

Dead Shadow (Complete!)

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Dead Shadow (Complete!)

by [Serena Walken \(SerenaWalken\)](#)

Summary

Getting disturbed at 6:00 AM wasn't on BJ's list of things that day, but his whole afterlife changes when he found out Lydia and her family were murdered. Taking the Neitherworld's clause and permission, he's ready to hunt down those responsible, but finds out that Lyds is in even deadlier trouble of becoming a Dead Shadow. A spirit doomed to live in their moment of torment on Earth forever.

Now, the Neitherworld is making him speak on her behalf. (BJ/Lydia Romance and Horror)
A mixture of funny and sweet, but also very cold, intense, and cruel. (Complete!)

Notes

Warning!: This story is extremely dark, my darkest one yet. It's the reason I am rating this mature. If you have problems with reading about suicide or depression, this is not something you should read. While it has several great parts full of humor, romance and happiness, it is filled with psychological horror as well. Gore is kept extremely low, but the scares in it are meant to elicit fear to those Beetlejuice hunts. It's a romantic drama and a horror. Beetlejuice does not hurt or hunt anyone who lives with the ones responsible for the crimes. He works around them.

I've always wanted to write something in the vein of *The Crow*, *Stir of Echoes*, *Ghost*, or *What Dreams May Come* (Not a horror, but is actually pretty terrifying if you think about it towards the end.) Basic revenge ghosts sort of, but also focused on a moving on with life (or in this case 'afterlife'). This is the second horror I've ever attempted to write and mixing it with romance is going to be one hell of a skill. It kept me from writing it for some time. Years actually.

I didn't really know how to accomplish it until 5:30 yesterday morning. I got up, started typing away and it's now born. It's so tight and solid in my head, there's no way I can stop the writing now. How long it will take to write it remains to be seen. It's going to be at least 15-30 chapters knowing me. Maybe more. I always know the concept, not the length to finish it. Probably updated at least once a week. Maybe more. We'll see.

Anyhow, that's it for the notes. Some chapters will be full on the usual Beetlejuice fun and loving thing. Others, not so much.

Me

Neitherworld

It wasn't the greatest time. Beetlejuice yawned unapologetically. He'd been summoned by the Mayor Maynot. Whenever that happened it wasn't good, and especially at 6:00 am in the morning. Who woke up at that time that wasn't lame? Nobody he knew. Beside the mayor was somebody he didn't know. Probably one of the mayor's new lackeys or something. "Hey!" He yelled turning into a rooster holding an old fashioned alarm clock. "I haven't even crowed yet! What gives?"

"Beetlejuice, get dressed!" The mayor demanded. "You have a very important visitor."

Beetlejuice grumbled. Bad enough they got him up so early, he was having to get dressed too for a nice impression? Why give a nice impression. He wasn't nice. Still, he snapped his fingers, turned on his juice, and fixed his tie now in his usual black and white striped wear. "There. Happy?" He scoffed with a snort. "I'm not."

"Beetlejuice." The person next to the mayor spoke. "My name is Miss Second Chance."

"Yeah, like that isn't an obvious enough name," he said. "You friends with Goody Twoshoes?" She wasn't laughing, nor did she look upset.

"There is no easy way to approach this," she said. "You might want to sit down."

"I might want to not," he rebelled. Still, he went ahead and juiced a chair for behind him. He fell down into it, slouching more than sitting. Still, she didn't seem bothered.

"I am afraid that I have some terrible news considering your friend Lydia Deetz," she said.

Just like that he stood up and juiced the chair back away. No way was he slouching or sitting for news about that. "What about Lyds? Spill it!"

"You are going to need to stay reasonably calm for us to get through this," she said. "It's okay. I will wait." She looked at the watch on her arm. "I have all the time in the world. Go ahead and curse and juice as much as you need to."

Someone was giving him permission to juice them? No, no one would do that unless . . . "Fine. I'm calm." He wasn't calm, but he wanted to know. "I need to know what's going on with Lyds."

"We must talk about some painful facts. The living world is just that, pain."

Okay. He really didn't like where that conversation was going. "Did somebody hurt Lydia?" That was impossible. Day or night, she just had to say his name. Just had to say his name! It was impossible someone could hurt Lydia.

"The Deetzes," she said. "Charles Deetz. Delia Deetz. Lydia Deetz. None of them are among the living anymore."

Beetlejuice lifted a finger. He paused. He opened his mouth. He didn't say anything. He looked at the uniform she was wearing, finally taking notice of the tiny patch on the left of it. Two silhouettes of souls.

"Take your time." Miss Second Chance. That's why she'd been so good at handling him. She could probably handle a lot more. She was trained too. She was a counselor. A counselor to the recently deceased. "Tell me when you are ready."

"People." He finally spoke. "Don't naturally die as a family at once. Not unless they ate something? Poisonous mushrooms? A deadly disease?" They were already gone, he had to give himself hope in something else.

"No. Their lives were ended by other humans." She was quiet again.

"Oh." He felt. He didn't know how he felt. "Other humans, huh? Other humans. Otherrrrrr, why didn't she call for me?!" He turned into an old fashioned phone but quickly changed back. His juice was not going to make a mockery of this situation. "Why didn't she call? Why didn't she call!" Damn it, he needed to know. Damn counselor wasn't going to tell him right away. Not for about a minute of being silent. It was standard. *Why didn't she call me? Why didn't she call me?!* He didn't care what time it was, day or night, night or day, in the middle of a mud bath, who cared?

It felt like forever for the minute to be up. "She was restrained first while she was sleeping. You may call it fate if you wish, or don't if you wish. Her mouth was gagged."

Another minute. If he didn't respond, it would be thirty seconds. If he did respond, it would take longer.

"Later on, if you feel strong enough to look at the detailed report, I can get you a copy," she said. "For now, here are the most basic facts you need to understand for us to proceed. All three of the family members were bound, gagged, and taken downstairs. Charles Deetz and Delia Deetz were shot and killed by Lydia Deetz. Lydia Deetz turned the gun on herself afterward. The people who killed them are wanting it to make it look like Lydia killed them so they get away with the murder. What we've received from Charles Deetz is that his daughter was forced to choose their manner of death, and shooting was easier."

Another thirty seconds. Just don't speak. Just hang on. Just.

"Charles is haunting their home. For now, he is the only one who has been talked to." She paused.

He didn't say a word. Didn't breathe. Didn't blink. He didn't want to hear it, but he needed to hear it at the same time.

"Normally, we simply process through, however it's a well known fact that the infamous Beetlejuice knew them. To avoid an overbearing sense of revenge upon the Neitherworld for the unfairness of rules that did not permit you to reach her, we are reinstating the Lex Talionis Clause for you only. You don't have to take it. It's up to you if-

"Mine."

"-you want to use it." Miss Second Chance nodded. "There will be some paper work, and some strict rules and regulations if you do this." Paper that had appeared in her hand floated toward Beetlejuice. "If you mess anything up, it's terminated."

Beetlejuice juiced a pencil for each paper, signing each one. He himself didn't move, only the pencils. He already knew the damn rules by now.

Miss Second Chance took the papers back. "Don't let yourself be seen by anyone else. Only one at a time. No proof that you exist. They can only hurt or harm themselves. You can use weapons, but you cannot hit them. You can bother them in their sleep, but you can't kill them in it. The only traces you can leave are bruises and scratches up to a point. Nothing life threatening." She tucked her papers back away. "She will be haunting her former residence with her parents for 125 years. She is not able to see you until after your work is complete." She handed him a few sheets of paper. He curled them up and juiced them away. "Your information. Once it's processed, you are free to go."

Then, she disappeared.

University of Bridgeport : Mirror of a Dorm Room

Information. It was only the barest on purpose. Address, names, and the part they played. Giving him everything would have made it a lot easier, but they wanted him to dig his own information up. It gave a ghost using the Lex Talionis Clause both time to settle down as well as let them feel like they had more control. Lex Talionis was the Neitherworld's Eye for an Eye.

Until the Lex Talionis clause was done, he wouldn't get to see Lyds. Right now, he probably wouldn't get to see her for another few years on top of that. Getting to see the unprocessed while they were still in the haunting stage would take time. He had to let the Neitherworld and her family handle her for now, while he handled the ones who killed them.

And he would. He'd fill his arsenal knowledge with their worst fears, and they'd be crawling for razorblades to end their very lives as they were slowly driven insane. After they were killed correctly, for once if he followed the rules, they would be doomed to an eternal sentence of haunting their own residences until passing passed the Neitherworld.

Beetlejuice never fully explained the Neitherworld to Lydia. He didn't need to, it was obviously where the dead came after they were done living. But, it wasn't the end all. First, the recently deceased would haunt their homes or similar personal structures for 125 years to learn about patience, accepting death, and the many things that came with it.

Afterward, one of two things happened. One. They would disappear and pass onto the next phase. He had no idea what the next phase had been. Vaporization, reincarnation, no one ever knew. These individuals were never heard from again through any of the worlds he knew of.

Or two, which happened more often. For young deaths, violent deaths, or for the soul who hungered for more 'life'. There was the Neitherworld. People kept love, family, friends, and many similar things the living world offered. When they came, sometimes they were changed dramatically in their appearance, and sometimes not, but they would live out their death in the Neitherworld for thousands of years.

Some never even made it out of the Neitherworld, being born into it instead. Their souls never making it to a living transition, simply living out their existence there before moving into the next phase themselves. Not a bad thing. That was him. That was his whole family. Born and raised there. Ghost with the Most.

But there was no time for comedic gags or jokes for the Ghost with the Most today. He was going to take care of this and by the rules. If he screwed up the rules this time, these criminals wouldn't just bypass the Neitherworld after their haunting.

They would come out to the Neitherworld the same time as Lydia and her family.

Never. She'd *never* be forced to see them again.

It didn't matter which one he picked. They were all guilty, and they'd all get the same punishment. He didn't care if they all happily did it, if there was peer pressure, money involved, they needed a kidney for their dying relative, it didn't matter. They would all die being scared to death or by their own hands.

