t alone. “Who are you?”

Standing up, Andre smiled at her, sticking out a hand. “I’m Andre,” he said, pointing to his name tag with his free hand while he shook Lydia’s hand. “I work here. I was just keeping your brother company while he waited for you.”

“Okay,” Lydia said, suspicious. She turned to Lawrence. “I’m going to go back to change, and when I’m out, we can look at stuff for you.” She swept back into the changing room.

“Oh, you’re here to shop as well?” Andre set a hand on Lawrence’s shoulder, sliding back down to sit with him. “You should’ve said something!”

“I’m not really the most clothes-savvy,” he said, flushed. “Lydia’s the one who wanted to come here.”

“Well, I’m glad you’re here,” Andre said. Right as he was about to continue, a young woman around Lydia’s age poked him in the shoulder.

“Andre, stop harassing the customers and get back over here,” she said, arms crossed over her chest. “You’re on the clock for a reason, dumbass.”

He looked up, flashing a smile at the girl. “Jess,” he said, “I am helping! Aren’t I?” Andre turned to the man beside him and put a hand on his lap, looking at him, expectant.

“I-, uh,” Lawrence said, stumbling over his words, “yeah, you’re-, you’re helping.” His face felt hot, and he knew his hair color was shot to Hell now.

Andre winked, giving his thigh a squeeze. He began to pull his phone out, only to get whacked over the head by a rolled-up magazine, evidently picked up from the stack on the nearby table. “Christ,” he whined, “just give me a minute!”

“No, dipshit,” she said, rolled-up magazine in hand, “get back to work!”

“Fine,” he groaned, and dragged himself up. With a smile, he walked away, only breaking eye contact when he was out of view.

From the doorway to the changing rooms, Lydia watched everything go down, bemused at the situation, content to watch until she noticed a particular aspect of Lawrence had changed. Eyes wide, she ran out of the room, grabbing him by the arm.

When she gripped his bicep, he flinched, brightness draining out of his hair. “Whoa, okay,” he said, startled, “don’t-, don’t do that shit, Lyds.”

“Sorry, sorry,” she said, “but you’ve got to get back here.” She dragged him with her into the changing area, finding the very last room unlocked and all but throwing him inside. Locking the door behind her, she looked at him, and when he didn’t seem to get the message, she spun him around to face the floor-to-ceiling mirror.

A shock of pink, almost like bubblegum in its vivacity, crowned his head, with violet seeping into its tips, traveling down to meet the lighter shade.

“BJ,” she said, trying to keep her calm, “did anyone see it switch?”

“I-,” he said, “I don’t think so? I was talking with the guy for a while but he didn’t mention it.”

“Okay,” she said, “I think we’re okay, then.” Lydia clapped her hands together, trying to pep herself back up. “Alright! I’m going to head out and grab you some stuff, just-, uh, just stay in here, okay?”

“Got it,” he said. He leaned on the wall, letting his head *thunk* against it.

“Hey, Lawrence?”

The use of his full name made him look at her, wary. “Yes?”

She ducked her head, hugging her arms to her chest as she avoided his eyes. “I’m sorry I grabbed you.”

“Kid,” he said, huffing out a laugh, “it’s okay. It happens.”

“I know, but-”

“Lydia.” He pushed himself off of the wall, walking over to her and dropping down to meet her face-to-face. “It. Happens. Sometimes we do things that weren’t the best way to do them, but you got me out of there before some Puritan dick could burn me for being a witch ‘cause my hair changed.”

The joke got a giggle out of Lydia. “You’re not mad at me?”

“Nah,” he said with a smile, “I couldn’t be mad at my best friend.”

“Beej!”

“Shut it,” he said, ruffling her hair. “Now, if you’re still intent on using me as a dress-up doll, go find something you want to laugh at me in.”

She nodded her head, hair whipping as she moved. “On it!”

-

Moving between the aisles, Lydia searched, trying to find as many clothes as possible to get Lawrence to try on. She had an armful of jeans in varying colors, cuts, and sizes, draped over her forearm as she tried to sort through the shirts. A box of Adidas perched itself in the crook of her arm, with a pair of sandals on top of it, barely balanced. Overshirts were irritating to gauge sizes in, but she grabbed an array of them and tried to balance them with the jeans and shoes on her arm when she felt a tap on her shoulder.

“Hey,” one of the workers asked, “do you need a basket?”

“Yeah, actually!” She took it from his hands, stuffing the clothes inside. “Thanks.”

“It’s no problem,” he said.

She waited for him to leave, glancing at him out of the corner of her eye as she shuffled through

the graphic tee's. When he didn't leave, she looked directly at him. "Is there something else?"

"Uh," he said, shoving a hand in his pocket, "I was-, uh,-"

"Wait," she said, narrowing her eyes. She looked at him, racking her memory, and when she saw his name tag, she knew exactly why he was acting so shift.

In front of her, Andre shifted from one foot to the other, trying to avoid asking the question Lydia really, really didn't want to have to answer.

"Just say it," she groaned, turning back to the clothes.

"He's your brother, right? I mean, you look real young, no offence, but I know some guys use the sister excuse and -"

"Yes, Andre," she said, sighing, "he's my brother."

"Sweet, okay," he said, trying not to show his excitement, "is he-, uh," he threw the words out as fast as he could, "do you know if he's gay?"

Lydia closed her eyes, taking a deep breath.

"I'm not tryin' to assume or anything, but he's -"

"Lawrence," she said, stressing the syllables, "is bisexual."

"Oh, thank God," he said, tension draining out of his body. When she walked over to the shorts section in a vain attempt to dissuade him, he refused to take the hint, following her over. "Is he single?"

She glared up at him, which was a bit ineffective due to the light pink shorts she was holding. "If you can't ask him yourself, you don't get to know."

Andre was taken aback, slapping a hand to his chest. "Damn, okay! I like that," he said. "It's good that you're lookin' out for him."

If she let herself feel a bit of pride for that, she wasn't going to give Andre the satisfaction of knowing. "I try my best. He's been through a lot."

"Aw," he said, "I'm sorry to hear that."

"So am I."

"Andre, I swear to God -"

Rolling his eyes, he turned around, shouting over his shoulder. "I'll be there in a sec, Jess!" He looked back at Lydia, sheepish as he rubbed the back of his neck. "I guess I'll see you later?"

She raised her eyebrows, unimpressed. "If you're lucky."

"Let's hope I am!"

Lydia watched as he went back to the counter with a skip in his step. She shook her head, piling tailored shorts into her basket before grabbing a few miscellaneous objects and running back to Lawrence.

When she knocked on the door, he opened it. His hair was back to green, which meant one less thing to worry about. “Hey,” he said, “what’d you end up scavenging up?”

She pushed her way inside the room, closing the door behind her. “Jeans first,” she said, laying them all out, “and I need you to try on everything, BJ, and show me.”

He looked at the large pile before him, stacked neatly on top of a futon. “All of them?”

“All of them,” she confirmed. “We need to figure out your sizes. I tried to guess it, but I might be wrong.”

“Okay,” he said, still bewildered at the sheer amount of clothes.

When she saw one of his hands reach out to fiddle with something stapled to the clothes, she stopped him. “Don’t rip the plastic tags out,” she warned. “If they go off, we have to pay for them whether they fit or not.”

He nodded, and with that, she stepped outside, closing the door behind her and pulling out her phone. She had a few notifications; two texts from Delia, a text from her dad, two DMs on Twitter from Angie, and a few others. She checked the messages from Delia first.

*“How are you guys finding everything?” and “Don’t forget to grab some socks for your new shoes, the ones that fit with flats!”*

She smiled at the concern. *“Found everything so far! BJ is trying on jeans rn,”* she typed.

Within the minute, Delia replied. *“:0! Send pics!”*

*“I will lol”*

The door in front of her opened, and she looked up.

“These fit the best,” he said, walking around in them. “Are they supposed to look like this?”

“They’re supposed to hug everything,” she said, trying not to laugh. “They’re not like suit pants, or like the old man Levi’s Dad wears on his days off.”

He kicked out a leg, wary. “You’re sure?”

“Yes, BJ, I’m sure! Now stay still for a minute.” She took out her phone and snapped a photo of him, sending it to Delia. “Okay, keep those on and try on the shirts.”

He ducked back inside the room, shaking his head, and Lydia felt her phone vibrate.

*“He looks adorable!!!!!!”* followed by a string of heart emojis was what filled Lydia’s phone, and she tried to keep her giggling down, if only for Lawrence to not overhear. *“He actually looks his age for once ;)”*

“Gross,” she mumbled, typing out a response. *“How old is he again?”*

*“His years - a thousand or so. Our years - twenty.”*

She almost dropped her phone. “BJ?”

The door in front of her clicked open, and Lawrence stuck his head out, one bare shoulder visible as he tried to hide himself. “What?”

“You’re fucking twenty?”

“Yeah, when you convert it. Why?”

“You-,” she said, alarmed, “you’ve got to tell me that kind of thing! I thought you were like, closer to thirty than that!”

“Okay, first of all, rude,” he said, scrunching up his nose. “I like to think that I don’t look like I’m as old as the Maitlands, thank you very much. Secondly, do any of you guys talk to each other? I’ve had to have this conversation too many times to count.”

Pinching her nose, Lydia went back to her phone. “Just try the rest of the clothes on before I have a crisis,” she said. She responded to Angie’s message, and mindlessly flipped through apps on her phone while she waited. A celebrity from some movie was trending on Twitter, a cute photo of a dad and his son were on r/all, and her high score on *Mario Kart Tour* was beaten by Delia. All in all, nothing new.

The *squeak!* of the door hinge broke her out of her reverie, and her head snapped up. “Holy shit, Beej,” she said.

“What?”

She stood up, shoving her phone in her pocket to give him her full attention. “You actually look like a regular guy,” she said, “and you don’t look too bad.”

“Thanks,” he said, eyebrows raised. “Nice to know that I don’t look, and I quote, ‘too bad.’”

“Just take the compliment, you dick.” The buttons of the shirt were done all the way up to his neck, and she could tell that they were bugging him, so she undid the top few, leaving his neck free. He twisted his head from side to side, feeling it out. “How’s that?”

“Better,” he said, relieved. “Is this the kind of shit I’ll have to wear every day?”

“Nah,” she said, “only when you have to look nice. Regular shirts should do just fine for everyday type stuff.”

“Thank God,” he said. “I’ve worn button-ups for long enough. I think it’s time to be comfortable for once.”

“Try on the other shirts, then,” she said, shooing him back into the room. “We’ve still got to run by the best store in this place.”

“Consider me interested,” he said, head cocked to the side. “What could be better than this?”

“Oh, BJ,” she said, “you have no idea.”

-

Once Lawrence tried on the final piece of clothing - a pair of black swim trunks that Lydia swore he’d be putting to use when her dad took them with him and Delia down to Pensacola during summer break - she gathered everything back into the basket, leading him up to the registers.

One worker, the tall woman named Jess, saw them approach, and she immediately turned around, slapping something out of sight. In less than a second, Andre popped up, half-awake.

“What? What is it?”

Jess pointed at Lawrence and Lydia, not even looking their way as she doodled on the receipt paper.

“Oh,” he said, perking up. “Oh, hey! How’d you guys find everything?”

“It was easy,” Lydia said, disinterested.

“Alrighty,” he said, scanning their items. He took extra care in folding everything, placing each piece delicately in a large cloth bag. “Got any plans for today?”

“I’m just here to aid her in whatever scheme she’s got,” Lawrence said, grinning at Lydia.

Andre looked at the two of them, smiling at the picture they made. “God help your parents,” he said. “You two seem like you give them a run for their money.”

“We do,” Lydia said, chest puffed out with pride.

He laughed at that, placing the last item in the bag. “Receipt?” Lydia nodded, and he printed one out. Right as he was about to give it to them, he yanked it back, pulling out a pen and scratching something out onto the paper. “Here,” he said. His hand had a slight shake to it as he gave it to Lawrence, who just smiled at him as if nothing weird had happened at all.

“See you around,” Lydia said with a wink. *Dumbass*, she thought. *Couldn’t even say it out loud*.

“Yeah!” His voice cracked at the end, unwillingly pitched up. He cleared his throat, chuckling uncomfortably to try to break the awkwardness of the situation. “Yeah,” he repeated, “I-, uh, I hope I see you around.”

-

As soon as they left the store, Lydia snatched the receipt from Lawrence’s hand, scanning it until she found what she was looking for. “Oh my God,” she said. “BJ, he gave you his number!”

“What?” He took the receipt back from her, checking to make sure that she wasn’t trying to pull a prank on him. “Why would he do that?”

“Because you’re cute?” She looked at him, and in a way, could kind of see where Andre was coming from. Granted, there was absolutely no shot in Hell she’d ever feel the same, but she could understand it. The past few weeks had been kind to him for the most part; routinely sleeping, eating, and showering had definitely upped the attractive factor he had, and he honestly wasn’t even that bad-looking to begin with. Even if he still looked like he’d been through shit, he pulled it off much better than he ever had before.

“I am not ‘cute,’” he said, snorting at the idea. “I’m over a thousand years old. I’ve seen things you’d never believe. I’m literally dead.”

“And,” she said, nudging him, “according to at least one man in suburban Connecticut, you’re cute. Are you going to call him?”

“Nah,” he said. “Shit’s complicated enough without getting tangled up with a breather, ‘cause then you’ve got to have the talk.”

“The talk?”

“You know,” he said, waving his hand, “the one where I’ve got to explain that I’m dead, and then

it turns into a Q-and-A session about the Netherworld, and then it just gets really, really uncomfortable for both of us. Not doing that right now.”

“Damn,” she said, snapping her fingers. “Talk about the one that got away.”

“Besides,” he said, “he’s not even my type.”

She whipped around, walking backwards so that she could face them as they walked to the next store. “And your type is -?”

“Someone who can actually get their shit together and ask me themselves instead of asking,” he bopped her head slightly, not hard enough to mess up her pace, “my sister.”

“And here I was thinking I was being the best wingman for my brother,” she said, crossing her arms over her chest. “Can’t a girl try to help her undead friend get a date?”

“Not when said friend isn’t looking for anything at the moment,” he said, smiling. “I appreciate it, Lyds, but everything’s crazy enough as is.”

“When you’re ready, though,” she said, hopeful, “can I help?”

He looked at her, inquisitive, with one eyebrow cocked up towards his hairline. “You know what? Sure.”

“Hell yeah!” She pumped a fist in the air with a whoop, loud enough that the older couple walking out of the Pottery Barn glared at them. “Sorry,” she said, but they just walked away. When she turned her attention back forwards, she noticed that they’d made it to their destination earlier than she’d expected.

The doors were wide open, welcoming them in, and she took Lawrence’s hand as she went inside. Even with the darkened walls, she could see perfectly, and she knew that he’d love it here.

“Lawrence ‘BJ’ Deetz,” she said with a flourish, throwing her arms up as if she was at the bow of a ship, “welcome to Hot Topic!”

He looked around the store, taking it all in. The shirts seemed to be right up his alley, and that was before he even noticed anything else. Lawrence walked up to the racks, head tilted all the way back in an effort to see everything in front of him.

Lydia sidled up to him, trying to keep in her laughter at his expression. He looked like every young alternative kid when they first came inside the store, minus the slightly worried parent behind him. “What do you think?”

He turned to her, and in the dim lighting, his hair almost glowed with its alarmingly neon shade of green, bright enough that it strained her eyes to look at. “Lydia,” he said, dead serious, a pair of horrendously zippered pants in hand, “I’m telling you this as a friend, a pal, a sort-of brother, and as a fully grown man,” he paused, taking a deep breath, “I think I’m in love.”

this is all written with the assumption that connecticut malls are like the malls in nova.

writing the american eagle v. hot topic scene makes me laugh bc I remember that weird transition phase every emo kid like myself had where we started buying actual clothes at different stores and bought fun shit at hot topic.

my dumbass doesn't even watch stranger things but I wrote this chap listening to my 80s playlist [lovingly titled "bill and ted"] and thinking about the mall in the show.

me: [searches "men's summer fashion"]

google: here are thousands of photos of the same three skinny ass guys wearing polo shirts and cargo shorts

me: goddamnit.

bj interacting with normal people makes me laugh to write. esp. when they're,, ;) at him. yeehaw!

why do half of all of the oc's in this story have A names? angie. andre. poor jess and doug got left out of the group. speaking of andre, as of now he's a one-off. if y'all like him [or anyone else, for that matter] he could pop up again!

writing chaos bis brings me, a chaos bi, joy.

lydia's instinct is to just grab ppl and get them out of situations but. that really doesn't fly with bj. :( "When she gripped his bicep, he flinched, brightness draining out of his hair. "Whoa, okay," he said, startled, "don't-, don't do that shit, Lyds." p much exemplifies that; even if it's by someone he's chill with, it's almost always a no go.

my english teacher is five minutes away from beating me w/ my own laptop bc I'm working on this instead of reading the crucible. the things I do for y'all

also finished this chapter in a van on a two hour drive home from richmond. the things I do,,,

bj and lydia b like lmao what if we referred to ourselves as siblings,, as a joke! ahahaha. unless,,,

the title is misleading a bit. I am Very Sorry there isn't a scene of them going batshit in hot topic. debating between either having that in chapter thirteen or just leaving it out. idk. :P

like something? hate something? want to see something happen? want to see me eaten by a sandworm? let me know! comments are great, especially when I'm editing this while staying the night at my sister's boyfriend's house, which is,, kind of weird? trying not to think about it too much lmao.

as per usual, my tumblrs are always open! @strawberryicebreakers on main and @bisexualbeetlejuice for BJ-specific content. hit me up!



## driving and discussions

### Chapter Summary

in which the wonder twins go behind the wheel and charles has a freudian slip.

### Chapter Notes

@ this point, these chapter titles are just "how many synonyms for talking can sherrie pull out of the internet thesaurus?"

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Walking through the mall, Delia looked through the storefronts, trying to figure out if there was anything worth buying. She'd received Lydia's text that signaled that they were done, and if that wasn't enough, there'd been enough of a lull in credit card statements emailed in a panic from her bank to show her that they were either taking their damn time somewhere new, or had finally finished their shopping trip from Hell. There were few things in life she looked forward to less than having to deal with Charles after shopping, but at least she had an excuse this time around, but out of all of the traits of hers she'd wanted Lydia to emulate, Delia wasn't sure how she felt that "shopaholic" was the one she chose.

From inside her purse, her phone buzzed in short, frantic bursts, and she pulled it out to see that Lydia was calling her. She accepted the car, expecting to hear something simple, only to have Lydia's voice screaming in her ears.

"- doors! Unlock the doors!"

She pulled the phone away from her ear, cringing at the noise. "What?"

"Delia, unlock the damn doors!"

"I'm not in the car!" Her eyes grew wide, trying to figure out what was happening. "Where are you?"

"Outside the mall!" Lydia was breathing hard, and she could hear loud, fast footsteps as well. "Where are you?"

"Near the Macy's. Lydia, what's going on?"

"No time to explain," she said, huffing into the phone. "We'll figure something out, but get to the exit near there and be ready to run."

"Lydia, I -"

Lydia hung up the phone with a click, and Delia was left exceedingly worried near a department store. Throwing her phone back into her purse, she booked it to the exit, trying to avoid smacking the group of teenagers loitering between the exit doors and the food court. "Guess it was a good

day to wear flats,” she mumbled to herself as she ran for the doors. Once outside, she stood by the curb, scanning anything she could see. She didn’t know what she was waiting for, but she’d recognize it when she saw it.

Out of everything, though, she wished that seeing her CRV hurtling towards her wasn’t the sign she was looking for.

It came to a screeching stop in front of her, red metal gleaming under the sun. The windows rolled down, and Lydia stuck her head out of the backseat. “Get in,” she yelled, “and quick!”

Hand on the handle, she paused. “Why?” In her reflection on the door, she could barely make out two men, but she could see that they were dressed in blue, and their silver badges gleamed against the car. “Oh, for fuck’s sake,” she said, but did as she was told, yanking open the car door and jumping inside.

Before the door was shut, the car took off, blowing through the stop sign not even thirty feet away. She slammed it shut and turned to the driver’s seat in horror.

Beside her, Lawrence sat with his hands all but welded to the wheel, eyes wide in terror as he floored it in the mall parking lot.

“Lawrence,” she said, voice high and strained, “what’s going on?”

“Don’t distract him,” Lydia said, still trying to catch her breath. “It’ll make him crash!”

“Jesus fucking Christ,” Delia said, horrified, “what did you two do?”

“Nothing, I swear!”

“You must’ve done something!”

“Okay,” Lydia said, “depending on who you ask, we might’ve done something.”

“Charles is going to have an aneurysm,” Delia whispered. She wanted to hold her hands over her eyes, or better yet, to wake up from whatever karma-induced nightmare she was in, but she couldn’t; if everything was going to hit the fan in one fell swoop, she’d have to see it for herself. “Okay,” she said, trying to pull herself together, “okay, it’s going to be okay. We’re going to be okay.”

“Repeating ‘okay’ won’t make this car stay on the road!”

“That’s not helpful, Lydia!”

“I know!”

She didn’t even need to turn around to visualize the shit-eating grin she knew Lydia had on her face, but if she was going to get them out of this, she had to focus on the one currently driving a car he didn’t know how to operate. “Lawrence,” she said, keeping her voice steady, “can you please ease up on the accelerator?”

He swallowed, turning his head to look at her. “Which -,” he asked, voice small, “which one is the accelerator?”

“Eyes on the road!”

Lawrence yelped, turning back to face the road and narrowly avoiding colliding with a Fiat in the

right lane. The other driver laid their hand on the horn for a solid minute, which did nothing to help her or Lawrence. Evidently, though, his foot was on the accelerator, and in his panic, he pressed down harder, driving the speed gauge up.

“Whatever you’re pressing on, stop!”

Right before the gauge hit ninety, he lifted his foot up fast enough that his knee slammed against the steering wheel. He swore, letting go of the wheel in surprise. Delia lunged over him, grabbing the side of it with her left hand.

“Sweetie,” she said, barely keeping herself together, “please don’t take your hands off of the wheel.”

“Why are there so many fucking things you have to do with a car?”

“You’ll get used to it,” she said. *If we make it out of this alive*, she thought. The stoplight shifted to yellow, and the car in front of them began to slow down. “Lawrence, I need you to put your foot on the pedal next to the one your foot was just on.”

“Okay,” he said, and slammed down on the brake, bringing the car from ninety to zero in less than ten seconds. They all jerked forwards, but she was thankful that no one was behind her, and that her CRV hadn’t been rear-ended. “Like that?”

She took a minute to compose herself. *Don’t freak out. If I freak out, he’ll freak out, and then the car will be totaled and I’ll have to explain why to Charles.* “It would’ve been better if you did that a bit more gradually, but yes, sweetie, like that.”

Lawrence closed his eyes, pressing his forehead to the top of the wheel. “I hate this,” he moaned, face hidden from view. “I thought this would be fun, or easy, but I really, really hate this.”

Keeping an eye on the light, she put a hand on his shoulder, trying to soothe him. “I know it’s scary, sweetheart, but you’ve got to get us home. I can’t exactly switch with you in the middle of the road, as much as I’d love to.”

“You can do it, BJ!”