He watched the one in front of him through a mirror. Carter Adler. He was a long distance away from the Deetz'. He had no idea what caused him to go Peaceful Pines, but he would soon. He'd find out everything, and turn it all against him. For now, the less than confident human was trying to work on some kind of homework. He already looked unsettled, like he was scared he'd get caught. Good. It was rare to actually get the living to be scared to death, but getting at least one of them to go passed their fight/flight ticker mode would be fitting.

He juiced out of there to see the next one.

Bridgeport Bar

Scumbag number two. Beetlejuice just walked into the place. People stared for a second, but he didn't care. He didn't bother changing his Neitherworld appearance. There was no saying

his name three times rule anymore. If he wanted to, he could start taking these two on right now, but it wouldn't be smart. He'd be caught and he didn't know their weaknesses yet.

He just wanted to walk in there to see them, face-to-face. They'd learn it soon.

"Halloween was some time ago, man," the woman said on his right. Rebecca Beckett. Not involved in the killing, but she *knew* about it, and she was giving the guy beside her his alibi. Technically, he didn't have to take her on, but sending her down to a mental ward for the rest of her life might do some good.

Beetlejuice looked straight at the one next to her. Brady Copeland. No remorse from him as he took a drink of his beer. Of course not. He'd regret that. He'd feel something before it was over. "You got a problem?" he asked Beetlejuice.

"You took something," Beetlejuice managed to speak. "It wasn't yours."

"Man, just get out of here." He waved Beetlejuice away. "It's an open area. Go away."

For now. Neither of them looked nervous or sorry about what happened. They would be in the end. Even if it was just screamed out of fear.

University of Bridgeport : Mirror in the bathroom of a Dormitory.

Duncan Gibbs didn't have a mirror in his room, nor anything Beetlejuice could easily use yet to get to him. He kept it quite bare. That would change though. Changing into Betty Juice, he exited the woman's bathroom. Betty moved down the hall, up another flight of stairs, to the guys' dorm rooms. She walked partway, and knocked on the door of Duncan Gibbs.

He answered it and looked at her. Complacent. "Yeah?"

"Sorry," Betty said. "Wrong dorm room." Still, he took a chance to glance behind him. At some point, he'd get in there. "I was looking for my friend Lydia's dorm room."

Lydia was a common name, but he saw it strike a small nerve in him. "Well. This is the guys floor. Try another floor."

"Okay. Thanks," Betty said. "If you see her, let me know. She's got *deep* black hair." Betty lingered on him a second before walking off. He closed the door, but she went back to his door. For now. Betty looked around carefully. The slightest person coming out could screw up his rule. Betty took the dry erase marker on his door and wrote on his board. LYDIA. Then he knocked as hard as he could and disappeared to the other side of the dorm, right beside the stairs. It was too far for someone to run and make it there. Betty waited for Duncan Gibbs to open his door. He looked down the hallway first, noticing her, before noticing his dry erase board.

As predicted, he tried to come after her. Betty calmly walked down the stairs and disappeared from view. By the time he got there, she'd be long gone with no explanation, and no one on campus ever having heard of her.

Eventually, after Beetlejuice starting doing his thing and he got desperate, he'd look into Lydia's friends in Peaceful Pines. Find pictures of her. Betty Juice.

But he'd find out she didn't have a house or exist there either. Seen but not found. The first seed of insanity to fill his mind. Just a tiny seed that wouldn't go too far yet.

But that seed would grow.

A home near the College Campus

Well. Beetlejuice was picking up on a connection now. Finley Jennings was in his kitchen eating something he pulled out of a microwave. Around him though, in several rooms, were paintings. Copies of famous paintings. Continuing to look around, Beetlejuice moved around inspecting them until he found some sculptures and art that could only be done by Delia Deetz. He'd never seen them before. They must have been part of the work she was working on at the moment, or released to an interested buyer. Either way, he knew that style.

No one else had that kind of style in the Land of the Living but Delia Deetz. *Did he take them after murdering her, or is it a reason for their deaths?* Did they kill for her art or because of it? Either way, it gave him plenty of spaces to hide when he was ready to. He would need to as well because he had two roommates who had no connection or knowledge of what he did. They were roommates to afford a house together for college. Liberty Mason and Wilson "Will" Addison. He'd have to work around them, never scaring them directly, or lending any credence that Finley Jennings actually saw anything. To them, he'd just be losing it.

And he would be losing it. Soon. Before Beetlejuice could investigate anymore though, he felt himself summoned back to the Neitherworld.

Neitherworld

He was in the same spot as before he left. Miss Second Chance was in front of him again. This couldn't be good. He didn't break any rules, he knew that.

"It's okay, you didn't break any rules," she said just to ease his mind. "You are doing well, but your friend is not. She was on the verge of becoming a dead shadow. We intercepted." She waited thirty seconds. "A dead shadow is-

"I know what a dead shadow is." Deadpanned. Lydia's mind was free, as free as his, but if she couldn't get over what happened, her mind would go back to the moment of her death, and continually circle it. Never escaping. Life was over. Now her form of her forever existence was on the line.

"If we hadn't been ready, she would be stuck as a dead shadow. Fortunately, we had a feeling it would happen. We pulled her out of the situation." She paused thirty seconds. "The Neitherworld is letting you speak on her behalf. Decisions on progression must be made."

"Was she with her family?"

Miss Second Chance nodded. "Delia Deetz is getting through it now. Charles Deetz reached her emotionally. His wife seems okay for the moment, and her progress seems steady. Charles Deetz was trying to help Lydia as well, but she almost became a dead shadow. A second chance may prove helpful, with her memory of the night erased, burning to a slower remembering instead. Maybe." She adjusted herself. "Charles Deetz would like to speak with you. It is up to you whether you want to take on his request."

Beetlejuice nodded. He watched Mister Deetz suddenly appear in front of him. He looked all around, clearly not zapping himself there. He didn't know any magic yet, that would take some time.

Charles looked ahead at Beetlejuice. "Mister Beetleman. Betty Juice. So many others." He shook his head. "I always knew it wasn't in my head."

Beetlejuice didn't say much. "Mister Deetz." There wasn't much he could say. Sorry you died? Sorry Lydia was forced to kill you? Sorry your daughter is struggling to save her mind? Nah. He just stood there. Charles didn't come all that way just to scold him about interacting with his daughter.

"You let her visit before. Several occasions I've heard. People in this 'Neitherworld' know her."

Beetlejuice nodded. *Belle of the ball here. Never mistreated.* He had to think it. He could not risk accidentally juicing. He had to watch every word. Mister Deetz wouldn't understand how his magic worked and he did not want to offend him right now.

"I want her to stay with me and Delia," he said. "I want it so much. I reached Delia, in what happened, but . . . they say Lydia's going to be some kind of trapped spirit forever on Earth. Eternally living the torment over again."

Ah. Clarification. Neitherworld was terrible on that kind of thing. That's what he wanted. "Not yet," Beetlejuice said. "She's at risk. It means you've gotta be careful, Mister Deetz. Really, *really* careful." Did he even understand how careful? "If the Neitherworld is intercepting in this, she's real close. You can't let her fall, you just can't."

"The Neitherworld?" Charles continued. "They want to move her onto the next phase after it. Is that heaven?"

After the Neitherworld. "Nobody knows," he settled on. "It's anything but here. You'll never see her again. Talk to her again. Walk with her again." Ah! He just wanted to see her already! Even if she was unconscious, he just wanted to see her. He watched Charles hand him a handkerchief. Had he been crying? Normally when he did he was screaming and yelling and blowing his own nose with his own handkerchief. He rubbed his eye. Yeah. He'd been crying.

"125 years is a long time," Charles said to him. "Holding onto Delia is hard enough, and I. I really hope I get this one right." He gestured to Beetlejuice. "How much do you care for her?"

The world. The universe! He care for Lydia more than any words could ever convey! "Lot."

"They said you're um, doing some kind of . . . revenge thing?" Charles asked him. "I-I should be an upstanding person and say it's wrong, but I don't care. I hope they pay for everything they did and then some."

"They *will*." They would be clawing for their own deaths now.

"You know this world. You know the rules and the way it works. You've been gone for some time." Charles hesitated. "Since Lydia knew about the Neitherworld, visited it and her mind is open to it? They've suggested that, maybe she should stay with you instead."

Beetlejuice paused. Him? They were recommending . . . him? Miss Second Chance said the Neitherworld was letting him speak on her behalf. It must have been because of Lex Talionis.

"But can you keep her any better?" Charles asked. "Or is it better to let her move on? I don't know. You're the one that gets the choice. Being separated 125 years sounds hard. Being separated for even longer is hard too, but at least she'd be at peace." He looked back to him. "Then again, it's supposed to be about happiness. That's how you don't fall? Lydia was always the happiest when her 'best friend' was there." He sighed. "Oh man. Do I keep trying and keep my family together? Or do I trust her with someone who's lied to me for years on end? I'd say no in a heartbeat, but you were said to be not only her best friend, but one of the most powerful ghosts out here." He shook his head. "I don't get to make the call though. Just be careful in what you decide."

Beetlejuice watched him get zapped away. It was up to him.

She would either live with her folks for 125 years, haunting their old house. Hopefully staying okay with her memory only slowly being processed. Hopefully over years or months.

If she fell she would become a dead shadow though, forced to live through all the pain at the end of her life. Over and over and over.

He could let her go onto the next phase. Protect her from becoming a dead shadow, but letting her go forever? Him, her family, her friends there. No one would ever see her again.

Or. For 125 years, she could be with him instead. *I don't have anyone else to watch like Mister Deetz does, and I could absolutely make sure she never fell! I'd put everything on it. I know how to keep her happy. Happiness. Renewed vigor. Me and Lyds, that was us!* He could do it. He could save her, but he was putting her becoming a dead shadow on the line if he couldn't. And. That wasn't right.

Miss Second Chance stared at him. "Well?"

Lyds. He closed his eyes, making his decision. "If she falls into it, put me in her place, and send her to the next phase." Replacing. It could be done, but never had been. No one wanted to replace a dead shadow. No one wanted to spend eternity wrapped in a nightmare. But he would for her. Meanwhile? "In the meantime, she can go to . . ." Charles. Him. Her dad. Him.