“Lydia,” Delia said, whipping her head around, “I’ll talk with you when we get home.”

She cocked an eyebrow, smirking a bit. “If we get home.”

“Oh my God,” Lawrence groaned, burying his face farther into the leather of the wheel. The only thing either woman could see was his hair, a deep purple striped with white and orange, like a zebra that came out wildly wrong.

“Don’t say that,” she said, rubbing her hand in circles, “I know you’ll get us home safe.”

“I’m going to hit someone,” he said, “or a tree, or a pole, or -”

The light turned green above him, and he whined; even if he could barely see the light and didn’t know the slightest thing about driving, he knew that green meant go.

“Lawrence Deetz,” she said, “I believe in you. Now,” she stuck a hand under his chin, bringing his face up into view, “drive us home.”

From his seat on the porch, Charles watched the road, waiting for Delia to arrive home with Lawrence and Lydia in tow. He scrolled through FaceBook, reading Doug and Allie's newest update about their grandchild, and he tried to draft up a comment to show his excitement, but put his phone down once he saw the beginning of the CRV edge around the corner of the street. The speed, or lack thereof, was a bit peculiar to him, but nothing that caused any worry in him.

Parking out front at an extreme angle, the car stopped, and three doors flew open. From the backseat, Lydia hopped out, but what concerned Charles was seeing Delia get out of the passenger seat. On the driver's side, Lawrence slid out, walking to the door on unsteady legs. He brushed by Charles, not even stopping to say hello. Lydia slid by him as well, following after her brother figure, but he caught Delia before she could do the same.

"Delia," he asked, "why was Lawrence driving?"

"You want the full story or the footnotes?"

He took note of how drained she looked and chose accordingly. "Footnotes."

She sighed, pressing a hand to her forehead. "Lydia wanted to see how many pins she could smuggle out of the Hot Topic, and they got caught by mall cops."

"That doesn't explain how he got behind the wheel of a car," he said, confused.

"They booked it out to the parking lot, and Lydia thought a cop would notice if she was driving," she said, rolling her eyes, "but that they'd realize Lawrence was, and I quote, 'technically an adult' and would assume he knew how to drive."

"Sounds fun," Charles said, forcing a smile. "How'd he do?"

The look Delia gave him would've killed him if it had the chance.

"That bad?"

"It was so bad, Charles," she said. "He was freaking out, and I couldn't do anything but watch him and hope that he wouldn't hit a squirrel and crash."

"Did he hit anything?"

"No, thankfully," she dropped down onto the couch, staring up at the ceiling. "He managed to get home without damaging anything other than sanity."

"That's good!" He tried to find the positive side of the incident, even if it was a very unlucky scenario to be in. "That means he isn't a hopeless driver."

"It's going to take so long to teach him how to drive," she said, shutting her eyes. "So goddamn long."

"I'm sure he'll be fine. It's always scary to get behind the wheel of a car for the first time, and I'm sure it was only worse for him because of the stress. I'll take him 'round the school sometime during the week to let him get a feel for it without other cars messing with him."

"He needs to learn how to drive without a damn camera first, Charlie," she said, cracking open her eyes and shooting a glare at him. "When technology gives out -"

"We'll all die, tech moguls will be killed by their creations, the whole schtick, I know, but I think

it'd be helpful," he said. Sitting next to her, Charles messed with her hair, unraveling it from the tight bun it was in. "Unless, of course, you want to teach him how to drive?"

"I need time to recover after today," she said. "I don't think my heart can take another hour of him behind the wheel within the next month."

"Then it's settled," he said, excited. "I get to teach my son how to drive!"

"Charles," she asked, cautious, "do you know what you just said?"

"What?" His delight hadn't let the weight of his words catch up to him yet.

"You called Lawrence your son." She sat up, looking him in the eyes. "And, 'he's not your fucking son,' Charles."

He cringed at her reference to their argument. "I'm sorry," he said, "it's just -"

"I know." She placed one of her hands on his, locking their fingers together tight. "I get it."

"It's weird, right?"

"Oh, God, it's weird. It's so weird, Charles."

He laughed, ducking his head as he did so. "How did we get here, Delia?"

"I don't know," she said, "but I'm glad we did."

"I always wanted a son," he said, voice quiet. He smiled to himself as he continued, "I mean, after Lydia, Emily and I knew we didn't want to have any more kids, physically speaking, but," he took a breath, eyes up, "we still felt like something was missing, you know? And then, after she passed and it was us and Lydia in New York, but it wasn't working, so I got us out of there and thought that that might finally be what fixed it. When it wasn't, when everything was still bad, I didn't even have time to think about it, and I didn't want to risk stressing out Lydia even more, but now? After it's calmed down, and all of a sudden there's Lawrence, it feels," he paused, trying to find the words, "it just feels right. Even after the issues that've cropped up, I still feel like we'll make it out of them, not only as individuals, but as a group."

"As a family," Delia added, smiling.

"As a family," he confirmed. "I wonder, though, as to how we ended up here."

"Everything happens for a reason," Delia said, "and I think that, after everything we've all been through, we deserve this. He deserves this. Lydia deserves this. We all deserve to be happy."

"I hope that it stays like this," he said, "peaceful and easy. It won't," he said with a chuckle, "not with days like today or people like Lawrence and Lydia, but I think that's what keeps life interesting."

"This sort of thing is never easy," she said, looking up at the bedrooms upstairs, "but that just makes everything worth it in the end."

-

"BJ?"

The light in his room was off, creating a pitch-black bedroom she couldn't navigate. She turned the

flashlight on her phone on, pointing it at various parts of the room to try and discern where Lawrence was.

On top of the bed, a lump, wrapped up by the duvet, was lying still, refusing to acknowledge her presence. She walked up to it, dropping onto the bed and leaning against it.

“Beej,” she said, prodding it, “you actually didn’t do too bad, especially for your first time driving.”

Still, he refused to answer, so she pulled the duvet down enough for his head to break free of it.

“BJ, what does orange mean?”

All she got in response was a whine. Lawrence was face down on the mattress, with hair the shade of one of the creamsicles she got from her third-grade teacher on the last day of school. She poked him on the back of the head, and he swatted her hand away.

“Hey,” she said, trying to find out how to perk him up, “it wasn’t too bad!”

“I almost hit the neighbor’s trash can,” he mumbled.

“Yeah, but you didn’t!” She stretched over him, using him as a pillow. “We got home, and no one died, so I’d count it as a success in your book.”

“Doesn’t count if the driver can’t die.”

“Yes, it does, dumbass,” she said, rolling her eyes. “No one got hurt, and you did pretty well for your first time on the highway.” Her foot hit her bag, halfway off of the edge of the bed, and she grabbed it, pulling it close to her.

“Stop moving.”

She peered at him, curious. “Why?”

“I can hear your bag jingling,” he said, and she lasted less than a minute before she burst into laughter.

“There are so many fucking pins, BJ,” she wheezed, unzipping the large pocket. Handfuls of pins spilled out without a care in the world, flowing like a river of tetanus-laden water, and she sifted through them, sorting them into piles based on what their designs were. “Hey, this one fits you!”

As fast as she could, she fastened one of the pins to the duvet, and mere moments after she pulled her hand away, he snatched it, bringing it close to his face. “Cat nap club?”

She snickered, looking at his bewildered expression. Taking the pin from him, she flipped it like a coin in her palm. “‘Cause you’re always sleeping when I wake up for school,” she said, smug. It was true; she woke up around five-thirty for school on weekdays, but she woke him up when she started moving about. He’d inevitably curl back under the covers in between Lydia waking him up and her leaving, so she had to wake him up again to say goodbye. “You always get so pissed off whenever I leave, and it makes me laugh! You’re like an angry cat who got disturbed when it’s favorite spot in the sun is taken up.”

He cracked an eye open to glare at her. “Let me live, Lyds,” he moaned, pushing his face further into the mattress. “I’m dead.”

“I mean, yeah, but that’s not an excuse to be a loser.”

His head shot up, tips of his hair shifting to a deeper orange that began to get uncomfortably close to red for Lydia’s comfort. “I’d like to see you try to drive on the fuckin’ highway for the first time and not panic when a car swerves into your lane.”

“Okay,” she said with a shrug. “Let’s do it.”

Abruptly, the red drained out of his hair, and he looked at her, confused. “What?”

“Let’s go. We can take turns at the wheel and see who can go longer without flipping out!”

“Are you sure?”

“Hell yeah!” She gripped the duvet between her hands and pulled, unraveling Lawrence from it, leaving him bewildered. “Let’s go, BJ!”

With a neon green head, he grinned, jumping into action. He stopped, holding a hand out to keep her from running off. “Get on my back.”

Her cheeks hurt from how hard she smiled, but her mischievous nature got the better of her, and she did as he told her. She hopped up onto the bed, and he crouched down, allowing her to drop onto his back, latching her arms around his neck. He gripped her to keep her from falling, and they took off, speeding down the hallway fast enough to make her eyes water.

Skidding to a stop, he clambered down the stairs, and she held on for dear life as she felt herself begin to slide off. They ended up at the bottom without any incident, and she let go with one hand to open the door for him.

“Lawrence, Lydia,” Charles’ voice called from inside, “what are you two doing?”

“Oh, shit,” Lawrence swore, swiveling around to meet Charles, but Lydia pulled on his shirt to bring his attention back to the task at hand.

“Keep going!” She threw a hand out, pointing at Delia’s CRV. “She always leaves her keys in the car when she’s busy.”

He looked back, conflicted.

“C’mon, it’ll be fun!”

Lawrence tore his gaze away from the door and nodded. With a cheer from Lydia, he took off towards the car, feet thudding against the stone walkway. Lydia’s hand, still outstretched, grabbed the car handle, opening it with ease. As she thought, Delia’s keys remained in the car, glinting in the sunlight that filtered in.

“I’ll start,” she said, sliding off of his back and jumping into the driver’s seat. “Just get in the passenger seat and close the door.”

“Okay,” he said, and ran to the other side of the car, pulling the door shut as he leaped inside. Once she heard the *click!* of the seatbelt, she grabbed the gear shift, bringing it down to the ‘R.’

Lawrence watched her like a hawk, trying to catalogue her movements. “Do you know what you’re doing?”

“Yeah,” Lydia said, lying completely. “I’m in Driver’s Ed right now; they already taught me all of

this stuff!” Glancing up at the mirror, she checked to make sure that no one was behind the car, and hit the accelerator.

*If BJ could do it , she thought, feeling the car move beneath her, how hard could it be?*

-

“Delia!”

“Sounds like Charles is pissed,” Barbara absentmindedly commented as she glued down a fence post near the mailman’s truck on the model. “Wonder why.”

“I think I know why,” she heard Adam respond, gaze locked on something outside of the house.

She stood up, walking over to meet him at the window. “What’s going on?”

“Isn’t Delia home right now?”

“Yeah,” Barbara said, “she’s downstairs. Why?”

“Her -, uh, her car isn’t here,” Adam said, mildly panicked.

“If she’s here, and her car isn’t, that means -” she cut herself off, eyes wide in horror, “oh no.”

“Delia, you need to get out here!” She could hear Charles running downstairs as he shouted, louder than all Hell in his frantic search for his fiancée.

“Oh no,” Barbara repeated. Taking off, she ran down the stairs with Adam hot on her heels. They barely missed running straight into Delia, who was leaving her bedroom.

She looked up at them, and then off of the balcony at Charles. “What’s wrong?”

“Lydia took the car!”

“She took the what?” Delia yelled, dropping her phone onto the wood floor. “Which one?”

“Yours, the CRV,” Charles said, breathless. “She got Lawrence to go with her.”

“Oh, for Christ’s sake,” she said, and made her way to the front door, yanking it open and poking her head out. Sure enough, the driveway was lacking one of the cars it usually held, and when she looked down the street, she saw her vehicle hurtling back towards the house, almost hitting the Woods’ mailbox a few doors down.

As it passed by the house at a frankly terrifying speed, she could vaguely make out the searing neon that indicated Lawrence was in the passenger’s seat, which meant that Lydia, barely fifteen and a half years old, was behind the wheel.

“Well,” Delia said, accepting the fact that she’d have to write an apology letter to their HoA, “at least Lydia’s getting practice for her permit test.”

## Chapter End Notes

I started writing this chapter as a last ditch attempt for nanowrimo. ended up with



about 30,000 words in one month. did I win? nope! but I'm sure as hell proud of myself for doing this at all lol.

it's 5:08am and I'll be damned if I go to bed with this chapter unfinished. obv I'll edit in the morning but,,, Gotta Finish!

edit - passed out around seven. did not finish. :(

I'm very excited to write chapter fourteen for one specific reason and y'all are going to beat my ass for it.

I got yelled at by an old dad at work on saturday and a baby screamed at the booth near my stand for a solid ten minutes. love that for me.

prom dress by mxmtoon has no right to go as hard as it does.

poor bj. never drove a car before and all of a sudden lydia's throwing him in the driver's seat while mall cops are on their asses.

okay so I Know I still didn't write the hot topic scene but I promise that it'll be in the "scenes that didn't make it into the main story" thing I'll work on after this is done. promise!

guess which dumbass just impulse-bought bj tickets! again! jan 8 matinee with my sister, babey!!!!

like something? hate something? want to see something happen? want to see me eaten by a sandworm? let me know! comments are great, especially when I'm finishing this up instead of getting ready for work.

as per usual, my tumblrs are always open! @strawberryicebreakers on main and @bisexualbeetlejuice for BJ-specific content. hit me up!

## academics and accidents

### Chapter Summary

in which lydia emulates her science teacher, and delia doesn't know the consequences of her actions.

### Chapter Notes

"this is not the end, nor is this the beginning; instead, I believe, it is the beginning of the end." - a winston churchill quote that I botched to fit this chapter

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

With the door locked shut behind her, Lydia jumped onto her bed, falling into its pillows with a soft *oomph* from the mattress as it caught her weight. She flopped over onto her back, spreading her arms out to the edges of the duvet, trying to catch her breath. Lawrence slumped against her bookshelf, barely able to hold himself up due to how hard his body shook from laughter.

"I can hear you two laughing," Delia called from the kitchen, "and I don't like that one bit!"

Lydia only cackled louder at her comment. She could feel the edge of the plate as it rubbed against her arm, having barely landed on the pillow she threw it at. "I wonder if she'll come up here for it," she said, flicking the saran wrap it was held together with.

"Nah," Lawrence said, wiping his eyes, "she's not that pissed, and besides, she wouldn't risk burning whatever other shit you're having her make for you."

"They're not for me," she said, "they're for my Gov class. Red and blue cookies, one for each party. Mr. Forest told us to bring in food for the end of year party-slash-mock election."

He looked at her, amused. "And you couldn't make them yourself?"

"BJ, I think you'd be better with an oven than I am, and that's really saying something." Recalling the Incident from her mind, a mishap with peanut butter cookies and too much baking soda when she was eleven, she cringed. "It's better for everyone involved if I'm not the one in charge, and," she shook the plate at him, hearing the first batch slide around on the porcelain, "now we can try these!"

He held a hand out as he dropped onto the bed, t-shirt almost catching on the zipper of her pillow. "Chuck me one," he said, and she obliged.

She snatched one for herself and took a moment to admire it. Even though she knew Delia's past in art, it still surprised her to see cookies with such clean lines in the icing, red and blue outlines of elephants and donkeys not even bleeding onto their white backgrounds. "These are almost too good to eat," she said, and took a bite out of it. "Almost." She eyed her alarm clock on the side of her nightstand, unhappily noting the seven-oh-five pm time she saw.

Tomorrow would be Thursday, and after that, Friday, which was the two-week anniversary of her summoning him. She had a few ideas in mind, but her favorite was the idea of taking him out for dinner. Of course, she'd have to have the rest of her family onboard, but she knew Delia wouldn't be an issue at all, and after seeing her dad and Lawrence's relationship shift after the weekend, she had a sneaking suspicion that he wouldn't protest. She kept this all a secret from Lawrence, though; she wanted it to be a surprise for him.

"Hey, BJ," she asked, glancing at her backpack, "did you go to school?"

He snorted at the question. "Yeah, kid," he said, "I did. Why?"

"When?"

"When I was a kid, obviously."

"Yeah, but like," she said, "how long ago was that?"

Drumming a hand on his thigh, he tried to think far back enough. "I started when I was five, so twelve-fifty. Ended when I was sixteen, so that'd be eighteen-hundred or so."

"BJ," she said, "you haven't been to school since the nineteenth century?"

"I mean, I went to college in nineteen-something, so there was that, but overall, yeah, I stopped around then."

She stared at him in shock, taking in the magnitude of what he was saying. "So you're telling me your education stopped circa-eighteen hundred?"

"Yes," he said, slowly, "and that's important because -?"

"BJ, do you know what evolution is?"

"What?"

"Oh my God." She clapped a hand to her mouth, "you've got to be kidding me. You're not serious, right?"

Eyebrows scrunched in confusion, he looked at her. "I am," he said, matter-of-fact.

"The Big Bang theory?"

He shook his head.

"Genetics?"

Another head shake.

"Schrödinger's Cat?"

"I know what a cat is, Lyds. Is that one a weird color or something?"

She rolled to the side of her bed, picking up the backpack that laid against the edge of it and rifling through it until she found her laptop, sliding it out and turning it on. "Okay," she said, opening up *Wikipedia*, "tonight's the night where you finally learn the beauties of science!"

He chuckled at her word choice, but still leaned over her shoulder to see what she pulled up.

“Let’s start from the beginning,” she said, and typed into the search bar. When she found the page she was looking for, she clicked it and began to read aloud. “The Big Bang theory is a cosmological model for the observable universe from the earliest known periods through its subsequent large-scale evolution.” Turning around to look at him, she noted his confusion and tried to reword the explanation she gave him. “It’s an idea about how the universe came to be.”

Lawrence looked at her, steeling himself. “Got it,” he said, giving her a thumbs-up. “Is that it?”

“Nope!” She scrolled down the page, trying to figure out what to teach him next. “Doppler effect, yes or no?”

He raised his eyebrows. “Guess.”

“It’s the reason why sound grows louder as it comes closer to you,” she said.

“Like a train?”

“Yes!” She smiled at him, elated that he understood it. “Good job!”

“Thanks,” he said, happy at her reaction. He shuffled up closer to her, and she shifted the laptop so that he’d be able to see it better. “What else is there?”

“So much, BJ,” she said. “What do you want to know?”

“What was the cat thing you mentioned earlier?”

“Schrödinger’s Cat?” He nodded, and she typed it up. “That’s a paradox my Psych teacher told my class about. Basically, you put a cat in a box that has a canister of poison in it. The canister can go off at any time, but you seal the box before it does. Since you never know when the poison’s released, you’ll never know if the cat is alive or dead until you open the box.”

“You guys killed cats in school?”

“No, Beej,” she said, shaking her head, “it’s theoretical. It never really happened. Plus, that’d get everyone arrested for animal cruelty.”

“What happened to it, then? Did it die?”

“BJ, it’s just an idea. It’s never been a real experiment, at least as far as I know.”

“Well, what stuff has been real?”

“Darwin’s theory of natural selection. That’s,” she said, already explaining it before he could ask what it was, “the idea that, in nature, animals choose the best mate based on characteristics that help survival. Artificial selection is when humans intervene in that process.”

“Like dogs?”

“Yeah, like dogs! Dog breeding is a method of artificial selection,” she explained, “but it’s not really good for the dogs. My dad wanted to get a German Shepherd for a while, but Delia’s adamant that any dog we get would have to be from a shelter, not a shop.”

“What about cats?”

“Delia’s allergic,” she said with a frown. “She loves them, but it wouldn’t be a good idea to get one. The only kind we could get would be a Sphinx, but my dad’s against that. He thinks they

aren't real cats."

"If it meows, it's a cat."

"What about cats that can't meow?"

"Fuck," Lawrence said, stumped. He ran a hand through his hair, trying to come up with a response and drawing a blank.

"Animals are weird," Lydia said, crossing her arms with a huff. "Every time scientists think 'yeah, we know this for certain,' something comes along and changes it up. That's the beauty of it, though; there's always something new to discover."

"The certainty of uncertainty," he said.

Lydia glanced over at him, amused. "That's oddly poetic of you."

He laughed, green hair lighting up as he did. "I try my best."

The click of her keyboard filled the next minute as she tried to figure out what to show him next. There was an entire world of possibilities, everything from genetics to the solar system and beyond. He didn't know about the Higgs Boson particle, or water on Mars, or even DNA itself. "Alright," Lydia said, "what do you want to learn about next?"

-

Downstairs, Delia finished the last batch of cookies for Lydia's class, placing them inside Tupperware and closing it all with a *snap!* of the lid. She slid them into the fridge to make sure that the icing wouldn't run and washed her hands of the leftover food dye stains. The water was warm as she scrubbed at a particularly stubborn patch of red, and she thought of what dinner would be.

Frankly, she didn't want to cook tonight, and she knew the Maitlands were busy upstairs with their pet project, so she didn't want to disturb them. She could always order in from the nice Italian place down on Waterway, and now that she thought of it, Delia realized that that would be an excellent idea for the night. Drying her hands off with the dish towel, she picked up her phone and called Charles.

"Hey," she said when the call went through, "are you good with Italian tonight? I know you won't get home until late, so I thought ordering in would be our best bet."

"That sounds lovely, Delia," he said, exhaustion seeping into his voice even in such a short sentence. "Do you want me to pick it up on my way back? I should be getting out in an hour or so."

"I think that'd work," she said. "You want your usual?"

"Yeah. I'll text you when I'm heading out so that you know when to order."

"Okay," she said, grabbing a notepad and pen. "I'll ask Lydia and Lawrence what they want in a bit."

"How are they?"

"Oh, just being little assholes, but that's their default when they're together," she said, smiling as she spoke. "I was baking for Lydia's class thing tomorrow, and the second I turn my back on the first batch, it's gone, and all I can hear is their cackles as they booked it up the stairs."

“Sounds like them,” Charles said, trying not to snicker. “It’s nice to see them both in such good moods.”

“Agreed,” Delia said, leaning against the countertop. “Even if they’re getting into trouble, at least they’re happy while they’re doing it. I don’t ever want to see Lydia as sad as she used to be.”

“And I don’t want to see Lawrence sad again, either,” he said. “Life’s better when the kids are happy.”

“You’re really intent on making us sound like we’re straight out of *Full House*, huh?”

“Well, I sure as hell don’t want us to be like *Mr. Robot*.”

“Oh, God, don’t even bring that up as a possibility,” Delia groaned. “The second Lydia figures out how to hack is the day we need to take her laptop away. I can’t even think of the kind of shit she’d be able to pull if she could do that.”

“New rule - never let Lydia join robotics.”

“You’re damn right,” she said. “She can stick to her quiz bowl team for extracurriculars.”

“Speaking of that, though,” he said, “I was thinking of going to her meet if I can get off work early enough next week. They’re having an end of year bracket-style competition with the other schools for fun, and the teacher in charge of it sent out an email inviting parents to come to support.”

“Oh, I’d love to go! It’s next Friday, right?”

“At five o’clock, yeah. Should we bring Lawrence?”

“I feel like he’d get a kick out of it,” she said. “I’m sure he’d love to come along.”