She should go to her family. He was risking everything for her, and he was the better pick. Her family was her family, Delia and Charles together could help her. But. He. Couldn't.

Trust her to them. "Me."

They Went On Vacation

Chapter Notes

Charles and BJ are obviously lying about a lot, but the date it is lie is mostly so that she has no excuse to return to school.

Neitherworld

Lydia found herself walking. Odd. Why was she walking? What just happened? She looked around herself. Oh, the Neitherworld. *Well, anything could have happened then*, she chuckled to herself. She looked at who she'd been walking with. Yep, BJ. Her memory was fuzzy, but she was in the Neitherworld with BJ. Did he get her up in the middle of the night or something? She was so hazy, she must have been half asleep. Probably 3 in the morning, shouting at her, she zapped herself there with a mumble of his name three times and voila. It wouldn't be the first time.

It was getting late though. Whatever he needed, she needed to help him quickly so she could get back home. She still had school tomorrow, and she couldn't afford to mess up. College was just around the corner. Community anyhow. BJ hated it at first, but once she said she'd let him come see her there too, he was okay. After all, he still had his Betty Juice. In fact, when he realized that she didn't have to hide him like she did in the past for his parents?

Oh, he lit up. When she wasn't in school, they could spend so much time together. It was college, no one knew each other, and Betty Juice would slide right in. It would be fun. "What is it you need help with, BJ?"

He didn't stop. "Um." He didn't sound so confident. "Let's get to the Roadhouse first, Lydia."

Lydia? Well, he did often call her Lydia, but something sounded off about how he said it this time. Hm. Well, it was late. *Not that late though*. Why did she think it was that late? It looked evening and the sunset was just coming. Maybe she was taking a nap at home? *Oh wait*. There could only be one explanation. She must be starting to come down with something. She didn't have any symptoms yet. No sore throat or anything but she was clearly feeling fuzzy.

As they arrived in the Roadhouse she looked toward BJ, expecting him to take the lead on whatever problem made him drag her into the Neitherworld at that time. "BJ, you need to tell me why I'm here." She yawned. "I think I'm coming down with the flu or something."

"You want to lay down, Lydia?" He looked concerned. He looked real concerned. "No prob." He went over toward his bed, beat it a few times making beetles come out of it. Lydia half

expected him to go after them, but he didn't even flinch for them. He just fluffed up the pillow and fixed the sheets. He gestured toward it. "There you go. Lydia ready. All the way."

"Um? BJ?" She asked. "I don't need a nap. I can nap when we're done with whatever you need," she said. "I'm sorry, I'm half asleep. I don't remember why you brought me to the Neitherworld this time."

He didn't answer right away. "I know that." He side glance looked at her. "I've just gotta be careful about this."

"Careful about what?" Lydia asked. "You seem so distant today, BJ."

"Oh no, not at all! I'm right here. Totally. Right here, Babe." He nodded a little too much. "Everything's just been the same like every other day." He snapped his fingers. "Food. You need some food, right?" He opened his fridge.

Lydia doubted he had anything in there for her. He actually had something that looked like food though? He handed her a hamburger on a plate. Lydia took it but lifted the bun to inspect it. It looked edible. She went ahead and tried it. *Not bad.* "Wow, BJ. This is excellent." It wasn't always easy to find edible food in BJ's place. She watched as BJ zapped a small kitchen table next to her. "Thanks." She sat down and finished the burger. She was still waiting for whatever problem BJ had to explain. It must have been a real biggie this time. Usually he could barely contain himself to tell her about it.

"No problem with me, Babe," he answered back.

Not with him? *Then I came here just to come here. At this hour?* No, wait, it wasn't late. It was evening. Sure, that made sense. She kept eating her burger. She couldn't place the flavor but it was good. "Oh no." She looked at the little bit of burger still left. "Yikes. I was so hungry. Uh oh. BJ? I think I just spoiled my appetite. In fact, I should probably get home soon." She stood up. "Mom's going to be furious. I missed dinner, I'm sure of it."

"You really do got the flu, huh?" BJ gave her a note. "Don't this ring a bell?" He turned into a giant bell, ringing himself.

Lydia looked at the note. None of it rung a bell. "Mom and dad went on a cruise for their anniversary?" It was their anniversary? Well, it had to be. That wasn't BJ's handwriting, it was her father's ticky handwriting. "They are leaving me alone for a week, Beej?"

"Yep," BJ answered. "You got real sick though. Feverish. You're getting better but I brought you over here to be safe." He held his hands out wide. "Besides! A whole week with Beej. What's better than Beej?"

Ah. That made sense. It was strange to forget it. Lydia looked at the letter again. No, it was definitely her dad's writing. Yeah, and the way he would write it too. Kind of nervy ticking, asking if she'd be okay, telling her about food and this and that. "I'm glad they are going on a cruise. I bet they'll have fun." She closed it up. "We'll have fun too. As soon as school is out each day."

BJ kind of fidgeted a second there again. "Yeesh, Babe. You really caught something, huh?" He turned into a fisherman yanking in a fish that looked feverish. He turned back to normal. "School's not in session." He juiced a calendar in front of her. "End of June, Lyds."

Oh. Okay? Lyds opened the note again to compare dates. Her father's date matched. *I thought it was May?* "Beej. Did. How sick did I get?"

"Uh? Well, you were sick beforehand too," BJ said. "You said you were okay, but you were pretty bad off. Not listening again." His ears came off a moment before he grabbed them and put them back on. "It's not surprising you don't remember Lyd, you were feverish for some time."

"Then? Did I ever go to the hospital?" There was time missing. There was something missing.

"Maybe?" BJ said. "I don't know, I was kind of forced to get out for a bit. You know, Donny. Can't predict him. Had to hide out for a bit."

If it had *just* been Beej' saying it, it would be different. She'd expect him to be hiding something, but it was her dad's handwriting. Definitely.

"You know what? Maybe you want to call him?" He juiced her a big phone for comedic effect before he switched it to a modern cell, striped in black and white.

Lydia held it. Well, it definitely couldn't be a trick. She heard it already start to ring. BJ must have called the number already. "Dad?"

"Lydia." His voice sounded really strained. "How are you doing? A-are you getting better, Sweetie? From being sick?"

Yeah. That was her dad. "I think so," she said. "I must have been really sick. I didn't remember you leaving for a cruise for an anniversary, Dad."

"Your mother and I thought you looked bad, but you insisted you were okay. You were sick from before, but we thought you got better."

"I was sick twice, back to back?" Maybe that accounted for the time? "I."

"You were really sick, Honey. We actually had to . . . call the hospital the first time. You spent some time in there for pneumonia. They said you were all better and the trip was coming up. You said you were better, insisted upon it. Mister Beetleman promised he'd be showing up daily to make sure nothing happened."

Okay. Um. *I was super sick. Okay.* Maybe she was a *lot* sicker than everyone was letting on. Even the way BJ was acting? Yeah, that's why she was in the Neitherworld. He was going to be super worried about her. Whatever didn't make sense now, would make sense later. "I'll be okay. I'll take it easy, I promise. Enjoy your trip, dad. Tell mom I love her."

"I. Ah. You bet I will." He seemed to crack before he hung up. He didn't even end with an 'I love you'. Lydia gave BJ back his phone before she felt herself juiced into a pair of purple

pajamas. "Okay, I get it. I'll crawl in bed."

"Good. Get you back on track." BJ turned into a train set briefly before turning back to normal. He fluffed the pillow again before she laid down. "Just take it easy. Doctor Beej' is here now." He looked like a doctor now. "Nothing's going to happen to you ever again. Learned all the signs to look for." Stop, Yield, and other traffic signs showed up around him before disappearing. "Learned so much even your dad is trusting Mister Beetleman to have a second eye over you." His eye flew out above her, but he easily yanked it back.

"Thanks, Beej'." Lydia smiled. "You're the best." She closed her eyes. Rest would probably be a good idea after all. She certainly didn't want to get sick again, or sicker. She still had a fuzzy feeling inside of her head, but it would go away once she got better. With BJ taking care of her, she was sure she'd be alright.

Later that Night . . .

Lydia awoke. It was much later now. 4 AM now. *I slept a long time. I really am still sick.* That wasn't a good sign, but at least she was taking it easy. And a slumber party over in the Neitherworld? Hadn't happened for a long time. Too bad she was sleeping to miss out on it. She looked beside her.

Beetlejuice had juiced himself his own little bed next to hers. He had even been holding her hand? Wow. How strange. It felt like he was being extra sweet for some reason. Although he'd hate it if she told him that. She got up and moved around. Falling asleep so early made her timing feel off. She wouldn't stay up long. Just long enough for a drink of water. She moved to the kitchen and got some water. She looked out at the night sky. Neitherworld night time. It was always the most amazing time.

She moved back to the bed. Going to sleep again should have felt harder. Crawling in, she put her body back down, but felt her hand being grabbed again gently. She looked toward Beetlejuice. Odd. *The way he's acting. Did the pneumonia nearly kill me?* Whatever happened, he was ultra worried. He was reaching for her hand in his sleep.

Well. The sympathy wouldn't last forever. She'd enjoy it while it lasted. Life would get back to normal soon.

8:00 AM

Lydia was starting to yawn. It was time to get up. She smelled something good beside her nose. She opened her eyes. *How'd he do that?* "Beej', where'd you get that?" In front of her he had placed one of her favorite fast food meals.

"I knew I was coming down here," BJ answered her. "I got it from beforehand."

"Wow. Thanks." She smiled at him and took it. Delicious. Her favorite breakfast sandwich. Okay. He was being a little oversweet now. Hopefully he snapped out of it soon. "What do you want to do today?"

"Go see others around here," BJ answered. Then, his strange look was replaced with a quick smile. "'Cause, hey! They all knew you were sick too and they just want to see you." He waved his hand around. "Ah, they wouldn't leave me alone until I agreed they could see you the next day. Ginger and that annoying tap dancing."