“Alright, I’ll email the teacher back about it to let him know we’ll be there.”

She heard someone yell in the background, and Charles’ resulting sigh. “I think I’ll let you go,” she said. “Don’t want you to get in trouble.”

“Oh, she isn’t yelling at me,” he said, “she’s yelling at Carrie.”

“The HR lady’s assistant?”

“Yep,” he said, “but now she’s coming over here.”

“See you soon, Charles.”

“I’ll be home as quick as they’ll let me.” He paused for a moment before speaking again in a hushed tone, keeping his voice down to avoid getting called out by the nearby woman. “I love you, Delia.”

She felt herself blush at the phrase; even after months together, and the vague plans of a wedding in place, it still made her feel special to hear him say those words. “I love you, too, babe.”

Hanging up the phone, she set it on the countertop and scratched out their orders on paper. Charles always got the same dish, something she could barely pronounce and knew that the man who took their orders would laugh at, and she added her own. She texted Lydia to ask for their orders, and got a response back in less than a minute. Unsurprisingly, they ordered the same thing, and she wrote it down.

With time to kill, she found her way onto the back deck, bare feet against the aged wooden boards, sanded down to avoid splinters. She looked out into the dusk, watching the sun set against the treeline, streaking shades of pink against the darkening sky. Below the deck, the backyard stretched into the distance, and she could see lightning bugs floating lazily around the grass, giving off flecks of yellow in periodical bursts.

When she was a child, she used to catch them between her hands, watching their light bleed out from between small palms clasped together as a makeshift cage until she'd take them apart to watch it fly away. It was something her dad taught her how to do, training her to be patient enough to approach them slowly as to not scare the bugs away. She wondered if Lydia ever did the same, if Emily ever taught her how to play with nature, or if there was even the right kind of environment in the city for her to do so.

Delia turned on a heel and went back inside, not wanting to go down that road tonight. While she wanted to know more about Lydia's childhood, she knew that that was something that wouldn't do anyone any good to worry about, especially on a school night. Checking her texts, she saw that Charles was on his way home earlier than expected, so she called the restaurant and placed their orders. They were always speedy about their cooking, so she knew that Charles would be able to get their food soon and be home in twenty or so minutes.

The table needed to be set, but after hours on her feet baking like a fiend, all she wanted to do was sit down, and besides, Lydia did promise a favor as her payment. She took a step out of the kitchen before stopping, realizing that she could both have her favor used and get the rare opportunity to prank Lydia instead of the other way around.

*Three times*, she thought. All it would take is saying Lawrence's other name three times, and he'd appear downstairs, which would be enough to freak out Lydia in a harmless way. *He said it didn't hurt to hear his name, just that it sent out a warning. I guess I'll have to say it quickly.*

"Beetlejuice," she whispered, "Beetlejuice, -"

-

"Pluto isn't a planet anymore, technically speaking, but yeah, those are the planets of the solar system!" Lydia shuffled through the old flashcards that she found in her desk, labeling all of the significant parts of the universe, and found the set with the major constellations. She held them up in front of him. "Want to do these next? I was thinking we could start with Ori -"

Lawrence lurched forwards, throwing a hand out to stop him from falling. He gripped her forearm in an iron-clad hold, and she watched as green seeped out of his hair, replaced with black as if painted with petroleum. "No," he mumbled, "no, no, no -"

She stared at him, adrenaline flooding her veins at the sight of his dread. "Beej, what's going on?"

He shook his head, eyes squeezed shut as his nails dug into her arm. "I -"

-

"Beetlejuice."

She looked around, expecting to see Lawrence nearby, and grew puzzled when she didn't see him anywhere. As she ducked to check behind a curtain, she heard a scream from upstairs.

"Delia!" The door to Lydia's room flung open, cracking against the wall hard enough to leave an imprint of the handle. "Delia, BJ's gone!"

She felt the blood drain from her face. Running up the stairs, she got to Lydia as fast as she could. “What?”

“He was -,” she said, breathing hard, “he was just here, but something happened, and his eyes went really wide, and his hair went black again, which isn’t good at all and he -, he just vanished!”

“Was it on purpose?”

“No!” Her eyes shone as she spoke, angry at the insinuation. “He didn’t tell me he was leaving, and it didn’t even look like it was his choice!”

“Is everything alright?”

Delia glanced up to see Barbara peering in from the door that led to the attic staircase. “Lawrence is gone, but not by his own will, and we don’t know why.”

“Are you sure he isn’t in the house?”

“We would’ve heard him by now!” Lydia’s voice strained itself as she tried to hold back. “Barbara, is there anything in your book about him?”

“I don’t think so,” she said, unsure, “but we can check. Follow me.” She went back up the stairs, Delia and Lydia on her heels. “Adam,” she called out, “can you get the Handbook?”

Adam looked up at the women from his seat and set down the glue he held in one hand as he tried to secure one of the trees to the board. “Of course,” he said, and went over to the bookshelf, grabbing the Handbook from the topmost shelf. “Why do you need it?” He handed the book to Barbara, and finally seemed to notice what was different. “Where’s Lawrence?”

She flipped through the pages of it, searching for his name and coming up blank. “There’s nothing on him in here,” she said.

“Check again!” Lydia reached a hand out, and Barbara swatted it away.

“You can’t use this,” she said, “remember? You’re not dead, Lydia.”

“What about his job?” Adam asked, taking the book from his wife. “He called himself a bio-exorcist, and if that’s an actual field, it might have a page or two in here.” He found the table of contents, dragging a finger down each chapter. “Aha! There’s a chapter on help for those remaining in the living world.” Finding the page it was on, he opened to it, and right under the heading was a list of jobs, alphabetized for convenience.

“Bio-exorcism is at the top,” Delia said, “does it say anything that could help?”

“It’s just a list of services they provide,” Adam said, “it doesn’t say anything about him specifically.”

“Wait,” Barbara said, taking the book out of his hands. ““If the bio-exorcist you hired lacks the skills you need,”” she read aloud, ““you must send them back, and the Office of Inter-World Affairs will find a suitable replacement. To send them back, state their title name thrice, and they will be forced to leave.”” Barbara looked at Delia and Lydia. “Did either of you say his name like that? Not Lawrence, but,” she paused, “the B-name?”

“I didn’t,” Lydia said, quick to defend herself. “All I ever call him is BJ or Beej, not the full thing.” She turned to Delia, eyes wide. “Delia,” she said, scared, “did you say his name?”



Delia clasped her hands to her mouth, sick to her stomach. "I didn't know," she whispered, horrified. "I didn't -, I didn't know that it would send him back, I -"

"What's everyone doing up here?"

"Charles," Adam said, "Lawrence is gone, and -"

"Wait, why?" His eyebrows drew together, and he looked around, worried. "Did something happen to him? Why did he leave?"

"It's my fault," Delia said, "the one thing we had to do was keep him safe and -, and away from the Netherworld and I fucking sent him there on a silver platter."

"Delia," Lydia said, trying to be gentle despite her panic, "you didn't know; it's not your fault."

"Have you tried to summon him back yet?" Charles asked. "If that's how you brought him around the first time, why don't you just try to do that again?"

"Okay," Lydia said, "give me room."

The adults spread out away from her, watching with held breath. She steeled herself as well as she could. Closing her eyes, she began the chant.

"Beetlejuice, Beetlejuice, Beetlejuice!"

When she opened her eyes, nothing had changed. Delia still stared on, tracks of tears painting themselves across her cheeks. Charles still had a hand on her shoulder, trying to be there for her, and the Maitlands still watched with rapt attention.

"Why didn't it work?"

"What if -, " Adam asked, "what if he can't come back?"

"You don't mean -"

With a grimace, he nodded his head. "If Juno was waiting for him, maybe," he said, uncomfortable, "maybe she already has him."

"Oh, God," Delia said, sinking down onto the Maitland's bed. "Oh my God."

Barbara tore her gaze away from Delia and looked around the room. "Where's Lydia?"

"I'm right here," she said, ducking under her arm and making a beeline for the only wall that lacked a bookshelf. She waved her hand in the air as she ran, and the glint of a plastic marker cap could be seen tight in her grip. When she made it to the wall, she ripped the cap off, throwing it behind her. "If he can't come to us," she said, drawing a large rectangle onto the wall, stretching to make sure it would fit Charles' height, "we have to go to him."

"Can we even go into the Netherworld?" Barbara asked. "Won't we be stuck there if we go in?"

"As long as you aren't caught, you should be alright," Lydia said. "I made it out, and so did you, Dad."

Charles made his way over to her, standing beside his daughter. "I'm going. Delia?"

She stood up, wiping the back of her hand against her face. "I'm going. He needs to come home,

and I'm not going to let him be tormented by that woman again."

"We're going," Adam said, finding his wife's hand and threading their fingers together. "Barbara and I can look on our own while you all search elsewhere. Divide and conquer, like the computer algorithm." From beside him, Barbara nodded her head in approval.

Lydia raised a hand against the makeshift door. "Dad, Delia, and I will go one way, and Barbara and Adam, you guys will go the other. Don't lose your groups, and if anything happens, make a door. I think that's your best bet to make it back into our world."

"Okay," Charles said. "Is everyone ready?"

A chorus of affirmations responded to him, and he looked down at Lydia, as serious as she'd ever seen him.

"Alright," she said, and knocked three times. The door creaked open, and the pale green light she recognized from all of those months ago filled the attic. "Let's bring Lawrence back home."

## Chapter End Notes

y'know, I would say I'm sorry, but am I? am I really?

finding out how to bring in the plotline for the end was one of the more difficult parts about this piece; there were a few other ways this could've panned out, but this is what I chose! and yes, it's the most sad of the possibilities.

bet that y'all didn't expect to be educated on post-1800s scientific discoveries through a beetlejuice fanfic, but that's what you get when the author is a fuckin' STEM nerd

chapter fifteen will be quite the ride. certain characters will make a reappearance!

like something? hate something? want to see something happen? want to see me eaten by a sandworm? let me know! comments are great, especially when my friend kennedy is about to beat my ass because I've been working on finishing this instead of getting ready.

as per usual, my tumblrs are always open! @strawberryicebreakers on main and @bisexualbeetlejuice for BJ-specific content. hit me up!

## suppressors and searches

### Chapter Summary

in which certain people make a reappearance, and the netherworld is a tricky place to navigate.

### Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

His knees buckled as they hit the carpet, shag worn out after centuries of shoes scraping over the top of it, attached to the recently deceased who all inevitably found their way into the office, and like them, Lawrence was here against his wishes and will. He lifted his head, searching for anything out of the ordinary that could explain his return.

Maria's desk sat vacated nearby, laptop absent from its usual perch, but her photos were still there. Nearby, Irva and Helen's clipboards sat atop the coffee table, pushed uncomfortably close to the single couch in the waiting area. The only oddity was the complete and utter lack of people inside; while there could usually be a stray soul or two found inside the building, he was seemingly alone in the lobby.

Pushing himself to his feet, he stood up, walking over to the door and yanking the handle towards him. It wouldn't open, which made no sense to him; there weren't locks on any of the Entry Offices, he was sure of it. He gave it another pull, but it refused to budge under his grip.

"What the fuck," he said, swearing under his breath. Cocking his head, he turned around, taking a step towards Evan's desk to see if he could find something to tell him why the office was empty.

"Language."

His chest turned cold at the sound of her voice, a solid weight expanding in his lungs that restricted his breath with its density.

There was nowhere he could go.

"It's nice to see you back," Juno said, walking up to him. She lifted her chin, meeting his eyes. "I was wondering when I'd see you again. Did you miss me?"

She stood with her hands behind her back, arms wrapped in one of the many blazers she owned. Her heels brought her height up a bit, but she still didn't reach him, even with his shorter stature. The pears hung 'round her neck as always, a constant he remembered for as long as he could think back to. Without the lights on, they seemed matte, lacking the sheen they held under fluorescent bulbs.

"I -," he said, but she cut him off.

Her eyes squinted at him in the dark, only now noticing his change in appearance. "What are you wearing?"

"Clothes," he blurted out. "The suit got dirty."

“Lawrence,” she said, frustrated, “what did I tell you about appearance? You can’t walk around looking like this. You need to show your status, and the best way to do that is through dress.”

“It was uncomfortable,” he said. At the side of his thigh, he tapped his hand against denim, feeling the material under his touch. “How -, how did you bring me back here?”

“I didn’t,” she said, voice flat. “As much as I wanted to, I can’t. You know that, Lawrence.”

“If you didn’t bring me back, how -”

“I think you know the answer to that,” she said. “Whatever you were doing up there, whoever you were with, sent you back.”

*No.*

“They wouldn’t,” he said, a touch too quick. He saw Juno notice, and the resulting smile sent a chill dripping down his spine. “I didn’t -, I didn’t do anything. It must’ve been a mistake.”

“Were you with those breathers again? The,” she paused, trying to find the name, “the Devres? Dells?”

He broke eye contact, ducking his head.

“Deetz?”

His teeth pressed together hard enough to crack, and he refused to say anything, but his silence was enough of an answer for her.

“It’s Deetz, isn’t it? The girl and her father, what were their names?”

“Don’t bring them into this,” he said, quiet. “Just -, just don’t.”

“The ghosts as well, that cute little married couple -”

“Please,” he said. “Please, Mom, don’t -”

“Oh, and the mother, the redhead, she was interesting enough. Tell me, Lawrence,” she raised an eyebrow, waiting for him to answer, “why did they send you back?”

“They didn’t,” he said. “I didn’t do anything wrong. It was an accident.”

“Lawrence, you know that I don’t appreciate it when you’re dishonest with me. If it were an accident, they would’ve called you back.”

“They don’t -,” *oh, God*, “they don’t know that what they did sent me back.”

“It’s in the Handbook.” She stared at him, unimpressed. “They know what they did and that they can bring you back, but they won’t. I want you to tell me why that is.”

“I didn’t do anything wrong!”

“Try that again.”

“I -,” he stumbled across his words, choking on them as they emerged from his throat, “we -, I mean, there was a misu -, there was a misunderstanding a week ago but I -, I apologized and it got better.”

“Obviously, Lawrence, it didn’t. They’re alive; everything they experience is messy and is never as ‘fixed’ as you think it is. They don’t understand you, and they never will. Do you realize that?”

“They did, though,” he said. “They -, they do. They understand me, and they take care of me, and they lo-”

He stopped. *Is that -*

He felt it again, the swoop of a hook finding his ribs and tugging, trying to pull him away. *Once more*, he thought, pleading to whatever deity there was that made him to say it once more, just one more time, and he could get out of here and -

“Oh,” Juno said, “well, we can’t have that, can we?”

She stepped towards him, and in a fluid motion, brought her hands from out behind her back. In each grip, she held something circular, shaped like bracelets made out of an opaque black material he couldn’t place, and they were each cracked in half, open on a hinge. Swiftly, she swung one over each of his wrists, keeping pressure on them until they gave a slight *click!* as the ends came together, encircling each wrist tight enough to bite into skin. She stepped back and watched him.

“What -,” he said, swallowing hard, “what are these?”

“Suppressors,” she answered, calm. “I had them made for you back when you were younger and,” she looked him up and down in distaste, “smaller, but never needed to use them. You always knew to behave, but recently, you’ve started acting up again. These are here to teach you a lesson, Lawrence; if you don’t use your abilities in the right way, you won’t get to use them at all.”

He felt faint, as if something important was blocked off and there was no way for him to reach it, nothing to relieve the well he already felt building up inside of him. When he looked down, the sight of the bracelets turned his stomach. “You can’t do this,” he said, voice small. “You can’t -, they’re a part of me, I -, I can’t live without them.”

“You can, and you will.” She raised a hand, inching close to him, and he slammed backwards, causing the edges of the door to nick his bare arms, scraping against his biceps. Juno stepped forwards, and he tried the doorknob once more, hoping, praying that it would open, but it didn’t.

She clutched his elbow, a crude imitation of an older woman asking for help to cross a street, and pulled him close until he could see the stitches on her clothing and the creases of her make-up. “No,” she said, “you don’t get to run away again. Your days of playing house with breathers are over, Lawrence, and it’s time you finally accept that.” She dragged him as she walked, muttering under her breath as he tried to wiggle out of her grip. As they approached the door to her office, his effort to escape increased tenfold. “You need to grow up and move on.”

He knew what was going to happen, what always happened when Juno was mad, truly mad, at him.

“It’s time for you to finally take something seriously and be the person you were made to be.” With her free hand, she opened the door, pulling them both through the small doorway. Inside, her desk, along with everything else, was in its usual position, but that wasn’t what he was looking for. She pulled him towards the far wall, half-hidden in shadow.

Most of the deceased that were unlucky enough to find their way into Juno’s office assumed that the door led to a closet or restroom, but that wasn’t the case. It was something she had built centuries ago, a means of travel for her to avoid who she deemed to be the average population. She wrapped her fingers around its handle and opened, bringing Lawrence into its depths, and closing it

behind her.

Within an instant, light spilled upon the pair, and Juno continued forwards, not stopping even when Lawrence did. His foot hit one of the bushes at the front, thorns embedding themselves in his shoe, barely avoiding his skin.

The house loomed in front of them in all of its glory, tan stone gleaming golden in the sunlight. In front of the entrance, the old fountain still funneled water to its peak, falling down in unnatural elegance. He remembered the fountain, how he used to play in it when he could find time away from school, when he was sent home and had an hour or two to spare before Juno left work.

He remembered everything about this place, from the high ceilings and wood floors to the windows fitted with bars after he found his way out one too many times; and the things he could never forget, the way it got mind-numbingly cold in the basement, or how empty it was with only the two of them to fill it.

“Lawrence,” Juno said, reaching the ornate door that stretched ten feet into the air, unlocking each of the three locks it held, “welcome home.”

-

Outside of her office, Maria waited, tapping a heeled foot against the pavement. It was midday, but the door remained shut, locked tight. She’d never had to deal with it like that before, and she’d called a locksmith, but he was taking an eternity to arrive. Pulling out her phone, she sent a text to Lawrence. As far as he’d told her, it seemed as though life on the surface was treating him well; the Deetz family appeared to be good for him, both on the mental and physical aspects, but to be fair, anything keeping him away from Juno would be able to accomplish that.

She wasn’t blind to how they interacted, as much as Lawrence appeared to think she was. There were many, many rumors surrounding either of them, and even more concerning their relationship. It wasn’t a mere boss and employee relationship, but they didn’t seem to be friends; if anything, Lawrence seemed to resent her as much as he constantly sought her approval. Juno was her boss as well, and she sure as hell didn’t treat Maria like how she did Lawrence.

When it came down to it, Maria didn’t even know a lot about Lawrence himself. She knew he was born-dead, something she couldn’t even conceptualize. He was hundreds of years her senior, but when everything was taken into account, she was almost a decade older than him in the years of the Netherworld. It’d only been sixty-nine years since she’d passed, bringing her total age up to twenty-eight, but she barely felt the difference from the day she died.

The complexities of her death and what came after were something she didn’t think about often, but at least she’d had the chance to live, something Lawrence never got to experience, barring a brief period back in January when his life turned on its side. He’d come back different; while she hadn’t interacted with him much beforehand, she’d gotten the general personality off of his interactions with her; he’d been a flirty, hectic ball of nerves and stripes that answered to none other than Juno, bringing everything back to the beginning of her thoughts.

Juno was ancient; no one seemed to know when she’d arrived, nor anything about her life, only that she’d slit her own throat, but even the reasons behind that were unknown. There were very few other beings of her power and influence in the Netherworld, and they all held similar positions around the globe. Other than Juno, who’d taken a position as the head of the American branch of the world, she knew of Adallindis, head of Germany, Rigel, head of Tunisia, and she’d personally spoken to a few of the representatives from Australia when their head came to talk to Juno. There was never any sort of election for leaders, and there wouldn’t be unless one of them stepped down

from their positions, which was heavily unlikely.

After he'd come back, though, he'd changed. He was calmer, for once, and while he wasn't exactly happy, there seemed to be a weight off of his shoulders that Maria believed to be caused by Juno's absence. She wasn't there to hawk over him anymore, bringing him with her to new assignments, or, in some cases, berating him when he'd failed. Maria didn't see Lawrence fail on a case often, and she had a nasty suspicion that it wasn't just his pride that made him pursue success with a near-suicidal drive.

There'd been an incident back in October of '98 that still haunted her, when he'd nearly gotten himself exorcised by a family in Italy when he'd tried to help the spirit stuck there. It was the closest she'd ever seen anyone get to a full exorcism and still make it back to her office, having to detail their experience for science. She remembered the way he walked in, dazed, with gray hair and fresh rips in his suit, as if he'd aged through all of the years he'd lived only to be thrown back in the body of a nineteen-year-old at the last possible moment. He'd refused to give her a clear answer, instead choosing to mumble through his responses until she dismissed him, realizing his presence helped neither of them.

"Ma'am?"

She pulled herself out of her thoughts, giving her attention to the man in front of her. Part of his face seemed to hang off of what remained from his skull, but the rest of him appeared to be fine enough, and frankly, she'd seen much worse. "Yes?"

He held up a box, clasped between burnt fingers. "I'm here for the lock."

"Oh," she said, and walked him over to the front of the office. "It's right here. The office has never been locked before, so I wasn't sure what to do."

"It's no fault of yours," he said, and knelt down, taking out his tools to try to pry it open. She waited, watching him to make sure he was alright on his own.

"Maria?"

She turned, squinting against the sun as she tried to find who called her name, but before she could even try to guess, they'd run up to her, skidding to a halt in front of her heels. Two people, a man and woman who appeared to be in their early thirties, looked at her, eyes wide. "Who are you?"

"Maria," the woman said, "we've met before. I'm Barbara Maitland; I live with the Deetz family, \_"

"Oh, Barbara!" She smiled, clasping her hands in front of her. "Lawrence has told me quite a bit about you, and," she looked at the man, "Adam, I presume?"

"Yeah, that's me," he said. He took his glasses off, wiping them against his shirt as his wife spoke.

"Speaking of Lawrence," she said, "have you seen him around here?"

"No," she said. "Why would I? He's up in the living world -"

With narrowed eyes, she glared at the pair, and Adam cleared his throat. "There's been an incident," he said.

"Goddamnit," she said, pinching the bridge of her nose. "I give you all one task, one simple task of keeping him in the Upperworld, and you manage to let him leave?"

“We didn’t let him leave,” Barbara said, flustered. “He didn’t even choose to leave! There was an accident with his name, and the next thing we knew, he was gone.”

“He never told you, did he? The power of a name,” she said, irritated, “is more than any of you could ever believe.”

“He never told us,” Adam confirmed, unhappy. “I think he was afraid to.”

“Oh, he was,” she said. “He didn’t want to be sent back against his will.”

“And that’s exactly what ended up happening,” Barbara said. “Do you know where he would’ve arrived?”

“He’s under the jurisdiction of the United States,” she said, “so he would’ve landed -, shit.” Whipping around, Maria spoke to the locksmith. “Could you get that door open any quicker?”

“It’s done,” he said, taking his key out of the door. “Wasn’t too complicated.”

“I’ll have the money sent to you,” she said, “but the situation’s a bit urgent right now. Thank you.”

“No problem, ma’am,” he said. Without a look back, he walked away, not wanting to get caught up in the trouble surrounding him.

Grasping the doorknob, Maria opened the office, flicking the light on as she made her way inside. Adam and Barbara followed her, uneasily looking over everything on display. “Is this,” Adam asked, “where we were supposed to go when we died?”

“Yes,” Maria answered, striding to Juno’s office, “this is where you were supposed to go, but that didn’t happen, now did it?”

“No,” Barbara said, “but I’m glad it didn’t.”

“So am I,” Maria said. The door was closed, and she opened it, peering inside. “There’s no one here.”

“Should there be?”

“This is where Lawrence would’ve gone,” she said, puzzled. “There’s no other office for this region of the country.”

Adam and Barbara followed behind her, walking into the room. After turning on the lights, Adam poked around at the various decorations in the office. “There isn’t a single photo in here,” he said, curious.

“That’s odd,” Barbara said. “Not even any of her and Lawrence?”

Maria glanced over at the other woman from her position near the liquor cabinet. “Why would she have a photo with him?”

“You don’t -”

Adam cleared his throat, watching his wife. He shook his head, and she grimaced.

“Not my story to tell,” she said. “Learnt that the hard way.”

“You know,” Maria said, “even after all of the time I’ve spent at this building, I’ve never been in



here before today.” She chuckled to herself as she ran a hand against the wall. “To be honest, I thought she’d have some sort of trap door or crocodile tank in here, but it’s just normal.”

“If I was a centuries-old megabitch,” Barbara said, muttering to herself, “where would I hide my secrets?”

“Not in my office,” Adam said. “People are naturally inquisitive; it’s too risky. I’d hide them in my car or at home.”

“What about robbers?”

“Well, let’s just hope the house doesn’t get robbed!”

“You two, come over here.” Waving them over, Maria stepped aside, showing them what she was looking at.

A door, nearly the same color as the wall, laid under her fingers, ridges barely visible to those unfamiliar with it. When she tried the doorknob, it moved under her grip, and she opened it. “I wonder where this leads,” she mused. “Want to find out?”

“It might help,” Adam said. “I say we go.”

“Agreed,” Barbara said, facing Maria. “Any clue that could bring us to Lawrence is worth investigating.”

Adam turned to his wife with a smile. “Investigating, that’s new!”

She raised her eyebrows. “Maitlands two-point-oh?”

Nodding, he high-fived her. “Maitlands two-point-oh!”

Maria huffed a laugh at the pair and turned her attention back to the door, pushing it open. The Maitlands followed her as she stepped through, and within the blink of an eye, they stood, confused, at the edge of a property line, looking upon a mansion surrounded by trees as a makeshift fortress.

“Where are we?” Barbara asked, quiet as if she were afraid someone would hear her. “Are we still in the Netherworld?”

“I believe we are,” Maria said. “The Upperworld feels different; you’d know it if you didn’t spend most of your time there.”

“If we haven’t left,” Adam asked, “then where in the world are we?”

Feeling through her left dress pocket, Maria took out a phone, loading up her location. “We’re still in the same area,” she said, “although we are much further out than I’ve gone. I don’t make it a habit of going off the grid.”

“Who lives here?”

Barbara turned to her husband, worried. “Adam,” she said, tense, “the door was in her office. Who do you think would live here?”

“Goddamn,” Maria said, breathless as she took in the house’s grandeur. “I figured she must be rich, but this is on another level.”

“Fountains are a bit tacky, aren’t they?” Barbara walked forwards, meaning to inspect the aforementioned decoration, and as her foot touched the first stone of the walkway, she felt herself freeze. She heard Adam say her name from behind, but she couldn’t turn.

From the balcony above, she watched as a small woman walked out, eyes narrowed down at her. She rested a hand upon the edge. “And who are you?”

“Barbara Maitland,” she answered without hesitation. She puffed out her chest and flashed a smile at her, trying to appear unbothered. “Are you Juno?”

Her mouth twisted at the name, and she scoffed at the woman below. “Why do you want to know?”

“I’m looking for a friend of mine,” she said, “and I think he might be here.”

“A friend?”

“His name is Lawrence,” she said. “Do you know him?”

The woman’s jaw clicked shut at the question. For a moment, she disappeared from view, only to return from the bottom of the staircase that led to the balcony, and she made her way over to Barbara. When she was barely a foot away, she spoke. “Are you here alone?”

“Yes.” *If she can’t see Adam and Maria, she thought, I’m not going to make their presence known.*

“Good.”

“Wait, what are -”

With an unnervingly secure grip, Barbara was grabbed, and she felt her feet finally find their movement as soon as she was touched by the other woman, only to be dragged forwards towards the door of the home. “I don’t have time for this,” the woman muttered, rolling her eyes.

“Where are you taking me?”

“Inside,” she said, nails digging into Barbara’s sleeve. “We’re going to have a chat, dear.”

## Chapter End Notes

bj begging junos not to bring the deetz into this is,,, not fun. at all. esp the fact that he outright starts calling her "mom" while doing so.

there r so many things I have for the sequel to this and the fact that I can't write them yet? horrid.

I'm going to the Newseum in the morning and I'm so sad it's closing at the end of the month :(

writing junos in general is very difficult; her personality is very intricate, and writing her relationship with lawrence is tricky. I've seen a lot of people characterize her as this overtly shitty person, which, valid, but it's important to know that issues like hers aren't always as overt as that. subtlety is one of the main reasons abuse continues

without outside intervention.

lawrence's thought process goes from juno brought me back -> who brought me back? -> did the deetz never forgive me? in such a flash and it hurts. but it really shows how much he trusts them that he didn't even think they could've been the cause until juno puts the idea in his mind.

there are,,, certain grammatical rules I Loathe to break in my legitimate writing. obv y'all have noticed my authors notes are very different from this fic [+ if you've chatted with my on tumblr, same thing!] which is pretty funny to me lmao. anywho. grammatical rules include not starting sentences with for/and/nor/but/or/yet/so, spelling out any number [maitlands two-point-oh, lawrence talking about his age], starting consecutive chapters with the same words, along with a few other bits. breaking them is akin to breaking a bone and I Hate It but sometimes the story dictates it so I end up writing while becoming the personification of >:(

barbara seems like the kind of mom that would sing "i'd give my life for you" from miss saigon to her kid.

miss saigon slaps! waitress slaps! little shop of horrors slaps! six [at least ex-wives and don't lose ur head] slaps! hamilton slaps! the spongebob musical slaps! heathers slaps! fuck the music man!

speaking of That,,,

damn.

just, damn. nvr thought we'd be saying goodbye to the show so soon. I'll talk about it more when I finish the fic, mainly bc I'm definitely going to fucking cry when this fic is done so might as well cry abt multiple things in one go, but it hurts. a lot. this musical has given me so much, for getting me out of a writing block and giving me all of love y'all have given me bc of this fic, for reigniting my love of cosplay, for giving me something to carry with me, and it just.

it just hurts, y'know?

only fun thing abt the musical closing is the fact that my old writing teacher who doesn't even work at my school anymore texted me saying he was sorry to hear it was closing. he heard abt it and was like damn sherrie's Not Going to be Happy abt this better express my condolences as if someone fuckin' died.

another fun thing [at least for me lmao] - the editing process! I mainly self-edit, but I run everything through grammarly before posting. it's like an 25:1 ratio of self edits:grammarly, though. been a writer for longer than I can remember lmao; workshopping my own pieces alongside others pieces has given me Quite the Experience. if I was a sim, I'd be like,,, level seven in the editing skill.

like something? hate something? want to see something happen? want to see me eaten by a sandworm? let me know! comments are great, especially when I still need to shower and get my shit packed for my trip tomorrow. :P

as per usual, my tumblrs are always open! @strawberryicebreakers on main and @bisexualbeetlejuice for BJ-specific content. hit me up!

# loneliness and last resorts

## Chapter Summary

in which lawrence has a hard time adjusting to being back home.

## Chapter Notes

don't kill me.

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

He couldn't sleep.

Time worked differently in the Netherworld, and he was unsure of how many hours had passed since he'd arrived. Lawrence tried to fall asleep, to do anything other than stare at the wall of his childhood bedroom, but there was nothing. The buzzing around his wrists, a low, constant noise, did nothing to help, instead setting him on edge.

When he'd arrived, Juno had left him in his room, telling him to stay, and while he wanted to do anything but, he knew the danger that came with disregarding her wishes. He'd learnt that lesson the hard way after one too many escapades as a kid, prying bars off of windows with powers he was just beginning to get the hang of, but that wasn't even an option for him anymore.

The suppressors kept themselves latched to his wrists, locked tight. He couldn't even find their hinge when he looked for it, twisting every which way to try and spot anything other than the uniform black it showed him.

His room was the same as it'd always been. The same bed, with the plain blue quilt atop a mattress that had one spring missing, rested in the corner it'd been in for as long as he could remember. Across from it, the wardrobe that he'd gotten when he was five-hundred stood tall against the wall, next to the large window that rested high above his head, having been moved slightly up with each escape he'd attempted. There was still a desk, opposite from the door, with an old oak chair pushed next to it.

He walked over to it, looking for anything strange or unusual about it. The inkpot he'd used still stood proud at the upper-righthand corner, with a quill still inside, but other than that, the surface was unremarkable. Bending down, he opened the first of three drawers attached to the desk.

The first drawer slid open without issue, and when he checked inside, he could see why. All that it held was paper and spare canisters of ink for the pot, ready for whenever he would inevitably knock the one atop his desk over. He shut the drawer and moved onto the next.

Drawer number two was slightly more interesting, with a few old knick-knacks he'd swiped as a child from around the Netherworld. An old doll, wrapped in a makeshift toga with a crown of what appeared to be leaves above its head, rested on top, having been found in a ditch on his way to school when he was three-hundred or so. The next item, a box of poems and stories, he'd stolen

from the nearby library and denied any accountability when they inevitably asked him where it had disappeared to. After that, a box of crayons, a few stray buttons, a headband, a water bottle, a sock, a bell, a rubber ball, and more unearthed themselves, each bringing a memory along with them.

He shut the drawer with a deep *thud!* , not wanting to think about any of those items.

The last drawer wouldn't budge when he tried to open it, and upon further inspection, he found a small keyhole near its handle. Lawrence knew that he couldn't just force it open, be it with his abilities or his physical strength, and so he resigned himself to searching his room and hoping that the younger version of him had been smart enough to not lose the key.

He checked the wardrobe first, throwing open its doors with no hesitation. All of the clothes were gone, and while he didn't know exactly why, he figured that it could've been Juno's doing, raging after he left for the most recent time, or of his own doing, trying to make sure he wouldn't return. He checked in the shoe compartment at the bottom and at the hat area towards the top, between each of the empty hangers and every drawer, but it was nowhere to be found.

He moved onto the windowsill, running a hand along it and feeling nothing but smooth wood underneath his hand.

As his last option, he moved towards his bed. Shaking the pillowcase brought no answers, nor did shifting the quilt, and he almost gave up before he thought to check underneath. He got onto his hands and knees, looking into the abyss, and sure enough, the gold glint of a small key caught his eye. Shoving a hand towards it, he grabbed it and dragged it out, bringing it over to the desk.

He tried it inside the lock and smiled when it worked, allowing him to slide the drawer open with no refusal. Inside, all that lay on the wood was a small notebook, thick and leather-bound with yellowed edges.

Lawrence opened the notebook, curious to see what resided inside. On the first page, scrawled in messy, childlike writing, was a statement proclaiming that

*"This Journal Belongs to Lawrence.*

*DON'T LOOK INSIDE!*

*[even you, Mom]"*

He forgot that he used to have a journal, or that he'd ever even written inside it, but it was clear as day that he had. Flipping to a random page, he tried to figure out when he'd had it.

*Today was a good day, the entry read, Mom was nice to me and so was Ms. Kendra at school. She even let me hold the pet frog!*

He chuckled at the memory. His fourth-grade teacher had died alongside her pet frog, and she'd kept it with her wherever she went. Getting to pet it was an honor amongst her students, and he'd been surprised as Hell when she'd deemed his behavior good enough to warrant a pet. Lawrence flipped to another page, eager to read more about his young self.

*Today wasn't a good day.*

Lawrence paused, unsure of whether or not to continue, but at this point, his curiosity refused to let him leave it alone.

*Today wasn't a good day, he read. I got my Math grade back, and it isn't good enough. It's not my*

*fault I don't understand something that just got invented like, five years ago, but apparently they still want to grade me on it. It sucks.*

*Mom's going to kill me.*

He switched to another page.

*Mom isn't -*

Another page.

*Today, Mom -*

Another page.

*Mom -*

Another page.

*M-*

Another page.

*Juno -*

He narrowed his eyes, having caught the shift.

*Juno's mad at me* , it read, *and I don't fucking care why. I need to leave.*

His first escape. He still remembered it, the terror of being outside the house at night mixing with fear of what Juno would do to him when she found out, but the desperation of leaving had overshadowed any other emotion or thought until he had already thrown himself out of the window and landed on the grass below.

He'd made it three nights before coming home a wreck of scraped knees and dirt-caked hair, begging for Juno to forgive him, telling her that he was just a stupid kid that didn't know what he was doing.

Remembering that kid, the kid that was him so many years ago, was enough to make him put down the book. He set it back inside its drawer, closing it and locking it, now understanding why it was locked in the first place. Moving back over to the bed, he slid the key back underneath it and sat atop it, running a hand against the quilt. It was like the one at the Deetz house, and -

He didn't want to think about them; not about Adam and Barbara, not about Delia or Charles or Lydia, not about how warm the house had been recently with its windows open. He didn't want to think about how all he had to do was mention that he was hungry and Delia would either tell him where to find food or that she'd make him something herself.

Lawrence felt the heat build behind his eyes, felt his face flush as he grew upset, but he wasn't thinking about it in the same way he wasn't thinking about how Lydia was about to tell him something else science-y, or how Charles had mentioned a book earlier that day that he thought Lawrence would enjoy.

He wasn't thinking about that, or about anything else, until, of course, he admitted to himself that he was, and, alone in ways he hadn't been in weeks, he wept.

He wept for the life he'd lived, a millennia wrought with pain and hardship that he'd never been free from, for the kid he used to tell himself he'd avenge one day and never did. He wept for who he was today, the bitter, broken man that knew nothing other than sadness in the cold, dusk-dark room that sleep evaded him in, that wore a striped suit, not with pride, but with fear, with every stitch embedding itself into his core, leaving him to tear them away, taking bits and pieces of his body with them. And most of all, he wept for the future he'd never have, the family that he hoped and begged and prayed for that he knew he didn't deserve, not with what he'd done, but that he needed; a home where he could finally feel safe inside, where he had been able to sleep in a bed without earning the luxury, where his clothes were given as gifts of goodwill and nothing more, where, for the first time in his life he'd felt cared for.

Crying, in his case, was not beautiful. It wasn't the kind shown on television or movies, where a single tear drips down one's cheek, culminating at the chin and falling, splashing against the floor as an elegant raindrop; it was the kind of pure, unadulterated regret and shame that left him panting for air with a throat that thickened in the absence of anything to continue breathing for, where all he wanted to do was scream until his brain took pity on him, causing him to blackout as a break from existence, but life could never be so kind.

No, life was never kind. It didn't consider the consequences of giving a baby boy to a woman who never wanted children, of taking away his father before he'd known he would have a son, of bringing him into a world where no one wanted him. It didn't give a second thought to the young boy wandering through the decades of adolescence completely and utterly alone, with no hand to hold or words to guide him to where he needed to be. It didn't advise him when he couldn't focus in school, when his teachers gave up on him as a lost cause that couldn't be taught. It didn't help him earn his first job, or make his first friend, or do anything as a teenager with no one to support him, to tell him that it was okay to be sad or to cry, that didn't scream at him when his emotions showed themselves to anyone willing to see. And life, life didn't care when it ripped him from the only family he'd ever known, from the first woman to think of him as a son and want him to be hers, from a man who thought of him as the son he'd never had, from the girl who treated him like a brother, from the people who made him feel happy and safe and finally, finally fucking loved.

He swallowed the bile that formed a paste in his throat, trying to stop shaking and failing miserably. Restless energy thrummed throughout his entire being with nowhere to go, no outlet of any kind other than recycling and rolling within him again. It felt as though his body was alight in flame, flaring bright in his nervous system and slipping down through his nerves until his hands became nothing less than a blur of moving fingers and scraped wrists. He could feel everything as his body began to burn itself.

In a fit of helplessness, he grabbed the bottom of his shirt and dragged it over his head, not caring as it pulled against his ears in his hurry, and threw it away, off into a dark corner of the room. As the air hit his bare chest, Lawrence gasped, lurching forwards as he tried to suck in the air around him and coming up with nothing, with the weight of everything still piled against his chest and no sign of it dissipating. The only thing that would let him breathe again would be getting the goddamn suppressors off.

With his left hand, he hooked his fingers around the bracelet on his right wrist, trying to fit them into the minuscule gap between it and his skin, gritting his teeth as he tried to calm down enough to get what needed to be accomplished done. He gripped it as securely as he could, and tugged, pulling it against the meat of his palm.

It wouldn't budge; it wasn't large enough to fit over his hand, no matter how hard he pulled. The suppressor pushed dangerously hard against bone, but he couldn't give up.

Arms crossed over each other, he gripped each suppressor and pulled with a brutal kind of strength, desperately trying to get them off and away. In the light of the setting sun, barely bleeding in through the window, the metal gleamed, mocking him in its uniformity, and he -

*crack!*

screamed, dropping his wrists as fast as he could as his vision blanked out into nothing but a blur of tears and white-hot pain. Before he could stop himself, he felt himself heave, and he slid off of the edge of the bed, hitting the hardwood floor harsh, landing on his forearms as his stomach tensed, bile rising and leaving his throat as his wrist cried out at the continued pain.

Lawrence held himself up, coughing to get the last of the bile out of his mouth and closing his eyes as he tried to ignore the sound it made as it hit the floor. When his stomach was empty, the only sound in the room was his laboured breathing, intermittently broken by the high-pitched keen coming from somewhere deep inside of himself. His forearms trembled against the stress his weight put against them, but he couldn't bring himself to move into a different position, with all of his effort going into keeping his arms up to try and give himself the dignity of not falling into his own vomit.

The door creaked open ahead of him, but he couldn't look. He couldn't face her, not when he looked as pathetic as he did.

"Lawrence," her voice said, trying to hold back disgust as her heels edged into his peripheral vision, refusing to come near the puddle beneath him. She turned and left, coming back a moment later. "Sit up."

He groaned, shuddering against the cool air that came in with the open door.

"Get on the bed, Lawrence."

"I -," he mumbled, weak, "I can't."

"You can." She swept over to his bed, sitting on the edge of it and watching him. "Get up."

With his uninjured hand, he pushed himself off of the floor into a kneeling position, hunched over to fight the wave of nausea that reared its head at the movement. He stilled, clutching a palm against his mouth.

"Lawrence."

When the nausea subsided, he found his feet beneath him and stood on wobbling legs, hardly managing the few steps it took to get to his bed before collapsing on it, hunched over, mouth tasting of soured sickness.

Juno looked at him, shirtless and shivering as he tried to calm himself. She took the towel that she'd found and held it in her right hand. "Turn to face me."

He shook his head, eyes clenched shut.

She sighed and took ahold of his shoulder, pushing it until his upper body turned towards her. Using the towel, she cleaned vomit off of his mouth and chin, turning it inside out and mopping the sweat off of his shoulders and neck afterwards. She dropped it onto the floor, next to the puddle. At his continued silence, she huffed, annoyed. "Do you feel like explaining yourself?"

"I'm sorry," he said, eyes still shut and head facing down.



“What?”

“I’m sorry,” he repeated. “I-, I’m sorry you had to clean that up.”

“Well, you certainly weren’t going to.”

“And,” he continued, “I’m sorry that I hurt you with -, with the sandworm, and I’m sorry that you had to fix my mess in the Upperworld, and -”

“Lawrence -”

“And I’m -,” he felt himself begin to hyperventilate, trying to breathe as well as his body would allow him to, “I’m sorry I fuck up so much, and I’m sorry that -, that you always have to deal with it. I’m sorry that you had to have me as a son, and that I wasn’t better, that I didn’t try harder to make you proud.”

Unnerved, Juno watched as he continued, unable to stop himself.

“I’m so-, I’m sorry that I tried to replace you, I’m sorry I tried to be something I’m not, I’m sorry I abandoned you and the Netherworld, I’m sorry I can’t be a son you can love, I’m -,” tears burnt hot against his eyes as he spoke, trailing down his face, “I’m sorry for it, Mom, I’m sorry for everything you’ve had to put up with, and I’m sorry that -, that I’m here at all, that I couldn’t just be useful and get exorcised and make your life easier for once in -, in my fucking life.”

Across from his mother, he broke. Each breath was a knife to his ribs as he tried to find anything to keep him afloat.

She took notice of the way he cradled his right wrist, and took it into her own hand, looking it over. “Did you break this?”

He shook his head, furiously fast. “I -”

Instantly, she gripped it, unforgivingly tight, and he let out a hoarse shout. She dropped his wrist as quick as she could, and he clutched it close to his chest.

When he moved it, though, it didn’t hurt. There was no flash of pain, no nausea at all. “Did -,” he said, sniffing, “did you fix it?”

“Yes,” she said, simply.

He looked down at it, and back at her.

Lawrence launched himself at her, throwing his arms around her small torso and holding tight, not feeling her flinch beneath him. “Thank you,” he said, “tha-, thank you, Mom.”

She stared ahead, refusing to look at him, arms remaining at her side. “You’re welcome.”

“I love you, Mom.”

She said nothing, and after a minute, he drew his arms away. A giddy smile spread across his face, and even as his chest still shuddered, trying to regain some semblance of normality, his eyes were bright against the dark. Half-dried tracks still glistened on his cheeks in the remaining light.

“Can -,” he said, tapping his hand against his thigh, “can you take these off now?” He shook his wrists at her on the off chance that she didn’t understand his request. “I can’t-, I can’t sleep with them on and -”

“Lawrence,” she said, closing her eyes, “you need to keep them on for your own good.”

“But -, but I can’t sleep, and you know how I get when I can’t sleep!”

“This will help that,” she said, opening her eyes and resting a hand on each suppressor. “Soon, you’ll never have to sleep again.”

“Mom -”

“Lawrence, stop trying to get them off.” Standing up, Juno looked down at him, unimpressed.

“You need to get your abilities under control, and this is how we do that. It’ll make me happy to see you able to control them.”

“I want to make you happy,” he whispered.

“Exactly,” she said. “Now, I’m going to go speak to someone, and I need you to be quiet, do you understand?”

“Yeah,” he said, “yeah, I can do that; I can be quiet.”

“Good,” she replied, and made her way over to the door, staying clear away from the vomit on the floor. “Clean this up,” she added as an afterthought. “If you do, and do it well, you can join me at dinner.”

“I will!”

“I’ll be back in a little bit,” she said, “so be quick. Goodbye, Lawrence.”

“Bye, Mom,” he said, watching her close the door. He dropped down to the floor, grabbing at the towel and shifting over to the puddle.