"Okay." Lydia got up. She looked at her clothes. She watched as BJ juiced her usual red outfit on her, but there was something different about it. As she moved around, she saw it. It wasn't just a spiderweb pattern. "The way the light catches on the pattern?" No way. "Deadly-vu! This is real spiderwebbing." How'd he do that?

"Thought you'd like it." He gestured out the door. "Come on. Let's go." Just as soon as they moved from his place, Jacques and Ginger were right there.

By the looks on their faces they were definitely worried. "It's okay," Linda assured them. "I'm fine now. See?" She spun around. The light catching on the real spiderwebs was so amazing. "I'm much better." Still, they seemed so worried.

"Yeah," Ginger grabbed a handkerchief and dotted her eyes. "I-it's really good to see you all better, Lydia!"

Yeah. Okay. Overwhelmed Ginger again. "Thanks."

"Yes, um, yes. Eetz good to see you again mez ami." Jacques looked like he was really trying not to cry. "Good to see you all better again. You put ze scare een us."

"She's better," BJ said, shooin' them away, trying to get them to disperse. "Quit crying, she's fine!" He grabbed her hand and led her away from them. "Making such a fuss. Really."

"They just cared, BJ." Though Lydia felt better seeing his reaction. He'd been fussing himself earlier. When they left too, The Monster Across the Street was right there by the entrance to the Roadhouse.

"Look who's feeling better!" He was overjoyed. Poopsie didn't look as enthused as he did. "Glad to see you all better. Yep. All better."

"Yeah. All better. She's better. Can you think of another word?" BJ complained.

Still, The Monster Across the Street was still straight smiling. It was getting eerie. "Well, we are off now. Thanks for caring to stop by." Still. That look. Everything had felt so off since last night. Maybe she was still just sick. Well? She didn't want anyone to worry, and if she got worse, BJ would know. Her dad wouldn't have left her to him if he hadn't proved himself worthy as Mister Beetleman. "Where are we going today, Beej?"

"Shopping," he said. "Feel like giving the old Roadhouse a makeover." He got makeup juiced on him and fluttered his mascara eyes at her. "Whatcha think?"

Lydia laughed. There we go. Now Beej' was feeling better. "Awesome, let's go, BJ."

When they moved to Doomie, he was extra happy to see her too. Lydie and BJ hopped in. "So what are you thinking of doing?" She looked at BJ. "If you do it in beetles, you can't gnaw at your furniture again."

"I don't know yet. Gonna surprise . . ." He purposely stopped himself from his joke. Wow, BJ usually didn't catch it. He was going to say 'gonna surprise myself'. That was a big juicing, his juice would have surprised him somehow. Odd. Usually he used his juice to his advantage, or at least didn't care to stop it.

Thinking way too much about this. Lydia felt the wind in her face as they went down to the local Neitherworld store.

Land of the Living

Bertha and Prudence walked into school together. Their friendship had to get tighter than ever to get through the ordeal. You'd think anyone would be a little more sensitive to them. The end of school would be coming soon. College around the corner. It was supposed to be the greatest time of their lives. While they used to be ignored at school, now they weren't ignored. They were stared at. It wouldn't quit.

It was bad enough losing Lydia, but having her legacy go down that way?

"Oh. Hey?" Claire Brewster. They didn't need any sympathy from her. She'd never give sympathy. "So? I just wanted to say, like, it's a real bummer that you lost your friend? I mean, even though she was apparently a total psychopath that killed her parents and herself. That in no way reflects upon you two." She waved at people watching, talking more to them. "Just, Claire Brewster is a real supportive person, you know? Although, in my opinion, we all should have seen it coming. Lydia liking spiders and beetles and being weird and all. Weird, non-conformatives are dangerous, you know? I mean, who doesn't want to be liked?"

"Back off!" Bertha couldn't take anymore. "We don't need to deal with you right now! And!"

"Lydia never would have done it," Prudence said softly. "Never. I'll never believe it."

"Hey, it's okay." Claire looked around her again. "I'm trying to be nice? 'Cause like, being friends with someone who killed their own parents and themselves is like, hard? But, um. Denial is real bad too," she warned them. "The law doesn't make mistakes and, like, all the evidence is totally gathered and stuff. So, you might as well face it." She walked by them, whispering, "Your friend was a psychopathic maniac. If I were you, I'd forget Community College and just run away as far from this town as possible. After all. Sickos travel together."

Prudence held onto Bertha's hand tighter. "I know evidence." But she knew Lydia. "Police use things like forensics and DNA." But she knew Lydia.

"Let's just get to class," Bertha said to her. "It'll die down. Don't worry." Still, Bertha was trying to hold herself together, but she was breaking.

They lost their friend, but even their memories of Lydia Deetz were forever scarred. No one even held a funeral for them to attend, they just scheduled to burn her ashes. They attended Charles and Delia Deetz' funeral though, but it brought no comfort. Each of them thought that the first few days of it. Dealing with losing her, attending the funerals, and somehow things would get better. But, it didn't. Things just got worse. Rumors got worse.

Never getting to see her, hear her, or just seeing her fun smile and quirky attitude was hard enough. But knowing that no one would even remember her fun smile and quirky attitude. It hurt. All they heard about was how underneath the quiriness and friendliness was the face of a serial killer. A psychopath. A sociopath. Anyone who even showed sympathy had a hidden agenda, like Claire. Just trying to 'look good' for the other students. But, most didn't care to even put on fake friendliness. High school was almost out. College would begin soon.

New start, at least. New start. Except, neither of them got accepted into the same colleges. Prudence wanted to go to a University now. She was cancelling enrollment in the Community and moving far away with her family. With her skills, she had a full paid scholarship anyhow. She just didn't want to leave her friends. It was bound to happen later on though, and now with what happened with Lydia? Her family didn't mind pulling away from Peaceful Pines at all.

Bertha however, was stuck in the Community College. She hadn't tried for anything else except a couple. But, they were just far off dreams. When Bertha was done with school for the day, her and Prudence parted ways. Bertha moved toward the mailbox, getting mail for the one other college she wanted to attend. She took it inside, put down her stuff and opened it. She already knew it'd be a no. "Yes?"

Yes? Bertha's fingers shook. Yes? Oh, it was exciting, but she couldn't pay for it. Still. She could tell her family. She was smart enough to make it in. She had other mail too. Bills for the family. And one from . . . Betty Juice? She hadn't seen her since the whole disaster. She opened the mail.

Dear Bertha,

Times are tough. I'm bailing from Peaceful Pines. But, I never really let you or anyone visit me 'cause I was stinkin' rich! But I never acted like it. Didn't want friends who saw me for that. Anyhow, here's a small amount of money to make your dreams come true.

Use every bit of it for college! And if you need help, I'll be right there!

Betty Juice

That small amount of money? "Mom? Mom!" Bertha shouted. It was enough to pay for college and then some!

Neitherworld

Beetlejuice only snuck away for a minute. About that time, Bertha would be coming home. He'd already known the situation a long time ago. Prudence was getting away from Peaceful Pines, which was good. Once he started his thing, getting Lydia's friends out of the vicinity was going to be important. They'd start nosing around and asking questions. He'd already played around with one of them, couldn't help himself. Sooner or later, they'd be coming down to investigate themselves.

Beetlejuice used to be restricted on what he could juice, but with Lex Talionis, he could do things like money now. Untraceable, real, and out of a vault of a billionaire who'd never even know it was gone. He didn't abuse the privilege, just enough for her college and moving away. Lydia was dead, not them. He couldn't forget about the living that suffered too.

Anyhow, just a minute. Long enough for Lydia to look at some samples. He rounded the corner and saw her, still looking at tablecloths.

She looked toward him. "How come I'm the one that keeps having to pick things?" She smiled. "BJ, you are going to have to put a little effort into it if you want to redecorate your place."

"I am," BJ said. It was called whatever Lydia wanted. He was decorating for her to make the place feel like it was hers too. He had a week to get her comfortable before he had no choice but to give her the first blow. That she was dead. That was good enough. The rest would come in time, to her own mind, whether he wanted it to or not. But, he just had to keep her happy. Keep her spirits up.

That was so much better to do before all this. He wanted to be happy, he wanted to be carefree like his usual self. But, this. It just. It was before her time. They had fun in the Neitherworld, but he never really thought about her being there. Permanently. Dead. Yet. Anywhere near yet. It felt strange and wrong to be happy about it. And he did strange and wrong things all the time, so it was *really* strange and wrong.

She should have been ending high school that week. She should have been looking forward to going to the community college. A little bit of freedom. Then, she'd really get freedom going to a University. Getting a career. Getting a life of her own. By that time, he might not have been able to be a part of it. Once she got a husband and had kids. Might have been long off the path of him by then. But?

It was a better route for her life. Than this. If he hadn't believed he could watch her better than her dad, he would have left her with him, but he was already holding onto one. More than two at a time, after she already reached that close? Just too dangerous. The Neitherworld was Beetlejuice's home, his territory, and if there was anything he saw that was the slightest way wrong, he could get her the help she needed right away.

He told and asked the others around the Roadhouse about it, and they agreed. It wasn't in his selfish head for once. Leaving her to a newbie dead guy, dad or not, it wasn't smart. They'd be helping to keep an eye on her too. In fact, he had spotted Ginger round the corner. She'd covered Lydia while he dealt with Bertha, just in case.

Even Mister Deetz. He hated it, but even he would help with a phone call or two. Not something he wanted to abuse. It'd be hard enough. Couldn't even bear to end the phone call properly.

The rest of the Neitherworld wouldn't know yet. They would later. They weren't really his biggest concern right now. Only two things mattered right now. Not jokes, not gags, nothing in his stupid afterlife problems. Notta. Just two.

Getting Lydia to a balanced state in her death so she would never become a Dead Shadow.

And to make sure her afterlife was safe, away from the ones who hurt her. Ever again.

He was doing fine though. Getting better. Made a joke or two as they looked at more stuff. He could hide all the emotions inside and keep on his happy face. Because he had a better outlet to keep his emotions for. Jacques, Ginger, and everyone else in the Neitherworld. They were all getting a break. He was saving it all for them.