*She didn’t reject my hug, he assured himself, she didn’t hug back, but she never does.*

*She fixed my wrist.*

*She -*

*She loves me.*

*Mom loves me.*

*Mom loves me, Mom loves me, Mom loves me, Mom loves me, Mom loves me, Mom loves me, Mom loves me, Mom loves me.*

The mantra continued for the rest of the night, a constant stream of affirmation, and his mind didn’t spare a moment of thought to the shirt discarded in the corner or the family in the Upperworld that gave it to him. Things like that, they didn’t matter, not anymore.

Not when Juno loved him.

## Chapter End Notes

jesus,,,

jesus fucking christ, y'all.

when I say writing this shit can get real uncomfortable, this? is the pinnacle of that. I wrote this chapter while cycling through my chem songs, and y'all can't even imagine the fuckin' mindspace I was in while blasting "the world is ugly" while writing this. glad I already cleaned my room + other shit bc this bums me the fuck out.

"i'm an angst writer, i'm an angst writer," I chant, alone in my room, trying not to hurl at my own writing.

speaking of vomiting - first time I've ever written a vomit scene! don't know if I should be proud or not tbh.

this is,,, the first single-scene chapter in the story. damn.

like something? hate something? want to see something happen? want to see me eaten by a sandworm? let me know! comments are great, especially when it's 1:45am and I have school in the morning! yeehaw!

as per usual, my tumblrs are always open! @strawberryicebreakers on main and @bisexualbeetlejuice for BJ-specific content. hit me up!

# pathways and penthouses

## Chapter Summary

in which adam and maria have a chat about the afterlife, and the deetz family discovers a certain ghoul's home front.

## Chapter Notes

content warning for discussions of suicide/suicide methods. maria and adam chat about how people end up in the netherworld, so the context isn't too bad, but it's there.

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

“Where are we going?”

“Back to the city,” Maria said, reaching down and slipping off her heels. “We’ve got to run.”

Adam looked at her, surprised. “Why? She doesn’t know we’re here; why can’t we just follow them inside?”

“You really don’t understand how this works, do you? You take one more step,” she motioned towards the stone walkway, “Juno will know, and even if she doesn’t, she’ll get the truth out of your wife soon enough.” She tossed her hair, irritated. “Follow me.”

“Barbara,” Adam said, pissed off at the implication the other woman threw at him, but walking away with her nonetheless, “would never give us up. She’s stronger than that.”

“Adam,” Maria said, staring ahead, “Juno’s a ruthless bitch. If she can reduce Lawrence to a shaking mess, there’s no way she’d be unable to get information out of a common ghost.”

“Speaking of, uh,” Adam said, trying to find the right way to phrase it, “speaking of her and Lawrence, what do you know about them?”

“Them?”

He nodded, stepping over a particularly large rock as he did so. “Yeah, Juno and Lawrence.”

“She’s our boss,” Maria said, “and they’ve been inseparable for as long as anyone can remember.”

“If you don’t mind me asking, Maria, when did you die?”

“Nineteen-fifty.”

“Oh,” he said, taken aback. “You’re still young, then?”

“Yes,” she said. “I died when I was twenty-seven.”

“How?”

Maria lifted up her wrists with a grim smile. “Take a guess.”

“Oh, shit,” he said, shocked. “I’m so sorry, I didn’t -”

“If you off yourself,” she said, chuckling to herself, “your job in the afterlife is to be a civil servant. That’s why Juno is at the head of it all; yes, she sliced open her neck, but she did it faster than anyone else. She’s had the time to build herself up to where she is today.” She ducked under a branch, barely avoiding the leaves. “I’ve always wondered how Lawrence died.”

Adam looked away, uncomfortable. “He’s a bio-exorcist, right?”

“Yes,” she said, “but they’re still filed under the governmental jobs, so he must’ve offed himself as well.”

“How, uh, how do you think he did?”

“I think he shot himself,” she said, blunt. “That, or poisoned himself. He doesn’t have any visible wounds like mine,” she shook her right wrist, “but then again, I’ve never seen him with his shirt off, at least under good lighting.”

*I’m going to ignore the implications of that*, he thought. “How would that look?”

“Poisoning victims have this spider web-type marking on their chests,” she said, pointing at the center of her sternum and spiraling out, “and gunshots just leave their mark. If you blew your head to shreds, you’d arrive in the Netherworld like that, but a chest shot wouldn’t leave too much of a mark if you knew what you were doing.”

“And you think he’d know what he was doing?”

“I think,” she said, “that, while Lawrence is many things, stupid is not one of them. He’s surprisingly intelligent on topics concerning his job, even if he still gets tripped up by math.”

“Was he ever educated, do you know? Like, in a legitimate school environment.”

“I’d assume so,” she said, shrugging. “Even if he died young, there’s an education system down here for those who pass over as minors.”

“That’s good,” he said. “It’s nice to hear that there are safeguards in place, even if I’m already done with all of that.”

“It is,” she said. “Too many children pass over.” She stayed quiet for a moment as leaves crunched under her feet while she continued to walk, searching for any way back to a main road.

Adam watched her, wary of the questions she’d been asking. As much as he thought she deserved to know, he knew that details as personal as Lawrence’s needed to be kept away until the man himself was there to explain.

“I do wonder, though,” Maria said, weaving around a tree trunk, “how old he was when he passed.”

“Why?”

“Well,” she said, “his documents were near-impossible to find, and even when I did get my hands on them, half of the damn information’s been redacted.”

“Can’t you just find it out on your own?” He peered at her, curious as he tried to figure out what she meant. “I mean, if you have them, can’t you just,” he stumbled, “un-redact them?”

With a sigh, she sat down on the stump of a tree, cut down long ago. “That’s not how it works, Mr. Maitland,” she said, unimpressed. “If the information is gone, the only person that would know would be his caseworker, and, because his case wasn’t already difficult enough, he doesn’t have one.”

“Caseworker?”

“In your case,” she said, waving a hand at him, “it would be Juno. My caseworker still lives in Argentina, but even with the distance, she’s the one in charge of my information.”

“Why do you think Lawrence doesn’t have one?”

“The only reason he’d lack a caseworker is if there were pre-existing circumstances that gave someone else authority over him, and frankly,” she said, staring at her hands, “I haven’t been able to figure out who that would be. It wouldn’t be Juno; if our boss had jurisdiction over us, I wouldn’t still have my original caseworker.”

Ducking his head, Adam hoped he was able to conceal his facial expression. Barbara always told him he had a shit poker face, and he didn’t want to give anything away.

“And,” she said, continuing, “the information itself would have to be something serious. Something that could ruin the reputation of a higher-up, or, God forbid, be a government conspiracy.” She laughed at the thought. “Could you imagine that? Lawrence in the center of some big cover-up?”

“Wild,” Adam said, voice strained. “That’d -, that’d definitely be something for the history books.”

“If it is a cover-up,” she mused, “Juno has to be involved, at least partially. I mean, she’s practically his mother with how close she hawks over him.”

He felt his eyes widen, but he still wouldn’t look at her. “Practically his mom, huh?”

“Yeah,” she said, and pushed herself off of the stump, dusting the dirt off of the back of her dress as she stood up. “That, though, would require someone willing to fuck the old bat, and I sincerely doubt anyone would.”

Adam sputtered, and Maria smirked at him, eyebrow quirked.

She continued on their earlier path. “You newly-deads are always such prudes,” she said, amused. “Once you’re down here for a while, you end up realizing that upholding old beliefs of promiscuity and dialect are worthless in the long run. Hey,” she said, hair flying as she whipped around to look at him, “want to know something fun?”

*Oh, dear.*

“Lawrence and I have had a bit of a contest ever since you all killed him,” she said, flippantly ignoring Adam’s cringe at the memory. “One of those body-count type ordeals. What’s yours?”

“My body-count?” He thought back to his twenties. “Five.”

Maria whistled. “Well, you get around,” she teased him, smiling. “Guess mine.”

“I don’t want to be impolite -”

“Just pick a number. I promise I won’t be hurt.”

“Uh,” he said, worried. “Eight?”

With a laugh, she shook her head. “Fifty-nine,” she said, watching his expression, “and if you think that’s bad, never ask Lawrence about his. He’s the only man I’ve ever met to be in the triple digits, and that’s just who he remembered to count.”

“Have, uh,” Adam asked, uncomfortable, “have you two ever -”

“Fucked?”

He nodded, not wanting to say it out loud.

“Yep,” she said, popping the ‘p’ as she drew the word out. “He’s been very needy ever since he came back.”

*Don’t think about that .*

“Why do you want to know?” She peered at him, curious. “Are you interested?”

“No,” he said, hurriedly, “no, my wife and I were just wondering -”

“Oh,” she smiled, “he’d definitely be up for the task. You two have nothing to worry about.”

“That’s -,” he stammered, face flushed, “that’s not at all what I -”

She cut him off, halting in her tracks and staring at something behind them. “Stop,” she said, and swift on her feet, Maria stepped around him, placing a hand on his shoulder to move him to the side.

He hadn’t even noticed the door when they’d passed it; its deep oak blending in with the trees surrounding it. “Why is it so far away?”

“I don’t know,” she mumbled, running a hand along its edge. It stood straight with no support, just a single door in the midst of nowhere at all.

“Do you think it’ll take us back?”

Her eyebrows knit together as she looked it over. “I think it’s the same as before,” she said, “so, logically speaking, it should bring us back to her office.”

“The door in her office wasn’t oak, though,” Adam said. “What if it doesn’t take us back there?”

She grit her teeth and grasped the doorknob, green fingers locking around it. “I guess we’ll have to take the chance.”

-

“Excuse me,” she said, weaving between the crowd, “can anyone tell me where twenty-year-old guys hang out?”

“Lydia,” Delia said, patience running thin, “you can’t phrase it like that.”

“There’s a club near Andean Heights,” a woman said, smiling down at her, “it opens in an hour or so. Check over there for your guy.”

“We are not going to a club,” Charles said. “Not with Lydia, at least.”

“You can’t leave me!”

“Lydia,” Delia said, “we aren’t going to leave you. We can’t split up down here.”

“We can come back and explore later. What we need to do,” Charles said, “is find Lawrence.”

“Where do you even think we should start?” Delia glanced around, trying to hold back her facial expressions as she took in the sights of the Netherworld.

Head cocked to the side, Lydia asked, “why don’t we just check his house? He mentioned that he had one.”

“How are we supposed to find out his address? It’s not like -”

Popping back into sight before her absence had even been noticed, she looked up at Delia. “Found it,” Lydia said.

“Where did you find his address?”

“Guy over there knew it,” she said, pointing her finger at a man, face bright blue. “All I had to do was ask if they knew where Beetlejuice lives. Guess he must be well known.”

“That’s probably not a good thing,” Charles said, cautious. “Where is it?”

“Some place on eighth street,” she said, passing him the card the other man gave her. “Why does he have his address on business cards?”

“Maybe business has been slow?”

“Charles,” she said, turning to her partner, “can you get us a taxi?”

“On it,” he said, ducking out of the crowd, moving towards the street.

As soon as he was out of earshot, Delia glanced at the younger girl, gravely serious. “Lydia,” Delia said, voice hushed as she kept watch on Charles. “I need you to understand something, alright?”

“Alright,” Lydia said, “what is it?”

“If something dangerous happens, I want you to stick with your dad.”

Lydia huffed, rolling her eyes. “Nothing’s going to happen, Delia.”

“It’s just a precaution,” she said. “If we get in a situation and it’s either me or Charles, you get him out of there.”

“Delia, I’m not going to just leave you -”

“Promise me, sweetheart,” she said, pleading bleeding into her tone, “promise me. You need to get yourselves out if something happens. I’ll figure out how to get back on my own if need be.”

“Delia -”

“Got the taxi!”

“Coming!” Delia took the younger girl’s hand in her own, leading them towards Charles’ voice and



all but throwing her into the car, sliding in beside her as Charles took the front passenger seat.

Lydia glanced up at Delia, confused. *What does she think is going to happen?*

“Where to?”

“I’ve got the address on a card,” Charles said, passing it to the driver.

“Oh, BJ’s place?” He smiled, stretching an arm behind him as he checked the rear of the vehicle. The hole in his shoulder stretched as he moved, a nasty injury on his right side. “I’ve got to say, you all aren’t his usual crowd.”

Lydia perked up, leaning forwards to hear him better. “What’s his usual crowd?”

“From what my coworkers’ have told me, guys that could throw him over their shoulders and women who could crush him under their heels,” he said, smirking. “That, or crying widows trying to get their beloved back down from the Upperworld.”

“Wait,” Delia said, “what? Does he, uh,” she stumbled, “does he bring a lot of people home?”

The driver chuckled, accelerating as the red light turned green. “Ma’am, are you new down here?”

“Oh my God,” Delia said, leaning forwards to look at Charles. “Do we have to give him the talk?”

“Oh, shit,” the driver said, eyes flicking up to look at her in the rearview mirror, “are you his mom?”

“Nope; I’m not giving him the talk,” Charles said, eyes closed. “I’m drawing the line there.”

“Someone needs to!”

“Ma’am,” the driver said, face flushed, “I -, uh, I didn’t mean to insinuate anything -”

“Does he know what a condom is?”

“He knows what a condom is,” Lydia said, amused.

“How do you know what a condom is?”

“I’m fifteen!”

“Delia,” Charles said, “can this wait?”

“You’re here,” the driver said, staring straight ahead.

“Oh,” Charles said, surprised, “that was quick. How should I pay you?”

“Just -,” he stammered, “just leave, sir. Don’t worry about it.”

Charles looked back at his family and shrugged.

“Wait,” the driver said, “could you, like, not tell him about this?” His knuckles shone as he gripped the wheel, shaking a bit in his seat. “‘Cause he’s a nice guy and all from what I’ve heard, but I really don’t want to start off on the wrong foot and -”

“You’re good, dude,” Lydia said, bemused. She cracked open the taxi door and slid out, Delia behind her. The moment Charles exited, the driver all but shot off, flooring it into the night.

The building loomed ahead of them, a stark pillar against moonlight that stretched into the night sky with every metal panel screwed into its structure. It was in the heart of the city, a makeshift D.C., and, even without an identifying mark beyond a simple sign, something about it set it apart from the buildings around it.

Inside, the lobby was massive, stretching out further than it appeared to be able to from the outside. A couple, with hair as white as the tips of her nails, sat huddled on one of the couches, murmuring words Lydia couldn't hear. Off to the side stood the receptionist's desk, and the receptionist himself watched as Lydia took it all in.

"First time?"

She broke out of her thoughts and turned, holding back a scream.

The man's entire lower jaw had been ripped to shreds, with the exposed muscle and teeth being the only way he could still talk. "Yeah," he said, smiling at her expression, "it must be your first time. Who are you here to see, darling?"

"I'm here to see Beetlejuice," she said. Saying the full name made her want to cringe.

"I don't believe he's in," he replied, eyeing her. "Why do you want to see him?"

"I'm his sister," she said, chin held high.

"What's your name?"

She paused, looking back at Delia and her dad, who had watched her dig herself into the situation. "Lydia," she said, "my name is Lydia Deetz."

The receptionist clicked through his laptop, scanning the screen. When he found what he was looking for, his eyes widened, but he maintained his composure. "You're good to go," he said. He pointed behind her. "Who are they?"

"My parents," she said, "and they're coming with me."

"Charles," he said, reading off of the screen, "and ma'am, are you Emily or Delia?"

"I'm Delia," she said, nervous.

"You're all cleared," he said. "Top floor, penthouse suite. Code's M1-2, if you have any issues, there's a call button in the elevator."

"Why did you need our names," Lydia asked, curious.

"Every tenant provides a list of those allowed in their apartment when they're out," he said, unconcerned. "His contains your group, Mr. and Mrs. Maitland, Emily Deetz, Maria Saud," he squinted, confused at what the screen showed him, "and one name that's been redacted by the system. Weird."

"Yeah," she agreed, "weird."

"Lydia," Charles said, "we should head up."

She nodded her head and followed her dad as they went to the elevator. It, like apparently everything else in the Netherworld, was larger on the inside, and their trio fit comfortably inside its walls. She clicked the button for the top floor, and when it prompted for a code, typed "M1-2" into

the keypad it provided. Satisfied, the elevator closed its door and began to climb.

“He put our names down,” Lydia said, “why?”

“Maybe,” Charles said, quiet, “he wanted to be there if any of us,” he took a breath, throat tight, “came down here unexpected.”

“Dad,” Lydia said, “he had Mom’s name down, too. Do you think -”

“He would’ve told us,” Charles said. “It’s the same precaution he took with our names.”

“What’s odd to me,” Delia said, “is that he hasn’t been down here since he started living with us, so if he added our names -”

“He added them when he first got back,” Lydia finished. “After I killed him.”

She thought about it, about Lawrence, bloody and broken but still thinking of them, still looking out for her even after what she’d done, after she’d taken his only chance at life away and -

“Don’t, Lydia,” Charles said, placing a hand on her shoulder. “I know what you’re thinking.”

“We hurt him, Dad,” she said, feeling heat build behind her eyes, “and he still wanted to help us.”

“I know, dear, but we need to focus right now,” he said. “If he’s home, we can explain everything to him in just a minute or so.”

With that, the elevator let out a light *ding!* and opened its doors. She ran out, immediately calling out into the empty room. “BJ?”

“Lawrence,” Delia said, voice raised, “are you here?”

Charles bypassed asking at all and went straight to searching the place.

The home itself was, in a way, unlike anything Lydia would’ve ever believed Lawrence’s home would be like. For starters, it was oddly clean; from what she could see, in this case, the kitchen and living room, everything had its place. There were pillows on the couch, the floor was clean, hell, there weren’t even any dishes in the sink.

“Is it weird to say that I’m proud of him?” Charles asked, a small smile on his face as he popped into the bathroom. “My apartment definitely didn’t look like this when I was his age. Delia?”

“In here,” her voice called out from a nearby room.

Lydia followed the sound and found herself in the master bedroom, which seemed to be the only place that broke the theme the rest of the penthouse shared. While it wasn’t dirty, per se, it wasn’t nearly as put-together as everything else. The sheets of the bed were tangled, wrapped between each other, with a pillow stuffed halfway underneath. Something about the room unnerved her, and a quick glance at the walls showed her why. Unlike the rest of the house, there wasn’t a single window in the room, only two doors, one leading to the bathroom, and the other to a closet.

Charles, who had come inside after her, opened the door to the closet. A few white shirts, buttoned up on hangers, hung from a rod, and shoes rested upon a shelf near the ceiling. He pushed some of the shirts aside, curious to see if there were any other clothes, and found something else. “Lydia, Delia,” he said, interested, “look at this.”

Lydia put down the picture frame she’d seen, containing a photo of Lawrence, Maria, and two

women she didn't recognize, back onto the side table and walked over. "What is it?"

"There's another door in here," he said, moving aside to show the women. It was oak, like the rest of the doors in the house, with a lock fitted over its handle to avoid it being opened. "I wonder where it -"

The sound of something hitting against it shocked him, and he pushed Delia and Lydia behind him. Rattling loud, the handle seemed to almost vibrate with its ferocity.

"What the fuck?" Delia yelled, keeping Lydia behind her. "What is he keeping in there?"

"Let us out!" a man's voice, oddly familiar, called.

"Who are you?"

"It's Adam!" The doorknob rattled again. "Maria's here, too. Why can't we get through?"

"I forgot about the damn lock," Maria's voice said, irritated. "I can't believe it."

"Maria," Delia said, "do you know where the key is?"

"It should be on the bedside table," she said, "in the picture frame."

Lydia rushed over, taking the frame in her hands once again and shaking it, feeling relief rush through her system as she heard a small object *clink!* against the frame. She slid the frame open, grabbing the key as soon as it glinted against the light, and put it back together, bringing it over to her dad.

Quick, Charles placed the key inside the lock, opening it. Almost instantly, the door swung open, and Adam tumbled through, Maria hot on his heels. "Where are we?" Adam asked, worried.

"Lawrence's bedroom," Maria answered, hand pressed against her forehead.

"Where have you guys been?" Delia asked, eyes widening when she noted the lack of a certain woman with them. "Where's Barbara?"

"She's with Lawrence," he said, but he didn't seem anymore relieved by the statement.

"Oh, thank God," Delia said, hand to her chest.

"Where are they?" Charles asked, face dark. "If they aren't with you, there's a reason why."

Maria glanced at Adam, and sighed. "They're with Juno," she said.

"Fuck," Charles swore, ducking his head. "How?"

"She must've gotten Lawrence, and we found one of these," Adam pointed behind him at the door, "in her office. We went through it, and she ended up finding Barbara. Maria got me out of there before any more of us got caught."

"Where do the doors lead?" Lydia asked.

"Juno's house," Maria said, frowning. "Straight to the belly of the beast herself."

"And," Lydia followed up, "BJ and Barbara are there?"

Adam nodded, solemn.

She scanned the room, checking to see where everyone else was in the room, and, realizing that no one could stop her, ran forwards, throwing open the door.

“Lydia -”

“I’m going,” she said, staring straight ahead, “and I’m getting my fucking brother back.”

With that, she stepped through into the dark, with the rest of the group close behind.

-

She found herself in the middle of a forest, with trees stretching into the air higher than anything she’d ever seen before. In the distance, she could see a large structure, its lights shining deep into the branches around her.

“Juno’s house,” Maria said from behind her, “in all of its glory.”

“What are we waiting for?” Delia asked.

“Nothing,” Charles replied, gaze locked onto the home ahead.

Lydia glanced at Adam, who nodded, jaw clenched. She stood ahead of them all, facing the house.

Juno’s house, the home of the woman who’d made one of the people she loved into someone who didn’t recognize love itself.

She was the reason Lawrence couldn’t recognize her actions as simple kindness, the reason why he thought every kind gesture would be taken away with one wrong word.

She’d ruined his life, and, once he’d managed to get away from her and find a real family with Lydia and her parents, was going to ruin it all once more.

*And she’ll know fear when she sees me* , Lydia thought, *when she finally pays for what she’s done.*

## Chapter End Notes

okay I am Sorry for dropping off the face of the earth for over a week lmao. life's busy and I've been tired bc I ate a fuckin curb in a burger king parking lot after one of my shifts at work. don't work at bk tho.

long story.

anywho one of my arms got scraped to hell, the soreness made me tired, etc. etc. y'know? the important thing is that I am Back, at least until I end up getting injured somewhere else. feel free to yell @ me for it on tumblr lmao.

one of y'all motherfuckers needs to hold me back before I write a killjoys fic. my old mcr phase is coming back with a Vengeance. five minutes away from crackin' open

my old comics [that, fun fact, I waited nine goddamn hours in the maryland rain for gway to sign] and losing myself in the 'verse all over again.

what they don't tell you abt writing long fics - having to go back for continuity purposes. ends up being "holy shit this is an amazing idea!" [checks past chapters] "well. back to the drawing board."

that + saving Certain things for the finale leads to a metric fuck ton of time needed to plot shit out.

speaking of the Finale, capital f,,, christ. it will not be easy to write.

also just a little detail - something I think is interesting [I say, about my own writing lmao] is that bj's sexual jokes [in terms of @ the characters themselves] have tapered off now that he thinks [at least, thought] of them as legitimate family. he's a lot of things, but he ain't oedipus rex

now I have the oedipus rex song stuck in my head. he really loved his motherrrrrrr!

this is such a niche reference but every time maria starts teetering close to figuring out the relationship between bj/juno it makes me think of van helsing serious face from overlysarcasticproduction's dracula video, but this time it's adam making the o\_o face and trying to keep his mouth shut.

also seeing other ppl's fics refer to miss a as maria makes me :')

bj and maria as fwb is a good compromise between the different angles I was trying to figure out for their relationship. might pop up again ;)

cab driver: heh let me joke abt this guy's sex life

delia: his fucking WHAT

cab driver: Shit.

every time i had to write that [blank] was bigger on the inside it gave me war flashbacks to my doctor who phase.

bj is currently giving me "creep" by radiohead vibes.

also, speaking of the b-man. this is the first chapter in the entire fic that doesn't have him in it! weird, right?

edit: aight holy shit creep Really fits bj. like,,, it's basically his anthem for the rest of the fic tbh. holy hell.

off topic but anyone else catch the new season of You on netflix? shit Slaps so hard I haven't finished it yet but seeing robin lord taylor again made me laugh bc his character is basically the penguin from gotham but blond and heterosexual.

like something? hate something? want to see something happen? want to see me eaten by a sandworm? let me know! comments are great, especially when it's two a.m. and I haven't updated in over a week and managed to slice open my foot two hours ago on a wooden plank. gross!

as per usual, my tumblrs are always open! @strawberryicebreakers on main and @bisexualbeetlejuice for BJ-specific content. hit me up!



## caution and confrontations

### Chapter Summary

in which barbara speaks with the matriarch, lawrence wears something new, and truth is a fickle mistress to deal with.

### Chapter Notes

happy new year, y'all!

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

As she paced along the floorboards of the room she'd been placed in, Barbara felt her patience begin to wane.

She wasn't sure how long she'd been inside the home of Juno, nor did she have any way to find out. There wasn't a clock in sight, and the room, what appeared to be a guest bedroom, had no windows to see daylight out of. The sparse decorations it did have, including a painting of an old shipwreck on one wall with a mirror on the other, didn't give any hint as to if the room had ever been lived in.

*Well, not lived in, per se*, she thought, rolling her eyes at the double meaning. *Can't really do that in the Netherworld.*

Walking around the bed, she stopped in front of the mirror, looking in. The outfit she'd chosen the day before everything had happened was still what she wore, a floral-patterned dress, with an area cut out towards the top to show the black velvet underneath, still clung to her, clean despite her time in the forest with Adam and Maria.

*Adam and Maria*, she thought, mind grasping onto the pair, *what happened to them?*

She could remember seeing Juno and her subsequent entrance to the house, but for all she tried, she couldn't seem to recall if they'd left. Granted, she hadn't exactly been able to look behind her, as Juno would've noticed, but she never heard them walk away, either, and after that, she'd had a more pressing matter to concern herself with, namely, finding Lawrence.

He was somewhere in the house, she was sure of it, but where he'd been remained a mystery to her. A small part of her had hoped that he'd come to her after Juno inevitably told him, that he'd try to break her out, reassuring her that he was here and that he was alright, but he hadn't. For all of the time, or lack thereof, she'd been inside, she hadn't seen hide nor hair of him, which concerned her more than anything else could've. Seeing him, even if he wasn't well, would be better than being kept in the dark about his condition, allowing her to think of all the states he could be in.

With jittery nerves, she combed a hand through her hair, gathering it atop her right shoulder before splitting it in two, shifting half over to her other shoulder as well. Looking off to the side, she tried to see if there was anything else in the room she could use to keep herself busy, when -



*Was that a scream?*

she dropped her hands to her side, snapping her head from side to side, trying to discern where it had come from. It stopped as quickly as it had started, a short burst of sound she knew she'd heard. For a moment, she could almost pass it off as something else, a simple odd noise coming from an old house, when a thud accompanied it, and she realized that it was coming from a room that couldn't be too far from her own.

*Lawrence*, she thought, a coldness spreading through her chest at the growing horror she felt, *that was Lawrence*.

Footsteps clicked outside of her door, hitting heels against the wooden floors, moving towards the noise. They paused for a second before moving once more, and she heard the door to a room shut with a *click*.

Voices, muffled by the walls to the point where every word was indiscernible, followed for the next few minutes, and while she couldn't hear anything clear, she could tell that there were two voices, no more, no less.

*Lawrence, she's talking to Lawrence, that piece of -*

The door opened, and the sound of heels returned, closing the door behind themselves as the woman walked away. Barbara expected for her to leave, to go wherever women like her spent their free time, and tensed when she noticed that their sound had dissipated before she'd even realized.

Without warning, she saw the handle of her door turn, and it swung towards her, surprising her. She took a step back on instinct.

"I'm sorry, dear," Juno said, "I meant to come by sooner, but I had an issue I had to deal with."

*Grit your teeth, Barbara*, she thought to herself. *Don't blow this.*

"It's alright, ma'am," she said, forcing a smile onto her face. "I was just admiring your home, at least, what I've seen of it so far."

"I'm glad to hear that," she replied, and waved a hand toward the bed. "Sit down, dear."

Barbara did as told, perching on the edge of the bed. She looked up, trying to seem docile in the face of the anger she felt begin to rise.

There was nothing that she saw that could link Lawrence to his mother, at least, not physically. While they were both on the shorter side, that's where any possible similarities stopped. He was soft, something you'd want to take into your arms and hold, where the woman in front of her was nothing but sharp edges that would cut into skin if held too close. Her eyes had none of the emotion Lawrence's held, as if she'd simply lost the ability to feel, and her hair was simply white. The most jarring difference, though, was the slit across her throat, half-hidden behind a string of pearls. Even with Maria telling her about it, it still shocked her to see in person.

"Now," Juno said, bringing her out of her reverie, "what is it that you want with my employee?"

"I -, *employee? Is that all he is to her?*" "I wanted to check in on him. He's supposed to be, uh, clearing my home of the living, but he vanished recently."

"I'm sorry, dear," she said, sidestepping her statement, "but I feel like I know you from somewhere."

If she still had blood coursing through her veins, it would've frozen with that sentence. "I don't know what you mean, ma'am."

She shook her head. "I must be mistaken," Juno said. "As for Lawrence, he was redirected to a more pressing issue."

*You're lying*, she thought, seething internally as she tried to maintain her composure. *You're fucking lying, I know you are.*

"Of course, I could always send another bio-exorcist to your location," Juno said, trying to placate her. "After all, they're a dime a dozen down here. It's a very popular profession, and it isn't exactly difficult, either."

"Oh?" She narrowed her eyes, curious. "I was under the impression that it was quite difficult. I mean," she said with a laugh, "I know I surely couldn't do what he does."

"You're mistaken," Juno said. "Now, his replacement -"

"I'm sorry, ma'am, but I don't want a replacement. I just want Lawrence back."

"As I mentioned earlier," she said, polite smile cracking, "he's busy at the moment."

"Well, may I speak to him?"

Juno took a breath, fixing the breaks until she had on a mask of polite indifference once more. "Of course. His home address is -"

"I've already tried that," she lied, playing up the role of a simple customer. "His landlord said he hadn't seen him recently, and told me to ask you instead. Said you knew him better than anyone else."

"Well, he is my top employee," she started, before being cut off.

"But he's more than that," Barbara said, pettiness seeping into her words.

*If she won't admit it on her own, she thought, I'll make her face it.*

"I don't understand," Juno said, feigning confusion.

"He is, though," she said, pressing the issue. "It's almost as if you two are family, from what I've heard."

Her eyes flashed, the barest hint of emotion she'd managed to coax out of the woman. "You're mistaken."

"I'm not," she said, "and you know I'm not."

The mask dropped, and Juno glared at her. "Be very careful with your words, dear."

"It just puzzles me," she said, "how more people haven't put the pieces together."

"With the pieces being -"

"You're his mother," Barbara said, staring at the other woman dead in the eyes.

Juno broke her gaze, glancing off to each side before taking a step back. Barbara stood up and

stepped towards her, unafraid to push whatever buttons she needed in order to find out what she needed to know.

“I mean,” Barbara said, a grim smile stretching across her face, “the signs are all there. He’s textbook neglect, acting out to try to find someone who’d care, and when you add that to the odd little powers and abilities he has, it isn’t hard to figure it out. Not many people down here could be his mother, and as you’re one of the most powerful individuals in the Netherworld, it only makes sense.”

Her eyes hadn’t widened, not quite, but alarm quickly made itself known on Juno’s face. “You’re quite the investigator, miss -?”

“Maitland,” Barbara said. “My name is Barbara Maitland.”

“Oh,” Juno said, breathless, “I know you, Miss Maitland. You were with that family, weren’t you?”

This time, it was Barbara’s turn to be alarmed. “I -”

“You were!” Juno laughed, throwing a hand in the air with a mix of exasperation and sheer relief. “You and your husband, you were with the breathers in the Upperworld.” She strode over to the door, chuckling to herself as she moved. “Whatever he told you, whatever Lawrence tried to convince you of, isn’t the truth. He’s dramatic.”

Barbara caught up to her, unwilling to give up. “You know, Juno,” she said, venom spitting from each syllable, “even if he was, even if only a sliver of what he said was true, it doesn’t make you any better. You never deserved to have a child, nonetheless someone like him.”

“I’m sorry?”

“You ignore him,” she said, finally letting her anger slip out, “you treat him like shit, and he keeps running back to you because he thinks you’re the only family he has. He loves you, despite the absolute Hell you’ve made him live through. You don’t deserve him.”

“Oh, and you do?” Juno sighed, irritated with the woman before her.

“Yes,” she said, feeling her voice crack under the word. “He deserves people who love him, who don’t act as if he doesn’t exist to begin with. For fuck’s sake, Juno, your own secretary doesn’t know he’s your son!”

“She can’t! She can’t know, none of them can! Do you have any idea what would happen to me if word got out that someone like him was my son?”

“Someone like him?” Barbara turned on her, face flushed in anger. “What are you trying to say, Juno?”

“He’s pathetic,” she groaned, running a hand through her hair. “He needs to grow up and stop acting like a child.”

“He wouldn’t act like that if you’d given him a childhood to begin with!” Barbara yelled, furious. “If you’d been a mother to him, if you’d cared for him and made him know that he was worth more than the space he took up, he wouldn’t have to act the way he does!”

“Oh, and you would’ve done something better?”

“I would’ve loved him!” Her voice came out as a screech, truth screaming into the air, clawing its way out of her heart. “If -, if I’d had a child, no matter who they were or what they did, I would’ve loved them! I wanted to be a mother, and -”

“I didn’t!” Juno cut her off with a snarl. “Did you ever consider that? I never wanted to be a mother, but I was, and I had to deal with it. I never asked for a son.”

“He never asked to be born!”

Silence coated the room, heavy and unrelenting as it draped over the women.

“He -,” she said, voice quiet, “he never asked to be born, but when you decided to keep him, when you gave birth to him, when you held him in your arms for the first time, you became his mother, and you had the duty of keeping him safe and warm and loved.”

Juno looked away, unwilling to see the woman in front of her, but the light of the room gave away what she tried to hide as it caught on her face, striking against her eyes.

She was crying.

“You failed him, Juno.”

“I never -”

“You ruined an innocent child and let him grow up into a man who never knew unconditional love, and you left everyone else to pick up the pieces of a heart he’d carried around for years, shattered beyond repair.”

“If I ruined,” she spat the word out, disgusted at it, “him, why does he still love me?”

“Because, Juno,” Barbara said, “because you’re pathetic. You let him think you love him, and he reciprocates what he thinks he sees. He’ll continue to do so because he wants to believe that the one woman he holds in the highest regard thinks of him as a son, and as much as we’ve tried to show him he’s loved, as much as my family has tried to bring him in as one of our own, a small, desperate part of him will always crave your acceptance, even if he’ll never get it.”

Juno stared at her, and, without a word, turned away, walking towards the door. She opened it, stepping out into the hallway, and shut it behind her with a quiet *click* as the lock turned.

When Barbara heard her walk away, she looked around the room, searching until she found the dresser. She ran a hand along its top, hoping, praying -

*Yes!* she thought, feeling the ridges of two bobby pins, the same shade as the dresser.

Pins in hand, she ran to the door and dropped to her knees. She hadn’t done this since college, but she figured that her lockpicking skills, honed by the curfew her dorm had placed upon her, wouldn’t fail her now. She didn’t know what to do if they did.

-

With the floor cleaned, Lawrence sat atop his bed, head crocked up as to be able to see the sky outside of his window. It was dark out, but some of the stars still shone bright enough, even in the Netherworld, for him to see.

“Lawrence.”

He flinched at the sudden noise, but turned around. His mother stood in the doorway, having opened it without him knowing. She held black fabric draped over one arm as the other held the doorknob. "I have something for you," she said.

He got up, walking over to her, not noticing the slight shake of her hand as she gripped the doorknob tighter as he got close. "What is it?"

"Clothes," she said. "You need to change out of whatever it is you're wearing now. There are shoes in the bathroom as well."

He looked back towards the empty closet. "But I -"

"I kept this one," she said. "Take it."

Lawrence took it from her, feeling the smoothness of the suit under his fingers. "Thank you," he said.

"I need to go to the office," she said in a rush, looking down at her now-empty hand. "I'll be back in an hour or so."

"Can I leave my room?"

"Yes," she said, "but you know the rules. No going in the kitchen, and no opening any door that is locked."

"Couldn't if I tried," he said, trying to joke. The weight of the suppressors held steady against his wrists.

"Goodnight, Lawrence," she said, turning on a heel and leaving.

With her gone, he stripped, sliding off the jeans he had on and replacing them with suit pants. He buttoned the shirt over his chest and pulled the suit jacket atop himself, leaving the room when he finished. Entering the nearest bathroom, he found the shoes she'd set out for him and put them on, tying the laces as best as he could. Finished, he stepped back, looking in the mirror at himself.

Pure black had never been his choice, he'd always enjoyed a bit of color on his suits, but if it was what Mom wanted him to wear, so be it. Besides, his hair, a neon, flaming green, was enough color for him to be happy.

Happiness.

He didn't think he'd feel it again after coming back home, but seeing her, having Mom treat him better than she had before, having her actually give him a suit, made him happier than he ever would've believed. Lawrence smiled, seeing his reflection do the same.

It was good to be back.

-

The lock gave way after forty-five minutes, give or take, and Barbara was finally free. She cracked the door open, glancing outside, searching for any hint of Juno, and when she didn't see her, she opened it further, taking a step outside.

*Find Lawrence*, she thought, *I have to find Lawrence. I need to make sure he's okay.*

She turned down the corridor, going in the direction of the noise she'd heard earlier. Two doors

marked the end of the hall, and, noticing the light was on in one of them, she opened the door to her right.

It was a bathroom, but it was empty, save for a hairbrush atop the counter. She flicked off the light switch and left, moving to look inside the other room.

The door creaked open as she pushed against it, and the first thing she noticed was the smell.

*Why the hell does it smell like -*

A shirt, crumpled in the corner, caught her eye, and she felt fear creep its way up her spine. Nearby, a pile of jeans sat, lying limp on the edge of the bed.

“Oh dear,” Barbara muttered, feeling her stomach tighten. It didn’t take a genius to figure out what had happened.

Below her feet, she heard footsteps.

“Lawrence?”

They moved about, having not heard her. She raced out of the room, feeling her shoes hit the wooden floor as she ran the length of the hallway, desperate to find a staircase. “Lawrence?”

The hallway led onto a balcony that overlooked the foyer, with twin staircases leading to the floor below. Hand on the rail, she rushed down them, trying to avoid falling as she went as fast as her feet would carry her.

On the ground floor, she looked from side to side, hair flying every which way as she moved. Deciding to search further, she walked ahead, going deeper into the house. The end of the foyer opened up into a large living room, but like the foyer, it was devoid of what she looked for, and she left, going down the hallway.

She passed a large kitchen, impeccably clean like everything else she’d seen so far. Opening the door, she looked around, searching for any sign of life. She looked through the fridge and pantry, moving some of the boxes around, trying to see something, anything, but it told her nothing. The cleanliness of it all unnerved her. So far, with the exception of what she believed was Lawrence’s bedroom, everything in the house was spotless to the point of looking as though no one had ever lived there. The walls held no paintings made by anyone other than revered artists, there were no photos depicting a family, and each room had the same shade of paint on the walls and the same floor as the rest of the house. The idea that someone had lived here for more years than she could even comprehend and hadn’t made a single mark on the house only added to her growing unease.

She heard footsteps once more, and for a second, she thought she saw a flash of black flit into a room far away. It was barely anything, but it was the closest she’d gotten to finding a hint all night, and she took the opportunity, running towards it. As she got closer to the room, she heard someone moving around inside, and she sped up, hope blooming in her chest as she made it.

Barbara stopped, hearing her shoes squeak as they dragged against the floor, and she opened the door. “Lawrence?”

The man inside turned towards her, curious. He wore monochrome black as if it was the only shade in the world, and she saw the lines of the suit crease as he moved to stand up. “Barbara?”

She rushed to him, throwing her arms around his body and pulling him in tight. “You’re alright,” she said, burying her head in his shoulder, “you’re alright.”

“How -,” he started, shocked, “how are you here? Why are you here?”

“I’m here to bring you home, Lawrence.”

He tensed under her grip, and before she noticed, he moved away from her grip, putting distance between them. “No.”

Her joy at finding him fizzled out, replacing itself with confusion. “No?”

“I’m -,” he said, crossing his arms, “I’m not going back there just to be sent back when you guys don’t want me anymore. I’m not dumb, y’know?”

“I never thought you were, Lawrence, but,” she fumbled over her words, “why would you ever think you were sent back on purpose?”

“Someone said my name, the name you guys knew me by, three times. I wouldn’t be back here if you hadn’t.”

“Lawrence,” she said, on edge, “that was an accident. Delia -”

“Delia sent me back?”

“Yes, but it -”

She watched as his hair shifted, bright green being overtaken by blotches of deep purple, staining his head until it was the only color present. “Delia sent me back.”

“Lawrence, she didn’t know what would happen, and -”

“It’s -,” he said, voice shaking, “it’s in the Handbook. Lydia read the Handbook, I saw her, and -, and she told Delia, and Delia said it because she’s -, she’s still mad at me and -”

“Lawrence!”

He squeezed his eyes shut at her scream. “Please -, please don’t do that,” he stammered, clapping his hands over his ears. “Please don’t.”

“Lawrence,” she said, voice soft, “I’m sorry, but you need to know it was an accident. No one meant to send you back here.” He wouldn’t look at her, and, with his hands visible, Barbara noticed the black cuffs around his wrists. “What are those?”

He opened his eyes and saw what she gestured at. “My mom put them on. They hold back my abilities so that I can’t do anything wrong.”

“Oh, sweetheart,” she said, reaching a hand out. When he didn’t move, she leaned forward, feeling the cool metal under her palm and seeing the skin underneath, rubbed red and raw.

“It’s for my own good,” he said, pulling his hand away. “I need to know how to function without them, and this is the best way.”

“Lawrence,” she said, “why are you wearing a black suit?”

“Mom gave it to me,” he said with a shrug.

“Why -,” she asked, “why are you calling her that?”

“Cause she’s my mom,” he said. “Why else?”

“You never called her that before,” she said. She looked up at him, taking note of how tired he looked. “Lawrence, what’s going on with you?”

“Nothing,” he said. “I mean, I threw up earlier, but -”

“What?” She put a hand on his chest, eyebrows knit in worry. “Why?”

“I broke my wrist, and the pain made me get sick,” he said, nonchalant.

“You broke your -,” she cut herself off before her voice grew loud. “How?”

“I got freaked out and tried to get these off,” he said, shaking his wrists for emphasis. “But I’m good now! Mom fixed it for me.”

The smile he gave her did nothing to make her feel better; if anything, it did nothing but prove that being here was fucking with his perceptions. “Sweetie,” she said, “you need to leave with me, and we need to leave now.”

“Can’t,” he said, “Mom’ll be back soon.”

“She’s gone?”

He nodded. “She left a while back.”

“Lawrence, we need to go,” she said, “and if Juno’s gone, that makes it easier. Follow me,” she said, gripping his forearm.

He ripped his arm from her hold. “Don’t grab me,” he said, “and I told you, I’m not leaving.”

“I need to leave -”

“Then leave!”

“And you need to come with me!” She stood her ground, unwilling to let him stay. “You need to be with the people that love you.”

“I am!”

“You aren’t! Lawrence, she doesn’t love you!”

“Shut up! Shut the fuck up!”

His voice grew shrill as he screamed, and she didn’t need to look at his hair to know what color it shone.

For the first time since he’d come back, Barbara felt afraid of the man in front of her. “Lawrence -”

“Don’t fucking call me that! You don’t get to call me that!”

“Lawrence,” she said once more, “whatever she’s doing to make you think that, it’s a trick.” She looked him in the eyes, pleading with him to understand. “Juno, your mother, she doesn’t love you, sweetheart.”

Barbara saw the hitch in his breath, and before she could stop him, before she could hold him close



to try to help, he pushed her out of the way and left, leaving the door open behind him.

Without a doubt in her mind, she followed him, but he was fast, even without his abilities helping him along, and he knew the house much better than she did. All she had to guide her was the sound of uneven breaths as she tried not to think about the fact that he was crying because of her.

As she rounded the corner, she found herself back in the living room, and she saw him pressed against the side of the fireplace, shoving himself in the small corner it made with the wall, head buried in arms he'd thrown around his knees, hands gripping his hair. Barbara took a step towards him, and as she did so, the *click!* of a lock echoed from the foyer.

*Shit*, she thought, and ducked away, trying to find somewhere to hide. The edge of a bookshelf caught her eye, suitably far enough away to not be seen, and she ran to it, hiding herself against it. She could still see Lawrence, and by extension, the rest of the room, but if she was lucky, Juno wouldn't see her.

Barbara heard the door open and close, followed by the sound of heels against wood once more. She kept quiet and hoped that there was still some part of Lawrence that knew she loved him.

If there wasn't, if he was well and truly gone, there was nothing stopping him from telling Juno that she'd escaped.