The ones that deserved it.

Hold It Together

Neitherworld

Lydia watched them, unphased. In the beginning, she felt a little confused, and maybe feverish. As the week progressed though, there was something besides being sick. They had one week together, and even though they were having fun, something had been tying everyone at the Roadhouse back. Everyone had acted so different. Even now.

It seemed normal. It seemed like something BJ would pull, but it was different.

"Whatcha think, Babe?" BJ asked her as he stepped in the shower. "Got optional settings. Mud water or swamp water." He showed off the mud bath letting it cover him. He shook it off some, but twisted the swamp water handle which took the majority of the mud off. "Babe? What's wrong?"

What was wrong? What was wrong?! Lydia went over to his new installed shower. "Mud. Swamp. What's *that* one?" There was a third handle she pulled. Cold water flooded over BJ.

"Yikes!" BJ tried to move out of the way. "That was close. I almost got clean." He looked toward the handle. "That's the default choice. Not too bad though, now you can bathe and smell bad or good."

No. "No more kidding around, Beetlejuice," Lydia warned him. She started tapping her feet. "I could buy that I was sick for a little while, but this just isn't right." She looked around his place. "You've been getting actual edible food in here. You have a bath with clean water. You made me pick most of your new remodeling furnishings. You've been caging off your bugs and rodents and putting food that isn't in your fridge, inside of plastic bags." None of it was him.

He never cared about any of that. Hygiene? Pleh, he hated the word. Lydia never minded before, so why was he getting that way? Was it really her health? If it was, then why the redecorating? And the biggest one of all. "Tell me what's going on, BJ."

"What do you mean?" He asked.

"Why can't I go home?" She'd tried to more than once. Sure, he wanted her to stay but she still wanted to return too. To her bed. To her fridge. He didn't need to worry about stocking for her, why didn't he just return home? Her bedding and her sheets and her pillows. The mail, it would keep coming. And especially missing the chance to see her other friends. "Bertha and Prudence haven't seen me for four days, they must be worried."

"Uh."

"BJ," Lydia warned him. "I want to go home. Beetlejuice, Beetlejuice, Beetlejuice!" She said his name three times but nothing happened? What? "Home, home, home?" What was going on?

"Really trying to get to the end of the week before this, Lyds," BJ said. Yeah, he was outwardly admitting now that something was wrong. "A couple more days," he encouraged her, "and I'll tell you why you can't go home. Yet."

"Beetlejuice." Lydia was a calm person usually. You had to, in order to be a friend to Beetlejuice, but even she had her limits.

"Two days, Lyd," he insisted again. "Gotta wait two more. Just two."

"Beetle-"

"It's not a request!" He said firmly to her. "You have to wait two days."

Did he just yell at her? *It's not a request?* What in the world was he hiding?

"Okay, no way are we fightin', Lyds, not right now." He groaned. "Gonna have to do something." He snapped his fingers and disappeared for a minute. When he came back, he pointed toward the entrance to his place.

Lydia watched Ginger come by. "Hi." She waved two of her legs on the same side. "Lydia? Uh? You're kind of worried about something Beetlejuice might be hiding?"

Oooh. No. *He asked for help?* He'd never do that, BJ would never do that. What would cause him to do that?

"It's? You really need to wait for two days," Ginger insisted. "Please? Don't get mad at him, or us. This is really hard, no one's used to it."

"Two days." Lydia looked back toward Beetlejuice. "Fine, two more days."

Two Days Later.

So many things went through Lydia's mind about what it might be, and the top thing it could possibly be? It just, it still didn't fit. *I just want to know. I just need to know!* The only thing she could even possibly think of was that the trip was like, a last resort thing to a divorce. They'd always loved each other though. But her dad, the way he talked to her? The fact that her mom never talked to her?

"Okay." BJ took several deep breaths, moving around the room. "Alright. Okay." He exhaled. "Lyd? Something happened that changed . . . the way you go up."

The way she went up? "I don't mind," Lydia said. "I just need to know what's wrong. Please?" He was rubbing his hands around so much.

"As in . . ."

Wow. He was lost for words. Lydia sat down on his couch and squeezed where her hands laid. She felt a few bugs and beetles come out, but didn't think about it. She still didn't know, but BJ being lost for words? The whole week?

"As in . . ." BJ tried again. "As in you can't. Not for at least 125 years. Rules." His voice was thick. "Rules for uh." He had his hands out, squeezing them in and out. "Rules for the newly dead, Babe."

Uh? Lydia stopped squeezing the couch. She was expecting to hear something about her family. Why was he . . . he was supposed . . . "You were supposed to say something about my family or. Or. Or. Something. Why, are you." Why was he? What? *Newly dead. Newly dead.* "What's newly dead?"

BJ gestured toward her.

Lydia blinked a few times. She looked at Beetlejuice. At the couch. At the bug that was crawling on the side of the couch that was slowly leaving her eyesight. She didn't want it to leave her eyesight. It was something to stare at so she didn't have to think about what he just . . . "I'm newly dead?" But? "But my dad!" No, no, this was a cruel joke. A joke he had taken way too far. "I talked to my dad!"

"When you die, you get a few little twisting on the rules," BJ answered her. "I revealed my real self to him, so he could say goodbye."

"B-but." Her mouth opened but no words came out, only half understandable sounds, until it hit her. "The." Her eyes fell back toward BJ. "Sick?" She felt herself falling backward into the couch, getting consumed by the stuffing of it. She felt Beetlejuice's hand and realized she hadn't moved at all.

He pulled her up into a hug. "It's not so bad here," he said, trying to sound positive. "I mean, hey, I'm here. Lived here all my life. Lot of freedom down here. You know? You can start here at the Roadhouse and if you want, you can move out and upward. I mean, you know? Schools and jobs and all that."

He kept trying to talk, and he wasn't even using his juice accidentally, but it just didn't. *I'm dead.* The pneumonia. She never got better. She never got over being sick. She couldn't say anything and her eyes just wouldn't stop watering. Her mom. Her dad. Her friends. Her life. Everything she knew. Where she grew up. Her world. Gone. Forever.

When she was younger, a couple of times, she had dreams about it. Some strange dreams where she just woke up and they all threw a party because she could stay forever. All her Neitherworld friends were there with cake and ice cream and assorted other Neitherworld food. It was a happy dream, but it was just one of those dreams. Like, waking up and finding yourself alone on an island, where you could just scream as loud as you want and run as much as you want. No consequences. No thinking things through.

Those were dreams. Those were just stupid, silly dreams. She clung tightly to his back. "Beej'."

"Gotcha, Lyds, forever, it's okay."

Dead. Dead. Dead. Dead. Dead. Dead. Dead. Dead. Dead.

Beetlejuice wasn't surprised by the ear piercing scream she let out. He knew it wouldn't be easy. Everything she ever lived for was gone. No family, a few friends, no schooling, no nothing, just him and his Roadhouse. She only visited the Neitherworld. To ever say it was home. To say that she was dead. That she'd never see any of the living people she'd loved again? Alive?

He wasn't a bit surprised she started to fall into the couch. The Neitherworld was a world of feeling, of magic, and Lydia held a *lot* of feeling right now. He had to make sure he didn't lose her to any of it. If it took all his juice, he'd keep her tender self safe through it all. There was a reason it took 125 years in a place of safety before they could come out to the Neitherworld.

It was an open interpretation to all feelings. But it was either there with him, where he could watch her and know what could happen, or back with more newly deads who wouldn't know the first thing to do if she started falling into even just a couch. He let her cry on him for several more minutes, getting out a lot of her sorrow. He could feel himself getting so drenched, she was almost starting to clean him now.

She was starting to shout and squeeze him, telling him over and over she couldn't be dead. To prove it to her. That she was fine. But, it was just her ranting and venting. Beetlejuice knew that, he did it all the time. Before this.

She cried on him a good fifteen minutes before she had any concept of time. "I." Her first word in a while. "I don't wanna be dead." She sniffled and wiped her eye.

He looked down into those sad, miserable big eyes. Eyes he always hated to see. Eyes he always tried to prevent as much as he could. "I've always been a ghost," he said to her. "Born one. Got my annoying family here forever to bother me. This has always been home." He tried to wipe his tears. "But if this world was taken from me, I know I'd be feeling like you right now. I may never have been alive, but I know losing all of it's not easy, Babe."

She hugged him even tighter. "I don't even know what to do."

"Nothin'. Right now, don't gotta do a single thing," he assured her. "Better if you don't."

"Yeah. Magic. Neitherworld." She was speaking, but it sounded like she was long since tired. "No one ever again." Her whole body started to collapse against him. The squeezing from before was all but gone, now she couldn't seem to even hold on.

Beetlejuice picked her up and sat down on the bed. Right now, she was tender to all of the Neitherworld's strange magic. As long as she slept, he'd hold onto her. He watched as Ginger crept by. "She's out."

"Oh." Ginger dabbed her eyes, but tried really hard not to make another sound. She just shook her head behind her and then moved away.

Jacques looked in. "If you need anything, a break or anything, let us know, Beattlejuice?"

"I got her." Not going anywhere. Not yet. Lyd was priority uno. Until he could trust she wasn't going to fall into the abyss of the Neitherworld, his second priority had to stay off the table. Time would move though. It always moved. Bertha and Prudence just had their last day of school that day. Both of them would be pulling up stake and leaving Peaceful Pines shortly for their new life and new colleges. By then, Lydia would be recovered enough to trust to get away a little bit, letting one of the others watch over her a small amount of time.

And then. Priority two. Until then, all those murderers could just lie down. Have sweet dreams. Think they got away with it all.

While they could.

"Beattlejuice?" Jacques interrupted him one more time. "Uh? Ginger and all of us? We really just want to remind you that-"

"Beat it."

"Yes, I know, and it is justified. You have to do what you have to do. That's fine, just don't? Don't lose yourself in the process of what you need to do."

"Just beat it."

"It would do no good for her to get used to everything to have you completely changed. Just remember that. Revenge is a tricky thing." Jacques left.