## Chapter End Notes

me in september: heh. I'll write a two-shot bj fic and post it. haven't written fic in months but why not?

me in january, seeing that this fucking fic is at the top of the search bar for hits/kudos/comments/bookmarks, wordcount is over 60k: what. the Fuck?

shit's wild, y'all.

my previous longest fic was 20k and had 46 comments. 46. compare that to this fic? it's fucking fantastically weird and I love everything about it.

saw the show again and just. god. it's so good y'all. i just ♥♥♥ at the thought of it. there's something really, really special about hearing the title of my fic sang aloud, and it's just. really nice. every time I listen to dead mom, that little line makes me smile bc it makes me remember this fic and all that's come of it.

anywho, bc I don't want to get too sweet on y'all

I may [key word - may!] have to tack on an extra chapter or so. I don't want to rush the ending [and besides, y'all don't deserve a shittily rushed ending] so it may be a bit more than twenty, but that's all up to how the writing process goes.

also just an odd little fact - I tend to answer comments in waves; i.e, I'll reply to chunks of comments every few days or so depending on how many there are, hence why it might take a bit sometimes! I try to get them all answered/replied to quickly enough tho!

there was originally a title I jokingly referred to as "journey to the centre of the

netherworld." the reason it's called that, though, is that in the original rough plot, bj wasn't brought down by accident at all. someone [alluded to by the line "There are a few guys who might try to start something, but they wouldn't be able to get up here unless someone summoned them, so I'm doubtful that they'd even make it here." from chp five] that would've came up and mentioned junio going rabid down below, and bj would've known he had to go down and stop her. cue a big dramatic ass scene of bj determined to go alone as to avoid anyone else getting hurt, and the deetz/maitland family shutting him down and telling him, in no uncertain terms, that he wouldn't have to do anything alone anymore.

obv that was too sweet of a scene and my inner angst addict decided to drive sad shit in instead. c'est la vie!

this chp was just. bleh. to write. starting it off was harder than I thought it'd be. barbara is easily my hardest character to write, funnily enough. bj is easiest, with delia next, then lydia, then charles. maria is a bit eh, it's all dependent on the scenario, and adam isn't too tough if he's with someone else, but barbara? she's difficult, mainly bc of her personality.

y'all know that screech-y sad part of "I'd give my life for you" from miss saigon? reminds me of barbara.

this entire chapter is fascinating to me. a woman who became a mother when she never wanted to v. a woman who was desperate to be one and never got the chance.

"Don't fucking call me that! You don't get to call me that!" that shit Hurt.

like something? hate something? want to see something happen? want to see me eaten by a sandworm? let me know! comments are great, especially when I'm finally having to go to school again after a two-week break. gross!

as per usual, my tumblrs are always open! @strawberryicebreakers on main and @bisexualbeetlejuice for BJ-specific content. hit me up!

# regrets and retribution

## Chapter Summary

in which the cavalry is called in and lawrence finally comes to terms with the truth

## Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

She isn't a stranger to regret.

It wasn't an easy thing to admit to herself, but she knew she wasn't perfect, that she had done some things that she'd always wish she hadn't, the kind of actions that kept her up at night, that made her wonder if she'd done the best she could.

Lawrence would always be her greatest regret.

It had barely been a year after she'd slit her own throat in a fit of pain and fear. She was still getting used to the Netherworld and all of its complexities, of how interactions with, at that point, the limited group of people she knew, would work in this new stage of existence, and in that group of people, in the thousands that she could've found, she met him.

Rigel was, in and of himself, beautiful. Brown eyes framed in a tan, symmetrical face atop a well-built body left her in shock that such a man existed. He'd died of a stab wound in his leg, leaving him with the limp that she'd first noticed, but even the injury, a hole twisted with red and black, was like a work of art to her. She was lonely, having come to the afterlife before any of her family, and he was there for her when she needed someone. It didn't take much for her to fall in love.

They discovered their new home together, asking whomever they could about anything and everything. The one thing she'd been told, the only concrete fact that her caseworker had told her, was that once in the Netherworld, her life, and any continuation of it, was over, but that didn't mean that she couldn't build a new life for herself instead.

She loved him, and he loved her, even when he shouldn't have. He loved her when she was sweet to him, when she called him "dear" and cooked his favorite dish, and he loved her when she wasn't, when her words became cruel and scraped rather than soothed him. She thought he would never leave.

He did.

Five months later, after her home had lost its other owner, five months that she spent in a haze clouded by the shitty wine she'd managed to buy with the money she'd earned from her job as secretary to her caseworker, she felt physical pain for the first time since she'd died. Her boss had brought her into the only hospital nearby, used only for the people that came down with injuries that could be aided or fixed, and she'd heard the words she never wanted to hear.

*"Congratulations, Miss Juno, you're going to be a mother!"*

She thought the nurse was lying, that it was some sick trick on her behalf. It was common knowledge that children weren't born in the Netherworld, that new life couldn't be grown and

nurtured where life itself didn't exist.

As much as she loathed it, the nurse had been right. She was sent home with a small bag of clothes, impossibly small, and instructions to not tell anyone what had happened.

The next month blurred by her as she stood, shocked, in front of her door, trying not to look at the abnormally large stomach she hadn't seemed to notice before, the way her dress didn't quite fit anymore, the seams of her stockings that pulled at thighs as they'd grown softer.

She called out of work, claiming family issues and hating the fact that it wasn't a lie.

Her third trimester started with what felt like a knife to the chest and another ride to the hospital. The staff brought her in, swaddling her in a hospital gown and setting her up on the best bed available. They told her that she wasn't to leave until she held the child in her arms, so to speak. She was trapped inside against her will when all she wanted to do was curl up into her own bed with one of the wine bottles Helen had given her after her first week on the job.

In her cell, she had time to think, to try and figure out what would be easy, what would be hard, and what she couldn't do. She thought that the hardest part would be the physical process of pushing the child out, but giving birth was the easy part. Naming him, Lawrence for her father, Betelgeuse for his, was the easy part.

The harder part was having a small, screaming *thing* bundled in a green blanket placed in her arms and knowing that it was hers, that she was responsible for it. It was being dropped back off at a house that had nothing in it for the child and feeling guilt at the fact that she hadn't been able to face reality and go buy something, anything, that she knew she'd need. It was holding it in one arm while she tried to clean her bedroom, brushing dirty clothes and stained napkins off of bedsheets to make room for the two of them. It was the fact that, for all she tried, it wouldn't stop crying.

For the first few months of existence, she'd thought its hair was purple and only ever would be. The first time it'd shifted, when she'd brought him to work with her, unable to find a sitter, and he'd placed a tiny hand in her inkwell before stamping it on the page she'd been writing on, smearing her words until they were a streak instead of a sentence, she'd sighed, closing her eyes as she tried to push back a headache, but a noise had made her look down.

In her lap, giggling at a black, sticky hand, was Lawrence, hair as green as the blanket he'd come home in.

From that day forth, she experimented with him when she had the time, testing out the shift of colors his hair would undergo as she tried to find out what they meant. It eventually clicked, though, that they were tied to his emotions, that green was happy, red was anger, blue was unhappy, and purple was sad.

She remembered the first time he came home from school in tears, saying that the other children had made fun of his hair, and she'd told him that, if he wanted them to stop, he'd need to learn how to control it.

He never even tried.

Being a mother was not part of who she was, but she made sure that he was alright. She bought him clothes when he outgrew his old ones, fed him when she ate, and made sure he went to bed on time. Keeping him stable was her top priority.

She wasn't blind. The odd little occurrences that would happen whenever he got emotional, the

broken cookie jar she'd stumble upon when she'd forgotten to eat for a few nights, the flickering of the lights, she knew it was because of him, and that his powers would only increase as he got older.

She kept him in check, tracking his limits and making sure never to exceed them.

She did what she had to do and nothing more.

The first time he'd tried to run, she'd found him in less than an hour. He'd been hiding behind the fountain, shoulders curled in as he tried to will himself to pass the property line.

In retrospect, she'd been crueler to him than he deserved, but he had to be taught that he couldn't act like that, not when he was who he was.

The rest of time passed them by, and they were all each other had, even when she'd wished it had never come to that. She moved up into her job, and with centuries of experience behind her back, she'd climbed to the top. Lawrence followed her and stuck with her as long as she'd let him.

It was fine enough for the both of them, the routine they had. Once every few years, Lawrence would get the urge to leave, and all she had to do was let him. Sooner or later, he'd always come back.

Until he didn't.

She'd pushed him into the living world after one too many close calls, desperate to teach him a lesson, but when a week passed without any sign of him, she grew worried, whether she wanted to admit it to herself or not. She'd planned to go up herself, to find him and bring him back, when something a bit more unexpected had happened.

The girl and her father had found their way to the Netherworld, and every breath they took mocked her, showing her that her methods weren't without fault. She hated them, and of course, they were the people that Lawrence had managed to attach himself to.

Finding him up there, alive for a mere moment before death, was the most defiant thing he'd ever managed to accomplish. With his death as a human, he'd lost everything that had made him remarkable. He wasn't a born-dead, he didn't have his abilities, and his hair was a simple brown.

He was just Lawrence, nothing more.

It disgusted her.

She never thought, though, that he'd actually try to hurt her, but a sandworm and the subsequent five months reassembling herself proved that theory wrong. She came back, just as she always had, and waited for him, only to have him flee, but even that didn't mean anything, not anymore. Not when she had her Handbook, a guide for the upper management of the Netherworld, not when she knew just exactly how she could get rid of the other family for good.

He was back where he belonged, back at her side, and she'd be damned if she let anything take that from her.

-

Back against the shelf, Barbara watched as the woman made her way into the main room, a thick brown book clasped in one arm. Across from her, she saw Lawrence, still huddled in on himself.

“Lawrence?”

He perked up at the sound of Juno’s voice, rubbing the back of his hand against his cheeks, furtively drying them as fast as he could. Pushing himself to his feet, he cleared his throat and smiled. “I’m right here, Mom.”

“Good,” she said, setting the book down on the coffee table. She seemed tired, yet determined to do something, keeping herself awake despite the exhaustion that painted her eyes. “You kept to the rules, didn’t you?”

“Yep!” His hair shifted, last shades of purple replacing themselves with a manic, bright green. “No going in the kitchen, no going in locked rooms. I was in the library for a bit before I came out here.”

Barbara saw him move over, drifting close to his mother. With her suit, red and white, along with his in black, they seemed almost regal in a way, an emulation of the old royals she’d learnt about in high school. She looked on as he moved over to her, shaky legs guiding him. Juno walked by him, going straight for the kitchen, and the second she was out of sight, Barbara followed suit, moving silently behind the pair.

“Lawrence?”

He still had that smile, the goofy, child-like smile that broke her heart to see. “Yeah?”

“Why is the door open?”

*Shit.*

She barely caught herself before she let out a noise of surprise, realization dawning on her. *She told him not to go in the kitchen*, she thought, *and -*

*and I went in. I moved things around. Everything’s different.*

*This isn’t going to go down well.*

“Are you lying to me again?”

“No,” he said, genuinely confused. “I didn’t -, I told you I didn’t go in there. I’m telling the truth.”

Juno walked through the open door, immediately noticing the differences. The boxes Barbara had left on the counter, the still-wet sheen of the sink, the light of the fridge that still hadn’t turned itself off, it all pointed to only one conclusion in Juno’s mind. “Lawrence,” she said, “I expected better.”

She saw the green drop out, replaced by an ugly flush of blue, tinged with white and purple. “I did what you asked,” he said, face hot, “I promise. I promise, Mom, I didn’t go in here. I know you d-, I know you don’t like me coming in here alone and I promise I didn’t.”

“Who else would’ve?” She turned to him, back to the door as she questioned her son. “The only other person here has been upstairs throughout the night. I know that for a fact.”

“How?”

“They’re locked in,” she said. “Now, Lawrence, you know the consequences of going in here without me. They won’t change, but if you’re honest with me, it might go by a bit easier.”

"I didn't -, I didn't do it!"

"Lawrence," she said, sighing, "it does nothing to help you when you lie to me."

"But I -," he started, but cut himself off, and with a cold feeling in her chest, she realized why.

*Shit.*

He was looking directly at Barbara, eyebrows knit together as he tried to hold himself in one piece. All he could do was stare at her.

"Lawrence?"

"I'm sorry," he said, quiet. He dropped his gaze down to his shoes, scuffing them against the floor.

"For?"

"Lying," he said. "You're right, I -, I'm the only one down here, and I -, I couldn't stop myself. I'm sorry, Mom."

*He's covering for me,* she thought, surprised. *He doesn't want her to know that I'm out.*

"Your honesty would've been appreciated more if you hadn't lied first, Lawrence," she said, impatient. "Go to your room."

"But -"

"Go to your room." She took a step forward, a silent threat as she watched him. "Now."

Something inside of him snapped.

*No, not snapped,* she thought, *but something clicked. Something that hadn't ever clicked before.*

She saw him set his jaw, muscles tight under skin. He closed himself off further than she'd seen him, unwilling to let Juno get to him. "No," he said.

Juno stilled, and Barbara felt anxiety creep up her spine. *This can't be good.*

Turning on a heel, his mother looked at him, curious. She stood with a graceful sort of danger, poised as ever, but with a gleam in her eyes, a small amount of emotion, present beneath the surface she created of indifference. Moving over to the cabinet, she pulled out a delicate glass and a small, dust-coated bottle. "Lawrence," she said, calm as she poured herself a drink, "I'm going to ask you to reconsider whatever it is you're planning."

"Do you love me?"

The glass cracked under her grip. "We've been through this -"

"I need to know," he said. He stood tall, shoulders back, pushed out instead of curling in. "You keep treating me like I was when I was a kid. Did you love me back then?"

"I -"

He rounded on her, unforgiving, but unnerving in his tone. For the first time, he wasn't angry, nor was he sad, confused, or overwhelmed. He was just -

done.

“Did you?”

“You know I care for you, Lawrence,” Juno said, and for the first time since she’d ever seen the woman, she looked nervous. She hadn’t even attempted to clean up the glass, instead choosing to keep her gaze on her son.

“Do you, though?”

“Of course, you’re my -,” she stopped, swallowing the words. “You’re my son.”

“You never acted like it,” he said, quiet. “A millennia, Mom. You had a millennia.”

““Had?””

“Yeah,” he said, ““had.””

“What changed?”

His gaze flickered over to Barbara, brief, before locking back onto Juno. “More than you’d ever imagine.”

“Is this about that family in the Upperworld?” She sighed, pressing a hand to her forehead to stave off a building headache. “I told you, they don’t understand you, Lawrence, and they never will. They don’t know what it’s like to be like us.”

He twisted one of the suppressors around his wrist. “They don’t,” he agreed.

“Thank you,” she said, relieved. “Now, can -”

“You don’t either,” he said. “You don’t know what it’s like to be me.”

“I don’t have to,” she said.

“You say that,” he said, growing louder, “but then you do shit like this.” He held up a wrist, face a mask of neutrality.

“I do that for your own good, and you know that. I do that because I -”

“Say it.”

“I -,” she said, and stopped. Reluctantly, she closed her mouth, staring at him.

He raised his eyebrows at her, a sad smile twisting his mouth. “Didn’t think so.”

“And what is that supposed to mean?”

“Y’know, after all of these years, I thought love didn’t even exist,” he said, chuckling, “or at least, if it did, I didn’t deserve it. I’m bad, right? A big, bad demon born from the biggest and baddest of them all. Demons don’t get to be loved, you told me, but that’s not the truth.”

She stayed silent, and from her place in the shadows, Barbara did the same, hesitant hope in her chest.

““Cause Dad, he loved you, and if he’d ever gotten to know me, I think he’d love me, too.”



“Don’t bring him into this,” she said, voice low.

“But I never got that. I never got to know him; I don’t even know his damn name, but at this point, I don’t really think I need to, at least, not anymore.” Sliding off the suit jacket, he draped it over his arm. “I found a different family, one who said they wanted me. I didn’t believe them, not at first. Honestly, I don’t think I ever will.”

“They wanted me, but not like you do. They didn’t just want the power and prestige that comes with who I am; they wanted the ugly parts, too. They wanted the parts of me that you don’t, the sadness and the glee and the anger and the depression, they want all of it, because they want me, Mom, and when they told me they loved me, I didn’t believe them. I didn’t think I deserved it.”

He coughed, wet as he tried to get rid of the thickness in his throat. “I still don’t. I’ve done some shit to them. I tried to kill Barbara, I married Lydia, but even after every other fucked up thing I put them through, they still say they love me, and if that’s what they want to believe, I won’t deny them that. Not anymore.”

“What are you saying, Lawrence?”

He smiled at her, finally feeling the courage to say what he’d decided. “I’m leaving, Mom, and I don’t think I’m coming back.”

“Don’t pull this shit again,” she sighed, unhappy. “Do you really want to try to do this again?”

“Yes,” he said, stern. “I’m a grown man. I can make my own decisions, whether you like it or not.”

“I won’t let you,” she said. “I’m not dealing with it when it all comes crashing down.”

“If it does,” he said, “I’ll handle it myself. I don’t need you anymore.”

“Don’t say that,” she said, taking a few steps towards him. “Don’t say that, Lawrence.”

He turned away from her, back facing Juno. “I’ll find a way to get these off,” he said, nodding down at his wrists, “and I’m leaving the Netherworld, at least for the time being. I need to make sure they’re okay.”

“Lawrence -”

“Mom,” he said, “don’t. Just don’t.”

Distantly, Barbara heard the click of a door open, but she couldn’t tear her attention away from the scene in front of her. Lawrence’s eyes were closed as he tried to steel himself, to avoid falling into everything again. As he moved to leave the kitchen, Barbara watched as he faltered.

Behind him, Juno fisted her nails into the back of his shirt, puncturing the fabric and leaving small scrapes in his skin. “You’re not leaving.”

He jerked forward, trying to pull himself free. “Let me go, Mom.”

“No,” she said, gripping even tighter. “You need me, Lawrence. I’m all that you have, and as much as I hate to admit it, you’re all that I have. We need each other.”

“Mom -”

“I love you.”

He froze in his tracks, and the momentary stop was enough for her to pull him fully back to her. She placed her other hand on his bicep, digging her grip into the cloth that covered him.

From behind her shoulder, she felt a smooth hand upon her, gently bringing her behind the newcomer.

“Let me handle this,” Maria said, quiet.

Barbara barely contained a squeak but managed to stay silent as she looked behind her.

Adam stood at her shoulder, with Lydia next to him, shaking in anger. Charles and Delia weren't far behind, but kept each other in check, knowing that directionless rage wouldn't be able to solve anything. When she looked back at the green woman, she noticed a thick, leather-bound book clasped in her right hand, resting against her thigh.

*The Handbook? Why -*

“I'd suggest you take your hands off of him,” Maria said, voice cold as she stepped into the kitchen. She held her head high in front of her boss, uncaring of the consequences she knew she'd face if this went wrong.

“Maria?”

“Yeah,” she said, “I'm here, Lawrence.”

Juno noticed the book she held. “Put that down, Miss Saud; it's nothing like the Handbook you use.”

“Oh, I'm counting on it,” she said.

“Is this it?” Juno asked the man in her hold, pissed off. She dropped her grip on him, watching him to make sure that he didn't try to move as she spoke. “Did you try to convince someone to come save you?”

“He didn't,” Lydia said, marching into the light, taking her place beside Maria. “We came on our own.”

“We came because we want him to come home,” Delia said, joining the other women. Charles and Adam did the same, until their unit, their odd little family, could be seen.

“Oh, for Christ's sake,” Juno said, turning to face the teenager, “are you all really that intent on making him leave me?”

“Not everything's about you, you piece of shit,” Lydia snarled, taking a step forward. “I want my brother b-”

*crack!*

Lydia stumbled back, holding a hand up to her cheek. Her skin burnt red under her palm. Behind her, she heard her family shout.

“Never address me like that again,” Juno said, sneering at the girl. “Show some respect. When you come down here, my favor could mean the difference between Heaven and Hell.”

Delia walked forwards, pushing Lydia behind her, but not looking at her; instead, something behind Juno caught her attention. “Lawrence?”

Lawrence looked up at her, and his hair burnt red in the light as he stared at Juno. "You hit her."

"She's just a -"

"You hit her," he said, growing louder with each word. "You hit Lydia."

"Lawrence -"

"Barbara," Adam said, hand on her wrist, "step back."

"You did whatever you wanted to me," he said, the edge of a growl seeping into his voice. "You yelled at me, you screamed at me, you made me hate myself, but you hit her."

The sound of something sizzling, mixed with the scent of burning flesh, made Barbara sick to her stomach. She looked, trying to find the source of it.

The suppressors, cinched onto Lawrence's wrists, began to glow a deep red, matching his hair. They held tight for a moment, trying to do what they were made for, until it was too much for them to handle.

With a quiet *pop!*, they opened, falling off of his wrists and clattering to the floor, leaving twin welts deep in his skin. He rubbed at the wounds, getting a feel for them. Lawrence watched Juno, watched her every move, and saw as she tried to edge away from him.

"Look at that," he mused, "turns out, just like everything else, these can be broken. Crazy how that works."

"Lawrence, whatever you're planning," Juno said, hastily trying to appease him, "you'll regret it."

"I just want to go home," he said, "and I don't think I'll ever regret that."

"You're not going to -"

"No." He felt Lydia's hand on his elbow, Delia and Charles' hands on his shoulders, reminding him of what he is and what he isn't. "I'm not going to hurt you. I'm not you, Juno."

"Lawrence -"

"I think we should leave," he said, looking down at his makeshift family. "I'm sorry about your cheek, Lyds."

"It's not your fault, Beej," she said, trying to give him a smile. "We'll get fixed up back home."

"I've got gauze in the first aid kit in my bathroom," Delia said. "I won't let my kids walk around injured if I can help it."

"Your kids?"

Delia turned around, smile dropping off of her face.

"Last time I checked," Juno said, a cruel smile on her face, "Lawrence was my son. He'll never be yours."

"I'm sorry?"

Maria stepped forward, eyes narrowed. "I'm sorry," she repeated, facing down Juno, "Lawrence is

your -?"

"She's my mom," Lawrence said, "but it doesn't matter anymore, Maria, just -"

Cracking open the book in her hands, Maria found the page she'd already marked when she first found the book in the house.

"Miss Saud, you don't know what you're playing with."

"Shitty bosses are one thing," Maria said, voice cold, "they happen to everyone. Sometimes, they're even justified. This?" She gestured at Juno, at the welts on Lawrence's wrists and the fading mark on Lydia's cheek. "You don't get to be forgiven for this." She glanced down at the paper and began to murmur, slowly reciting the words she read.

At first, what she was doing wasn't clear to the family, but once Juno froze, eyes wide as the realization dawned on her, it was apparent.

"Exorcism," Lydia said, recalling what she'd heard months ago.

"Death for the dead," Lawrence finished, staring at his mother.

Maria looked back at him, serious. "Tell me to stop and I will," she said, "but if I do this, she never hurts anyone else again."

Frozen, all Juno could do was watch her son. He took a breath and felt Lydia take his hand, squeezing it, trying to be there for him, to reassure him that he wasn't alone.

With her,

and Delia

and Charles

and Barbara

and Adam

and Maria,

with all of them, he'd never be alone again.

Lawrence nodded.

"Thank you," Maria said, and book in hands, finished, bringing the chant to an end.

Juno closed her eyes, refusing to scream, to show any level of weakness, and quietly, she felt herself begin to dissipate, dissolving until all that was left was a pearl necklace, no longer strung 'round her neck, but falling to the floor, hitting the wood with a *thud*.

## Chapter End Notes

okay yes i am Well Aware it's been over a week do not merc me i've been busy!  
worked four days in a row out of five school days, had finals/unit

tests/quizzes/summatives in general. have not had time to write. or sleep, tbh. very busy and not in a fun way. :P

this chapter fuckin. ugh. to write. endings r like that.

juno pov was,,, interesting to write. felt like she deserved one, and I hope it was interesting for y'all!

every writer has that One Artist they listen to an awful lot while writing and if any of y'all can guess mine I'll be shocked. don't think I've mentioned him in my notes yet but his songs come up, esp during the sad/serious chaps.

also I am being unwillingly pulled back into gotham hyperfixating, which is Painfully Evident if you follow my main blog. listen. listen. seeing rlt in you s2 shocked me and now I want to see my penguin runnin' gotham again. also there's this one fic called redacted that crosses over w/ john wick bc rlt plays the administrator and just. ugh. it's perfect and I love it sm.