Beetlejuice knew what he was talking about. He didn't really care what he was saying. Whatever it took. Whatever it took to guarantee she never had to see them again. Whatever it took, to make them *feel* what she felt. But, he felt himself calming down again as she moved slightly in his arms. *You'll be okay. I promise. Promise, promise, promise, Lydia.*

Promise.

Final Lessons

Chapter Notes

Quick Reminders: Duncan, Carter, Finley, and Brady are the ones responsible for the tragedy of Lydia and her family.

Rebecca Beckett knows about the Deetz' murder, but didn't actually carry anything out. She knows her boyfriend Brady was a part of it though.

University of Bridgeport

"Rebecca Beckett."

Rebecca got up from her chair and went over toward her teacher. She was giving back her final project. Rebecca handed it in over a week ago, but it was time for the final grade. Pass or fail. College sucked and art class the hardest. She thought it would be fun, but art was actually really hard. As much as people said it was in the eye of the beholder, the beholder was her teacher with criteria. She drew better than stick figures, but for anything else, it was really tough.

"It was . . . different," her teacher settled on. "Your imagination has grown tremendously over the year. I never thought you'd do something so challenging. You aced your final."

Rebecca eagerly took her art. What did she mean by her imagination soared? She looked at the project and just about dropped it. *What the hell was that?* It was some dark night painting, but like twisted with stuff out of Da Vinci. It was weird. She wanted to protest about it to her teacher, but she already got her pass.

She sat back down and noticed Brady's wink. *No way. Really?* She gestured to it and him. How'd he do that?

After class, they met by the locker's nearby. "How'd you make that wicked looking thing?"

"I call it tortured love," he joked. "We've got more than a few, and we'll be getting our hands on even more soon. No worries, okay? I sacrificed *one* precious piece for you."

Rebecca rewarded him with a hug and a kiss. "Thank you so much! I didn't think I'd pass finals, and I'd still be stuck in that stupid art class. I love you, baby. Those things are going to be worth a fortune and you wasted one on me."

"Nothing's wasted on you," Brady said, "as long as it's appreciated?"

"Definitely. I'll show you plenty of appreciation tonight." She gestured to his project. "What about yours?"

"I did my own." He showed it to her. "Drawing. Future. Big house, big car, and a wonderful little family in the background of it all."

Aww. "For your final project?" She placed her hands on her heart.

"Well, I didn't get into all of this for minor fun," he said. He grabbed her hands. "Tonight, we are having the best dinner around. I have a surprise for you." He touched her cheek.

"Something your little freshman heart isn't going to be able to resist."

Peaceful Pines

"Do you want to come over tonight?" Prudence asked Bertha. "Celebrate the ending of this school year finally?"

"Yeah, I do," Bertha said. "We'll have fun. Only a little while longer before we. Well? Can't do that anymore."

"Yeah," Prudence said. "I know it sounds weird, but, I kind of wished we could have invited Betty Juice. I just, I haven't seen her since. You know." She noticed Bertha's odd look.

"What?"

"She contacted me. She's out of Peaceful Pines," Bertha said. "I'd tell you how, but I should really keep her secret. We are all out of here soon," she said. "My folks found a great place near my accepted college. It's on the other side of America in California. It's going to be a blast!"

"Yeah. I'm going to New Jersey. We'll be pretty far apart," Prudence said. "I'll be sure to write."

"Yeah, like every day, and phone calls too," Bertha agreed. "We'll be great. It'll be great. New start."

"Yeah," Prudence repeated. "New start."

University of Bridgeport

Brady tucked away the engagement ring in his pocket when Duncan, Finley and Carter showed up. "Hey there."

"Brady, what the hell?" Duncan started in on him, taking a seat on his side. Finley and Carter showed up on the other sides. "Rebecca told us what you're romantic ass just did. Giving away one of our pieces for a final?"

Finley grabbed the ring box out of his jacket. "Already spending money you don't have for her." He eyed him.

"Hey, I said I was only in it for Rebecca, and to get out of college for good," Brady warned all three of them. "I love her and I don't want to lose her. A lot can happen over the summer, I

don't want to waste it. I know she'll stay faithful if I have a ring on her finger."

"Estate sale is in two days. Two," Finley warned him. "Two! If you waste too much, there's no way you'll be able to get much art. Don't come crying to me if you get like one thing. That house is loaded with it."

"They have no idea what they've got," Carter added. "Look. I got the heebie jeebies once. Thought I saw something that wasn't there. We all got reasons to wanting to get out now, but it's useless if we don't hit that estate sale. Delia Deetz hardly ever sold anything as much as she tried. They'll be giving it away for pennies. To them, the couch is going to be worth more than any of it."

"Art is only as good as it's buyers," Finley agreed. "If there's one thing I learned from my dad, it's that. Don't waste anymore money on Rebecca." He slammed his hand down on the table. "And don't bother a single piece of our art again, or you are going to regret ever joining in this venture."

"It's just a proposal ring," Brady said. "One art piece and a proposal ring. Cheap one too. Once I get some real art from the estate, I'll buy the real wedding ring." He took his engagement ring back. "I won't do anything else, okay? Two days. We all go back to Peaceful Pines for it."

Two days.

Neitherworld

Lydia felt almost like a newborn baby. She used to be able to walk around the Neitherworld with no trouble at all. It wasn't like that anymore, now that she knew she wasn't visiting it. She was dead. She now had something she never had before as a human, her own magic, and it made her susceptible to pitfalls in the Neitherworld.

"Come on? You wanna little bite, right?" Beetlejuice teased her. He was at the table, shaking her sandwich at her. "Make it through without falling through. You can do it, Babe."

Concentrate on the burger. Lydia took another step forward. She had developed her skill enough that she didn't need Beetlejuice holding onto her anymore. The couch and the bed psychologically kept her steady now. They felt solid beneath her. Floors though? She'd already fallen down twice through the floor. BJ had to quickly catch her and drag her up.

"Mmmm, it's so yummy," Beetlejuice encouraged her some more. "Come on. Walky walk. Can't stay on the couch and beds forever, Lyds."

"Why not?" She took another shaky step forward. "If we scoot them closer together, then I can just jump from one to the other." Lydia knew that wasn't a choice, but at the time, it sounded good. It took a little while to accept that she had died and really never could return, but she focused on the positives now to get through it.

Her Neitherworld friends. Several of them had sent flowers and sorry your dead cards and even welcoming cards. Ginger and Jacques and The Monster Down the Street all stopped by to see her at least once a day. She also didn't have to worry about any pain anymore. Whatever she went through, it was gone now. She felt healthy and fine. Well, for being dead.

The Neitherworld was still the great place it was before too. All the wacky and insane things she used to love and enjoy were still there. But, her biggest positive was BJ. Not accustomed to working at all, or being patient with anything, he didn't curse or get upset with her at all with slow progress. Physically or emotionally.

She missed her life. She missed her friends, and she really missed her family. She'd miss everything about Peaceful Pines and the Land of the Living. She thought she might even miss Claire Brewster a little. Just, everything. But it wasn't over. Life was, but not her afterlife. It was just a second phase. A great phase that she got to skip to over haunting her old house for over a hundred years! That would have been boring.

Focusing on the positives, and right now the positive of a sandwich was tempting. She hadn't eaten much over the last few days and she was finally getting an appetite back. *One step. Two steps. Three steps.* Almost there! Hopefully when she reached out he wasn't like his mischievous self and moved it out of her grasp.

"Now that's progress, Lyds!" He congratulated her, juicing into a graduation uniform and standing up to give it to her like a degree. One step shorter than she planned. She was so surprised.

"Beetlejuice!" She started falling through the floor. Lydia tried to reach out and he grabbed her hand like always. He held onto her.

"Your impression of a monkey is really getting more impressive." He put on a monkey face. "Know what I mean?"

"Pull me up," she complained. "No joking, I'm hungry." She was pulled back through the floor and onto a kitchen chair of his. He gave her the sandwich. Ooh. Food. Her stomach growled. Awkward timing.

"Don't worry, Lyds, you won't die of starvation," he joked.

Lydia was quiet for a moment. She smiled. It was okay to joke about that kind of thing now. She needed to eject some humor in her life again. "I am going to enjoy this." She took a bite into the burger. Yummy.

"Okay. Almost didn't fall through. It was because of surprise." Gears came out of BJ's head, turning around. He was thinking about something. They went back down into his head. "Ah, fine. I won't be too far," he decided. "If you're ready, there's been someone who's wanted to visit with you." He glanced at her. "Mom."

Bea Juice wanted to see her?

Bea Juice's Home

She should have known it. Still, it wasn't different before when she saw herself in the reflection of the cleanliness of the floor. Lydia didn't stand a chance.

Beetlejuice knew it was coming too. He'd lifted her up higher away from the floor. "Really, ma!" He complained. "Newly dead comes to visit the floors can't be so shiny she can see herself. She'll fall right through." He floated over to the couch and sat her down. "Tables, beds, and chairs. Mentally she's okay with furniture itself now." He sat her down. "Right, Lyds?"

"Have to keep the floor clean, you can't just let it get dirty," Bea complained as she came toward him. "You're not cleaning yourself enough, BJ."

"I've been busy, come on," he complained. "Here. Have a nice long talk on the couch. Don't let her get up," BJ warned her. "If she starts to fall-"

"Goodness, Beetlejuice, who raised you?" She scolded him before she went over and started to clean on the back of his ears. "Dirty, dirty, dirty."

"Ma! Going, going," BJ said. "Dad wants to talk to me too." He looked down at Lydia "You'll be good for a few minutes?"

Lydia nodded. She was fine on the couch. After he disappeared, Bea held her hand and drug her across the floor. It felt like wading in water.

"In here, in here. You can sit at the table," Bea said. She started to clean the table top. "So. Death. How are you doing with that, dear?"

Brazen. Definitely BJ's mom. "It's going?" Lydia said. "I'm getting used to it."