I've got an article due for a magazine like,,, tomorrow that I Have Not Started. cannot focus. at all, babey!

lookin' at it all though tbh like. that's a legitimate problem for me. fuck it we ramblin' in my authors notes but at this point y'all are in too deep for this to be unexpected but like. attention spans? either short as frodo or weeks long. but in aplan today it made me laugh bc we did a socratic seminar and like we had these chip things to keep track of who talked to make sure everyone did and my teacher was like aight y'all don't fuck with the chip things they r loud and my dumbass just. kept fiddlin w/ 'em. at one point they fell off my damn desk and the chick next to me laughed and was like "sherrie yr literally one of the smartest people I know and you're fuckin with the chips"

I ordered like a forty pack of those lil animal mochi fidget things and? heaven. gives me something to mess w/ when I can't focus bc Gotta Move.

also I Need to study for precalc but. I also know that I will Not focus on that unless I bang this chap out first. thank my fickle focusing tendencies.

like something? hate something? want to see something happen? want to see me eaten by a sandworm? let me know! comments are great, especially when it's almost midnight and I still haven't showered or studied for precalc! Fuck!

as per usual, my tumblrs are always open! @strawberryicebreakers on main and @bisexualbeetlejuice for BJ-specific content. hit me up!

## families and finales

### Chapter Summary

in which a family returns to the world of the living, and Lydia tells her story.

### Chapter Notes



See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

No one ever told him how hard it would be to say goodbye.

It's silent when the pearls fall to the floor, and the silence remains when he bends down to pick them up. It's silent when he thinks of the shirt, still crumpled in the upstairs bedroom, and it's silent when Delia takes his arm, her hand laying atop matte black fabric that he hadn't worn in years.

Lydia, as young as she is, was the force that broke the silence around them. "I think," she said, her hand still holding tight to Lawrence's, "that we should go home."

-

All Delia wanted to do is take him in her arms, to hold him, to make him feel better, but she knows that any press on the wounds he carries won't stem their flow - they'd sting.

She wanted to let him stay, to have him collect himself enough that she won't be terrified that he'll break, but they don't have time.

"I think you're right," she said, gentle, "we need to leave before anything bad happens."

"How do we even get back?" Adam asked. "There's not exactly anyone up there that could summon us."

"If we go back to my office," Maria said, "I can get you all back to the Upperworld."

"How?"

"I have my ways," she said, blunt, "and now isn't the time to go into detail about them."

"Thank you, Maria," Charles said. He turned to the rest of his family. "Do what she tells you."

Maria smiled at him. "Just follow me."

-

She took them through the forest one final time, careful as she stepped between rocks and twigs in

her heels. Holding a hand up, she had them stop behind her, and she turned to Adam for confirmation. “This is the first one we went through, correct?”

“Yeah,” he said, “it’s the one.”

“Go through it,” she said, opening it for them. “Someone will be there to help you up. I need to stay behind, but I promise you’ll be able to go home.”

“Maria, I -”

“Don’t,” she said. “Someone needs to explain everything to the police, and I don’t want you all to be stuck down here for longer than you need to be. Go.”

“Thank you again,” Charles said, “for everything you’ve done for my family. If you ever need somewhere to hide out, my home is always open.”

“I just wanted to help out a friend,” she said. “Speaking of which, Lawrence, a word?”

He nodded, and Lydia let go of his hand.

Away from them, Maria whispered to a silent Lawrence, unable to be overheard. When she finished, she pulled him towards her, gripping him tight for only a moment before letting him go.

Lydia took his hand immediately once he was close enough. “Ready?”

He nodded.

The Maitlands went through first, closely followed by Delia.

Charles motioned for his children to go before him. “Just in case,” he said. “If anything happens, I’ll have your backs.”

-

The office was quiet, devoid of any workers barring one man dressed in what could only be described as the sleaziest suit Charles had ever seen. He tapped a foot, checking his phone with a fervent energy about him. Charles cleared his throat.

“Oh, shit,” he said, dropping his phone. He bent down, swiping it back up. “You’re the -, uh, the Deetz family?”

“That’s us,” Delia said. “Who are you?”

“Call me Sean,” he said, holding out a hand. No one shook it.

“Maria called you?”

“Yeah,” he said. “I’m her way of getting to the surface, which y’all apparently need.”

“Why do you do this for her?” Lydia asked, curious. “Are you guys friends?”

“Friends?” He laughed at the idea. “God no, she hates me. I owe her a favor,” he trailed off, “or thirty-five.” Hands clasped together, he smiled. “Eh, who cares about the specifics? Anyways, I -”

He stared at Lawrence, eyes wide.

“Holy shit, is that Beetlejuice? Dude,” he said, astonished, “no one’s seen you in a month!”

“He’s been with us,” Delia said, attempting politeness. “And he’ll be with us for the foreseeable future as well.”

“How did you manage to domesticate him?”

“Lawrence isn’t an animal,” Barbara said, offended. “No one ‘domesticated’ him.”

“Goddamn,” Sean said, head cocked to the side, “they really have you whipped.”

“Sir,” Charles said, voice tight, “can you please just let us go back up?”

“Right, right,” he said, rolling his eyes. “Who gives a fuck about my queries?” He sighed, reaching into a pocket and pulling out a pen.

“All we had to do was draw a door?” Adam asked, irritated.

“Nah,” Sean said, smirking. “I work with the Department of Transportation here in the Netherworld.” He walked over to the nearest desk and slammed his foot against it, holding in a laugh when the family cringed. Instead of crying out in pain, though, he just smiled as a low *clang!* echoed in the room. “Fake feet. Legs, too,” he added. “Car accident took ‘em both, but I got hooked up with these when I came down.”

“I’m sorry,” Barbara said.

“Don’t sweat it, sweetheart,” he said. He uncapped the pen. “Now, while the normals down here use doors to get down here, they never realize that. If you know your shit, you can use them to get anywhere you need to go. Observe!”

He drew the basic outline of a door, even adding in the doorknob, and stopped. “Where are you all trying to go?”

“Our house,” Charles said. “It’s in Connecticut.”

“Deetz household, Connecticut,” he repeated, scribbling out the words on the door with a speed that blurred the plaid pattern on his suit jacket. “Anything else specific to the place? Helps make sure you’re going to end up where you need to be.”

“There’s a model in the attic of the town,” Barbara said.

“Two cars in the driveway,” Charles added, “and a library upstairs.”

“Got it,” Sean said, drawing out the aforementioned features. He stood back to admire his work.

“That’ll bring us home?” Delia asked.

“Yep,” Sean said. He leaned forward and knocked thrice on the door, waiting for it to open before he stepped back. “Your nonstop ride to Connecticut awaits!”

-

The door let them out into the hallway between the foyer and the kitchen. Once the last person was out, it sealed itself shut, not even leaving a mark of its outline as it disappeared.

Before anyone could stop him, Lawrence walked away, going upstairs and out of sight. Lydia tried to follow him but was stopped by a hand on her shoulder.



“Let him go,” Charles said, even as his own body, poised to run after the other man the second he thought he had to, betrayed him.

Lydia looked at him, concern written across her face. “He hasn’t said a word since -”

“I know,” Charles said, “but this is one of the things he needs to come to terms with on his own. He might -, he might lash out if you say the wrong thing.”

“He’s in a very vulnerable mindset right now, Lydia,” Delia said. “You’ve got to be delicate with him.”

“When will he be okay again?” Lydia asked, worried.

“I don’t know, dear,” Delia answered. “He might not ever be.”

“But she was horrible to him!” Lydia groaned, frustrated. “Wouldn’t he be happy she’s dead?”

“No matter how bad she was,” Charles said, “he’s still going to miss her. It’s complicated.”

Distantly, the noise of water running through the pipes began to grow.

“We’re going to stay up for a bit,” Charles said, “just in case. If anything happens, come get me, alright?”

“And we’ll be in the attic,” Adam said, “the same goes for us. If he starts to get bad, you know what to do.”

“I promise I’ll get someone if something happens,” Lydia said, “but I think he’ll be alright. I’ll try to talk with him about nice stuff tonight, take his mind off of everything.”

“Please be careful,” Barbara said.

“I will,” Lydia said, trying not to feel offended at their lack of confidence. *BJ wouldn’t hurt me.*

The adults all looked at each other, wary. Right as Charles opened his mouth, Delia swore, cutting him off.

She stared at her phone, finally seeing the date after it wouldn’t turn on in the Netherworld. “It’s Friday night?”

“It appears so,” Charles said, checking his phone. Dozens of notifications began to pour in, everything from calls from Lydia’s school about absences to his coworker asking where he was lit up his screen. “This will be a wreck to deal with.”

“At least Lydia doesn’t have school tomorrow,” Delia said.

“You guys can go deal with that,” Lydia said, shooing them away. “I’ve got everything under control on the BJ-front.”

With one final worried look, they finally went upstairs, Maitlands following. Alone again, Lydia made her way to the kitchen in search of a snack.

She opened the refrigerator, checking to see if there was any Vanilla Coke left from when her dad bought some on Monday, and saw white takeout containers taking up the majority of the top shelf. Cracking open a lid, she realized it was the Italian food that had been wisely put away before Charles had gone upstairs nights ago.

Finding her's and Lawrence's boxes, she put them in the microwave, heating them up as soon as she heard the shower stop. She grabbed two cans, placing them on the counter as she waited.

She took them out when she heard the chime of the microwave, and went to grab forks. Arranging everything as nice as she could, she took a container in each arm, balancing the cans on top, and headed towards the stairs.

In front of his door, she stopped, shifting a bit so that she could knock.

"Hey, BJ?"

When she didn't hear an answer, she continued.

"It's Lydia," she said. "I'm going to come in, okay? If you want to be alone, just say so, and I'll see you in the morning instead."

Still, silence.

The doorknob was cool under her skin as she twisted it, opening the door. "BJ?"

Lydia couldn't see him anywhere in the room, and a quick look showed her that the bathroom was empty as well. She almost turned back to call for her dad or Delia before she felt a cool breeze on her skin.

The window was open.

"Damn," she said, looking down at the boxes before getting an idea.

She ran out of the room, making her way to the staircase that led to the attic. Without warning, she burst into it, much to the Maitland's shock.

"Lydia -?"

"Everything's fine," Lydia said in a rush, "I'll be on the roof. Don't tell my dad!"

"I really -"

She threw open the roof door, hidden amongst the bookshelves, before either of them could stop her, and shut it behind herself as quiet as she could. Taking a step onto the roof, she looked around until she saw him.

"BJ?"

He sat facing away from her, head tilted up to the skies above. His hair matched the night, black through and through, and he wore a simple gray t-shirt atop black joggers.

She walked towards him. "It's kind of cold up here."

He didn't say a word.

Lydia sat down next to him, carefully placing the boxes to make sure that they didn't slide off the roof. "You okay?"

"Did -, " he said, clearing his throat when it caught on the word, "did you know that Betelgeuse isn't just my name?"

She stayed quiet, waiting for him to finish.

“It’s the name of a star,” he said, voice hoarse. “It’s -, it’s the second-brightest star in Orion.”

“That’s interesting,” she said, carefully choosing her words. “Do you know which one is the brightest?”

“It doesn’t matter,” he said. He coughed, wet, as he tried to chuckle. “All that matters is that I’ll never be first, right?”

“BJ -”

“And -,” he said, “and that’s just constant proof, huh? I was never going to be good, or at least, not good enough for her. I’m not nice enough, powerful enough, small enough, I’m -, I’m never going to be what she wants.”

“You’re enough for me,” Lydia said, quiet.

He stopped in his rant, wide eyes looking at her. “What?”

“You’re enough for me,” she repeated. “Beej, you’re exactly how I want you to be. You’re enough for me, and for Dad, Delia, Barbara, and Adam, too.” She looked him in the eyes, pleading with him to realize what she was saying. “You’ve always been enough for us, and you always will be. What she wanted doesn’t matter anymore. It never did.”

“It doesn’t matter,” Lawrence said, “it doesn’t matter, ‘cause she’s dead. My mom’s dead.”

“And she’ll never be able to hurt you again.”

“She’s -,” he asked, almost as if he still couldn’t believe it, “she’s really gone?”

“She is,” Lydia said, “but we’ll never leave. You’ll always have us, BJ.” Firm, she stated, “no matter what.”

“Love’s conditional,” he said, trying to make it seem like he didn’t care, that he was fine, even when Lydia knew it was a lie. “I’ll fuck up, and you guys’ll send me back. You’ll forget about me. That’s just how it goes.”

“Lawrence,” she said, trying to keep her anger from leaking into her voice, “that’s bullshit.”

“That’s life.”

She put a hand on his arm, staring at him. “I need you to listen to me now, and really listen to me, BJ. You’re my brother.”

He tried to protest, but she cut him off.

“Don’t deny it. You’re my brother, whether you like it or not, and that means that I love you, that I’ll always love you. I’ll love you when you make fun of me for doing stupid teenage shit, and I’ll love you when you inevitably crash one of the cars. I’ll love you when you’re happy and helpful, and I’ll love you when you’re being a piece of shit, too.

“I’ll love you no matter the situation. I’ll love you when I’m eighteen and you’re being obnoxious at my graduation, and I’ll love you when I move out to go to college. I’ll love you when I’m old enough to live on my own, and when I get married, and when I have kids that tell me that I suck because Uncle Lawrence is more fun than I am. And you know what?

“I’ll love you until the day I die. I’ll love you until my corpse is cold in the goddamn ground, and I’ll keep loving you when I take my first steps in the Netherworld as a recently deceased person. Because -,” she tripped over her words, emotions getting the best of her as her eyes grew wet, “because that’s what families do. We love each other, unconditionally, no matter what happens.

“There’s nothing, BJ, nothing that you could make me do that would stop that.”

She blinked away tears, distantly aware that she was crying, and she moved closer, throwing her arms around his shoulders, holding him tight. “Don’t ever think that I don’t love you, that my family doesn’t love you, because we do, BJ.”

Lydia felt arms wrap around her, holding her as tight as she held him. Before she knew it, he buried his face into the crook between her shoulder and neck, hair tickling the bottom of her chin and neck, anywhere that the turtleneck, which she hadn’t been able to change out of since everything went down, didn’t cover.

She felt her shoulder grow wet, and she didn’t hesitate to hug him closer to her.

“I’m scared,” he said, mumbling into the fabric, “I’m scared that I’ll fuck up -, that you guys won’t want me anymore and -”

“That won’t happen, ever,” she said, throat tight. “I promise, BJ.”

“I -,” he said, “I love you, too, Lyds.”

She didn’t trust herself to answer without saying something sappy, and chose to stay silent.

“I love you, and I love Delia and Charles and -, and Adam, and Barbara, and I -,” he stumbled, “I just don’t want anything to happen to that. I don’t want anything to change more than it already has.”

“A lot of things change, BJ,” she said, “but you being a part of our family won’t. I won’t let it.”

He chuckled at her determination. “I don’t think you’d be able to do that,” he said.

“Watch me,” she muttered, eyebrows knit together.

He lifted his head from her shoulder, unraveling himself to take a moment to wipe his eyes. When his vision cleared, he looked at the boxes. “What’s that?”

“Oh, the boxes?” She grabbed them, pushing one, along with a can, into his lap. “It’s the food Dad got before -, uh, before everything went to shit.”

He stared at it, mouth open in surprise. “You -”

“I wasn’t sure if you were hungry, but I thought it’d be good to bring food when I came up.”

“I -,” he said, “I am.” He cracked open the lid, shakily smiling at her when she began to dig into her own meal. “Thank you, Lydia.”

“It’s no problem,” she said. “That’s what family’s for.”

And, hidden away, Charles and Delia, along with Adam and Barbara, who’d called them out the second Lydia ran to the roof, couldn’t agree more.

The rest of the school year passed by in a blur for Lydia. She'd wake up in the morning, get ready, say goodbye to her brother and Delia, and leave for school. She'd go to her classes, talk with Angie, eat lunch, go to her afternoon classes. On Thursdays, she'd go to practice for her quiz bowl team, and sometimes, on Tuesdays, Angie would invite her over to study. After that, she'd go home to her family, eat dinner, play video games with Lawrence if she had the time, do her homework, and go to bed.

Her homeroom teacher, Mr. Chenwith, assigned them a project for the end of the year, not wanting a single second to go to waste. As he passed out the papers detailing what they'd have to do, Angie turned to her, smiling.

"This'll be interesting," she said with a smile. "We'll get to see what everyone's families are like!"

"Yeah," Lydia replied, looking over the paper when she got one. "It'll definitely be something."

-

"Describe your family," she read aloud to Lawrence, "and detail how it has affected you. Please use examples learned in class or found in your own research. Your notes will be graded, so keep them detailed, but your presentation should only cover your basic family structure in order to keep everything timely."

"What're you going to do?" Lawrence asked, curious.

"I know exactly what I'm going to do," she said. "Do you know where my camera is?"

-

"Thank you, Mr. Deacon," her teacher said, lightly clapping as the student finished his presentation. "Up next -"

"I'm next," Lydia said. She stood up, walking to the front of the room where the SmartBoard was displaying each project.

He eyed her, happy. "I love the courage, Lydia," he said, grinning. "Just give me a moment to pull it up."

She waited as he walked back to his desk, searching for her file until he found it, opening it up. "The floor's all yours!"

Lydia nodded at him and turned to face her class. The intro slide had nothing but a title and a photo of her, alone. "My name is Lydia Deetz. I'm fifteen, turning sixteen in July."

She clicked the next slide. "I was raised in New York by my dad, Charles, and my mom, Emily. We lived there up until December, when my dad bought a new house here in Connecticut after she passed away."

Holding her head high, she continued. "It was messy for a bit, but we pulled through. My dad found a new wife, Delia," she clicked onto the next slide, "and their wedding is in September."

She pulled up another slide. "This is Lawrence," she said, smiling. "He's my brother. He's been in our family for -," she paused, trying to find the right word, "a while, but he was only formally adopted a few weeks back."

"Congratulations," her teacher said.

“Thank you,” she replied, continuing. “And while yeah, everything changing so much has led to some issues, I wouldn’t have it any other way.”

The presentation finished, and she stood in front, politely smiling at the smattering of claps her classmates gave.

“Alrighty then,” her teacher said, “thank you, Ms. Deetz! Up next, Ms. Gonzalez!”

She took her seat next to Angie, letting out a breath of relief that everything had gone smoothly.

“Dude, you didn’t stutter or anything!” Angie whisper-shouted. “I’m so proud of you!”

“Thanks, Angie,” Lydia said, grinning. A swoop of confidence, whether it be from her apparently excellent presentational skills or just a “hell yeah, I made it through the end of the school year without dropping out” feeling, she looked over at the girl next to her. “Hey,” she said, “do you want to come over this weekend?”

Angie’s head whipped around to her, tight curls bouncing as they moved. She smiled at her. “I thought you’d never ask.”

-

Sometimes, a family is a mom, dad, and their kids.

Sometimes, a family is a mom and her kids, or a dad and his kids.

Sometimes, a family is two moms and their kids, or two dads and their kids.

Sometimes, a family is a couple on their own, or just one person, with or without a pet in tow.

Sometimes, a family is a group of friends that found their way to each other.

And sometimes, a family is a dad, a step-mom, daughter, semi-dead son, and the ghost couple that lives in the attic.

Looking around the dinner table, at Barbara and Adam sitting atop the counter, chatting with Delia about one of the plants in her garden, and seeing her dad and Lawrence talking about whatever new movie came out in the series Charles had gotten her brother hooked on, Lydia realized something.

She wouldn’t have her family any other way.

## Chapter End Notes

and that's all, folks!

I can't even begin to describe what this fic means to me, but I'll try.

I first heard of this musical over the summer on TikTok, which is pretty much a summary of about a third of the teenagers with a phone. "The Whole Being Dead Thing Pt. Two" was a commonly used audio, and the app's love of the musical just kinda spiraled. I remember being at my dad's house, taking a dumbass video of myself, proud that I finally memorized the song that'd been stuck in my head for

weeks.

I ended up checking out the musical not long after, and with that, finding the fanbase. I read some of the fics on here back when the number of musical beetlejuice fics was still in the double digits.

With everything I love, I end up going on TvTropes about it to learn more, and that's how I found out about Juno. As someone who comes from a shitty similar situation, it hit hard.

I realized that there weren't any fics that dealt with it, at least in any situation that dealt with it in a manner that did it justice, so I said hey, fuck it, and wrote the first two chapters while crying and listening to "Nobody" by Mitski and "party favor" by Billie Eilish.

Listen, I never said I wasn't cliché as hell. I'm seventeen, lmao.

Anywho. I decided to post it, putting the chapter count at just two, and before I even went to bed that night, I got a comment. Over the next few days, more comments came up, and I realized, holy shit, I actually had an audience for this!

I decided to write a bit more, if only because y'all wanted more. Obviously, that spiraled.

Before I even realized, that two had added a zero to itself, turning into a twenty chapter fic.

I fell into even deeper love with this damn musical. I memorized every line, made a cosplay of the ghost with the most for Halloween. I watched the movie and a bit of the cartoon for added references. I even managed to snag tickets to the show itself, and got to see the show with my best friend and our writing teacher, a lovely woman with saint-like patience.

Then, the musical announced it was closing. I found out at work and got to spend the next few hours trying not to cry like a little bitch. I bought tickets, this time, seeing it with my sister, Shelley, who, like my teacher and friend, had the saint-like patience it took to not snap my neck when I started talking about the musical again.

And now, months from when I first heard the first few notes of the song that led me down this path, I wrote the last few lines of this fic.

Writing is a passion for me. It's my favorite form of catharsis, and this fic has been exactly that.

Granted, I never, in my wildest dreams, thought it would be over seventy-five thousand words, but hey, shit happens.

This is officially the longest continuous piece I've ever made, smashing the previous record held by a fic I wrote in May that barely reached twenty-five thousand words before I quit writing it. Being able to stick with one story this long is an accomplishment I thought would take a lot longer to achieve.

I've been reading fanfic since fourth grade. I always dreamed of being the writer behind a long fic with a huge following, but I never thought that would become reality for me.

Thank you.

Thank you, all of you.

Whether you just started reading this today, or if you've been here since day one. To everyone who left a kudos, who commented, who bookmarked this fic or even just clicked it, curious to read it, thank you.

A special thank you goes out to all of the beautiful, wonderful people who made art for this fic. I hope you all know I cried when I saw it. It means so, so much to me, as an author, to know that someone took the time out of their day to sit down and draw something I wrote up. Again, it's something I always dreamed about, but never thought would happen.

I have ideas for other stories in this 'verse, but I can't promise anything. Life is crazy, y'know?

I love you all, and I hope this ending is as cathartic for you as it is for me.

-sherrie :)

and, as always -

like something? hate something? want to see something happen? want to see me eaten by a sandworm? let me know! comments are fantastic, especially when I've been crying like a bitch all day because saying goodbye is never easy.

my tumblrs are @strawberryicebreakers for main and @bisexualbeetlejuice for bj-specific content! hit me up!

Please [drop by the archive and comment](#) to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!