"Did you get any kind of tick?" Bea asked. "Just don't get a cleaning tick." She stared at the table then cleaned it again. "Beetlejuice cares for his friend, but if you get a cleaning tick like me, I don't know if anything can save you."

Lydia smiled, but then what she just said clicked. BJ was born the Ghost with the Most. "Were you born in the Neitherworld?"

Bea stopped cleaning and looked toward Lydia. "Well now, one subtle sentence and you picked it up. You're a good one." Bea took a seat. "Your skin is a little lighter, but you're still a pretty thing. Nice to see. Eating well?" Lydia nodded. "Sleeping well?" Lydia nodded again. "Good, good. Beetlejuice is taking great risk with you not haunting for 125 years, but you used to walk around here just fine. Look at you, you'll be fine. With your opened mind, you'll be fine." She patted her cheek twice.

Bea Juice was asking the basics, and telling Lydia everything she already knew.

"Death is hard," Bea Juice then confided in her. "Hundreds of years later, I still remember it all. I went very young, too young, but the plague was rampant. There was no stopping it, period, let alone for a little one." She looked toward her floors. "It was so dirty. Covered in

bodies and blood and dirt. I just lied there, waiting for the time to come. Even as small as I was, I knew I wasn't long for that world."

Oh. Lydia wasn't expecting the conversation to grow so heavy.

"The Neitherworld. It's a second chance world," Bea said. "I was originally not called Bea Juice, obviously." She looked into her clean table. "It was nearly a hundred years later after reaching the Neitherworld that I found my destiny in Nat." She smiled. "After that, it was quite easy to find my real self and what made me happy. A hundred years of lingering around, wondering why I was never just moved on like everyone else. Eventually learned." She moved from the table. "Don't focus on your death, focus on your afterlife. My boy was very fond of you in life."

Lydia nodded. The conversation was nice. Not helpful, but at least she knew Bea used to be alive. "We're best friends."

"Of course, it's all you could be dear. You were so young, you were alive, things were different. I had to wait a hundred years before I found my destiny," Bea said. "You already have yours. When things get tough, and eventually they will? Just remember, you're not alone. You've got my boy."

"I know," Lydia insisted. "He's been really good about helping me." She looked around. "Usually he doesn't go very far."

"I'm not done talking yet," Bea said to her, drawing her attention back to her. "Nothing is really hitting home yet, is it dear?" She moved away from the table and went closer toward Lydia again. "When you go into the next phase, it will be because you completed everything to your full satisfaction."

Yes. Lydia nodded.

Bea tried again. "Stop that nodding. You're still not listening. Don't think of the afterlife as the afterlife. Think of the Outerworld as part 1, and the Neitherworld as part 2. It doesn't matter which part you finally find your happiness."

Okay. She wasn't supposed to nod. Lydia was trying to listen. She already knew all of what she was saying.

Bea patted her hands next to her. "Destiny doesn't always involve part 1. That's why you have Neitherworlders born within the Neitherworld and then moving on. Destiny had nothing for them in part 1. Destiny, had nothing that involved my boy needing to be alive. Only meeting you," she said to Lydia. "So take your time. Get used to the Neitherworld." She turned her back and started to clean the dishes. "But I've been waiting hundreds of years here, so try not to have a tick like mine. It's about the only thing that would turn BJ away, and it's high time I get some grandkids."

Uh? Uh? Okay. Lydia had been listening, but that last part?

"Oh please, even a cleaning tick would probably not turn him away." She turned back around. "Nat didn't care about my tick after all. Oh, I hope he's convincing our son to do something though. Been trying to get him to work for years, even before we knew about you, and nothing ever happened."

"I?" Lydia tried to speak up. "I'm just friends with-"

"You were. You were alive. You weren't from the same world, too young, different plans. Life and afterlife, it can't blend in that way." Bea held her finger up to her. "It's okay. Don't admit it out loud, it might make it harder. But, you should remember how that made you feel. Because the hardest turns are yet to be turned, but Beetlejuice is going to need you to stay strong. You can't fully rely on his power to get through it, or you'll sink both of you before you ever get a chance to be happy."

Can't fully rely on his power? Grandkids? *We were the best of friends. Just friends.*

"How's it feel when you sink through the ground with or without him? Feel it." Bea stretched out her hand, using her magic she pulled Lydia out from the table, letting her stumble across the ground, until it became like water!

Lydia felt herself falling again, but this time, there was no familiar hand to give her a pull up. She reached upward, desperately trying to hold on. "Beetlejuice!" Gone, where was he? With his dad.

You were. You were alive. You weren't from the same world, too young, different plans.

How long would she fall? She was in free fall, she didn't know what to do! What to hang onto! *Beeeetttlllleeejuuuuuuiiiice!*

You can't fully rely on his power to get through it, or you'll sink both of you before you ever get a chance to be happy.

Then, she saw it. She wanted him there so bad, even though she knew he was all the way out with his dad. His hand was there and she grabbed it, feeling it's familiar grasp.

How's it feel when you sink through the ground with or without him? Feel it.

"You okay, Babe?" Beetlejuice was right there for her now.

She looked up toward him. He was ranting against his mom now.

"Sorry, dear," Bea said. "Forgot to pay attention." She winked at Lydia. "Did you have a nice talk with your dad?"

"Eh, work," Beetlejuice moaned. "Always focused on it. Ugh." He smiled at Lydia. "Don't worry, I'd never let you down, Babe. Not like I was gonna a hundred percent trust my mom. Cares more about cleaning than anything."

"Be nice, Beetlejuice, some manners," she warned him. "Take your nice friend home and let her get some rest. That was quite a journey down I assume, but I got distracted by my

dishes."

Lydia felt Beetlejuice's grip stiffen around her. Not hard, just.

"Told you to watch her. Trusted you to watch her," Beetlejuice complained to his mom. He kept it simpler than what she felt coming from him. "Come on, Babe. Let's get out of here. Better things to do than hanging with parents all day."

Lydia clung to him tighter than usual as he lifted her from the ground. *I'm not strong enough to help myself yet, let alone Beetlejuice with anything. But?* But she stared at Bea smiling at her while she cleaned a plate. *But I?*

But she knew that pull up from Beetlejuice, was way too warm. Way too important. Way too . . . much. For how she *should* feel for a friend.

Purchasing Art

Beetlejuice watched Lydia. Days later and she almost fell through the couch. Ever since she had visited his mom, her progress became slower. Now, she was even regressing. "It's a couch, Lyds. Why are you falling through a couch." It wasn't a question that needed an answer. There was only reason she'd be regressing. "You're holding something back and it's keeping you from concentrating."

She denied it again. "No, I'm not," she said, clinging to the couch. "You can't make progress without taking a few steps backward."

Beetlejuice turned himself into a donkey and changed back. Enough said on what he thought of that.

"Death is hard, okay?" Lydia groaned. "Everything's new. It takes adjustments."

This time he turned into a bull and slightly snorted, puff coming from his nostrils. "Sure, Lyds."

"Look, you don't get it. It's all frustrating, okay?" She tried to steady herself on the couch.

"Look, you don't get it," Beetlejuice came back on her. "I know there's something bothering you." Flies appeared near his bull's appearances rear end. He started to swat them with his tail. "If you ever want to walk around normally like you used to down here, then you are going to have to tell me what you're hiding." Could she be remembering something vague already? "I mean. You got some memory of before it happened, you should express it." He turned himself into some mail marked express and fluttered next to her lazily by the couch. "Come on, Lyds. Who's your best friend?"

"I don't have any memories," she insisted again. "Really. It's just. Issues. That's all. Personal issues, I guess."

Beetlejuice groaned and turned back to normal, now sitting on the arm of the couch. "Personal issues? You're dead! What kind of personal issues you got left?" Ah, okay. Fine, there was something there in her eyes. It was super personal. "Girl things?"

"Sort of, I guess," Lyds said. "And don't turn into Betty Juice, that won't help."

Oooh, real girl things. "Well." Ooh. "I know one of those real ones! Kind of? Well, close enough."

Lydia was left alone with Ginger for a little while. She was on a chair which as of yet, she had no problem with. "Hello."

"Hi," Ginger said. "So. Beetlejuice said you had problems that you couldn't discuss with him? Uh. This really isn't the time to start having issues that you won't talk to anyone about," she

said slowly. "so, I'm here to listen."

Uuh. Lydia wasn't so sure about that. "I don't know." The subject, it felt like something she should be discussing with Prudence and Bertha. She didn't mind Ginger, but this subject?

"Oh, I know we aren't the best of friends," Ginger admitted too. "But, you are going through a very dangerous phase, I mean complicated phase!" She corrected herself. "And, well, it's . . ."

It's not like she was going to get a lot of options. *I have to tell someone. Beej is right, this isn't helping. But how can I tell without . . .* "I don't know how to tell you," Lydia said. "I mean. I didn't even know how or if I . . . feel something about . . . someone." It could just be because he was spending so much time with her. Because he never let her down, and she was right there whenever she needed him. But, friends were there for each other too. So, why was she even considering it? He didn't. He wouldn't, he was her best friend. She was his, and this was not the time for these weird feelings to pop up.

She looked back toward Ginger. The spider was slowly nodding.

"Oooh. I get it," she said. "You. You really liked someone in your world, but you didn't realize it at the time?"

Close enough. It was as close as Lydia could risk getting.

"Okay. Oh no, I can see why you didn't want to talk about that," Ginger said. "That's a lot of burden, I'm sorry! But, uh? It's not over? Maybe someone here will make you happy? You should really tell Beetlejuice, maybe he can leave the one you liked a love message?"

"No!" Lydia felt her cheeks getting warm. No, absolutely not, he could never do that. "No, I don't want that."

"Oh. Okay. Well? I'm sorry, Lydia. That time was short though, and you have so much more time here now," Ginger said. "So, you shouldn't be scared to tell him. Do you want me to tell him for you?"

Usually, no, but Lydia was hiding something very big in there that she could risk giving away. That the guy in question was Beetlejuice. *If Ginger tells him whatever, then maybe that will end this need to know from him?* "Fine, but I don't want to dwell on it. I just. I'm just trying to deal with it, while dealing with death too."

"Okay. Hang on, Lydia. You'll find someone else." Then, she left the room.

Strange. Lydia just told her that she supposedly might love someone in her world before she died. Why didn't she grab a hanky and start crying? She was such an emotional spider. Didn't her situation strike anything in Ginger?

"I got it," Ginger said as she approached Beetlejuice right outside the Roadhouse. "It's going to make this harder, Beetlejuice."

"Ah, great." That's not what he wanted to hear. "What is it?"

"She just realized she had pent up feelings for someone in her previous world. Lovey dovey feelings and she never expressed them," Ginger said softly. "So . . ."

"Heh. Well." Beetlejuice scratched his head. "Someone out there's trying real hard to one up on me, she's got repressed feelings about some boy in her old classes or something?" Damn.

"I know," Ginger said. "On one hand, it's romantically cute and sad, but I can't even stop to think about it 'cause-

"That just increases her chances of getting in trouble." No! "Naw, fate, I totally can take more. Throw the whole solar system at me!" His juice hit him in the back of his head with an art project of a solar system. "Art. I don't want to see art right now." He made it disappear.

"Maybe you should go to the other world, and leave him a note Lydia writes or something," Ginger recommended.

Beetlejuice didn't like that. "She's dead. Whoever this is, is not. What's the difference?"

"Uh? Closure?" Ginger said like it should be obvious. "She needs to find closure over this."

"Well, why's this guy got to be such a big deal?" Beetlejuice said. "I mean, I ain't never heard of no guy she liked that much. And like, no blushing or anything! And I was always around her girl-girl friends, they would have thrown it out at some point." It didn't make sense. Who could she have possibly liked? *Not important who it is.* "Nah, we need to just . . ." Um.

"Make her tell him in a letter," Ginger said again. "Eventually. She needs to get over the frustration. Confront how she feels."

"But." *Who cares about some little . . .* "It."

"She won't say his name right now," Ginger said. "I don't think she trusts anyone enough for that, and she says she's still working out how she feels."

"Well there you go! She is working out how she feels," Beetlejuice said. "That's the reason she's faltering, indecision. That's reason enough *not* to jump the gun on this one. Okay. Give her a little more time. Pushing her is even worse you know." Death probably wasn't an easy thing to accept, and there'd be a lot of frustration with feelings.

"If she doesn't get better, we should do something," Ginger said. "Your selfish tendencies of always wanting Lydia will have to take a back seat to help her if she can't get past it, Beetlejuice." She smiled at him. "Besides, it's not like whoever it is is some threat. She's gone from that world. You shouldn't feel jealous. You have her all the time now. Whoever this special someone is, they never will."

Beetlejuice was hitting his head. "I'm racking my brain over this." His head turned into pool balls being set up and split apart. He just didn't know anybody that meant that much to her. That she ever hinted about. She didn't even have any real friends that were boys to warm up to. So?

Who?

He went back into the Roadhouse. Fine. Great. Somehow she liked someone that completely slipped by him. He smiled toward her. *Lost love crap. How do I handle this?* He looked at her. Now she was all blushing and wiggly and . . . *damn it, she really does like somebody?*

Okay, fine, no problem. She was growing up. Well, she was growing up there, so, whatever! Not his area. Why was he starting to focus on this? *Who cares?! Getting her to a point she can walk across the floor so I can start going after those little gremlins! That's what matters.*

Right now, he still couldn't leave. He wanted to, he really wanted to. But slipping through the couch again? Not happening yet. Besides, he couldn't do anything yet anyway. But once Prudence and Bertha was gone.

Then he could finally take some action.

Duncan, Carter, Finley and Brady arrived at the auction to a surprise. Finley's dad was there. Mason Jennings.

Finley walked toward him. "What are you doing here?"

"You are buying a couple pieces of art, and then selling them back to me? While everything goes to the way side, I don't think so." He patted his son's shoulder. "Don't worry, I'll let you grab something a piece afterward."

"Hey, hey, hold up," Brady said. "That's not right. *We* did all the hard work."

"And you'll be rewarded with a piece," Mason said to Brady.

"No. No way. Look. That shit was risky," Brady pointed out. "Risky! If anything goes wrong, we are the ones who go down, not you!" He looked toward Finley. "This isn't fair, this wasn't the deal!"

"This isn't about you, dad," Finley confronted his dad. "This stuff, it's-"

"Dangerous for you to even be here, Nitwit," Mason said outwardly. He brought out his checkbook. "Brady, you wanted to quit school, marry, and have a nice job. What do you think you need for that?"

"Um. I need a house and a car," Brady said. "So I gotta get in on this."

"That's just annoying and a waste of time. If you don't know who it goes to, you make nothing," Mason said. "From what you pay verses what you make, you won't even be able to afford a real ring." Mason wrote him a check and gave it to him. "Cut out the middle man and take that. Putting your future at risk was dumb enough. Don't screw it up a second time."

Brady looked at the check. "Screw the art, I gotta go. Good luck you guys."

"Shit." Finley looked at his dad. "Are you just going to pay us off for a quick settlement?"

"Why drag it out?" His father asked. "I'm the one with the contacts. Your plan was to buy up some paintings, sell them to me, and then I would make my end that way. A terrible plan." He looked toward Finley. "You couldn't have pulled anything off without me. Not your education, and not other activities," he said. "Even this? If I was a cruel man, I could out you out of everything by threatening the truth. There is no connection placing me anywhere of importance. In your college activities and otherwise."

"Fine. I don't care, I just want the money," Carter said. "I just want this done and over with."

"There isn't checks for everyone now," Mason revealed. "I had some to give to Brady since obviously he was in a bad predicament. He was making bad decisions. I got him out of the way." He smiled. "You can take 10,000 a piece after the auction, or wait for me to sell and make ten percent. Your choice."

"Is ten percent better?" Duncan asked. "Is ten percent better than 10,000, Finley?"

"I'll wait," Finley agreed. "You better not cheapen me out on this. We took the risk."

"But as much risk as you took, you won't be able to take everything. Your students. How much do you have? Do you think they'll be giving it away at five dollars a piece? Art is still art. Even if they sell everything in large collections, Deetz' family isn't just going to let it go for nothing. It was what made her happy. The darkness made her happy." He smiled at his son. "What an interesting twist to the situation. That just makes it all the more appealing."

Finley looked toward Duncan and Carter. "Well?"

"I'll take the ten," Carter said. "I want out of this, really, it's bugging me. A lot. Just. The whole-"

"Let's not talk about historical activities," Mason warned him before he dropped anything. He wrote him a check. "You can't change your mind now." He looked toward Duncan and his son.

"I'll wait," Finley said. "I can wait."

"I . . ." Duncan sighed. "Man, I? Nah, I'll wait. If Finley's waiting, I'm waiting."

"Good, now either get out of here or sit back and be quiet." Finley's father dusted his sleeves. "I've got art to purchase."

Bug

"Goodbye, home." Beatrice waved goodbye, fondly remembering all the years they spent there. All the fun she used to have. A new town, and a new state. A new start. Her parents were going with her too, she'd be too far away from them in her mind. A new start with everything. Although, a small part of her wished she didn't need a new start. She wished they could have all gone to school together with Lydia. That this mess had never happened, and life just continued to make sense.

Out of the corner of her eye, Beatrice noticed Betty Juice on the other side of the house. She was going to say something to her, but Betty simply waved and walked off very fast. So fast she didn't even see her. At least, that must be what had happened. It's not like Betty could just disappear.

She ran to her parents car. A new life began today.

The Torturing Begins . . .

University of Bridgeport.

Duncan checked on his list of new classes. He'd just moved into his dorm room. He was still waiting on those paintings to sell and for him to get a percentage, but in the meantime, the worry just circled over his head. Even in the new year. At first, it was so easy. The plan had sounded super easy, and he wasn't the one murdering anyone. It'd surely be okay, Lydia Deetz sounded like a disturbed person anyhow. At least, the way she dressed and the things she liked. But.

When he was right there, in the moment that it happened, it didn't feel like he had no guilt. It didn't feel like the girl had been off-balanced. Guilt was heavy, but what was done was done. He just needed to collect and take care of it. He needed it.

If anything ever happened to him, if he ever got sick in the head then he would be able to take care of it. He could get away, or he could get doctors before things got out of control. His grandmother, rest her soul, she always came to his family's house to see him. She never let him visit her. When he was old enough, he was tired of never seeing her house. He knew the address, his family just told him he could never go there. On the few occasions he did, it was to pick her up for something. Never getting a chance to even peak in.

So he went to look for himself. During lunch time, he went to her house. He didn't do anything except look into a window of the kitchen sink. It was covered in coachroaches and

muck and things he couldn't identify! He saw his grandmother's horrified face as she walked by and he took off.

His family told him she had a psychological problem letting things go. That she was a hoarder. He never visited her place again, until there was no choice but for her to let go of everything. The house had to be cleaned as she went into a retirement home. By the time his family finished helping out that house, he couldn't eat certain foods for a long time. He became extremely clean and never left anything out in the open.

His dorm room consisted of a small wooden desk, a spinning seat, a small endtable and a refrigerator. Everything else was provided by the school. As long as he never got anything, bought senseless items, then he would be fine.

At least, that's what he thought as a small bug crawled out from beneath the desk. Just a tiny bug, small enough even the most scared people would squash it with their thumb. Practically a gnat size. He just smashed it with his foot and went back to looking at his classes.

Then another bug came out. Not real big again, but slightly bigger. About twice the size of a gnat. He squished it.

Then another bug came out? This one was about the size of a fly. It has a strange green color to it. Duncan didn't even know the color of it. Still, he squashed it.

Then another one came, slightly bigger. Okay, this was getting weird. He bent down and looked under his desk but saw no more bugs. He squashed it again.

Yet somehow, even though he'd just looked under there, another bug was coming out. It was about the size of a dime. How could that have been hiding? It was really a neon kind of green, almost slimy. Disgusting. He took off his shoe this time and holding his shoes in his hand, he squashed it. That one he would have felt under his feet.

Then another one came out, about the size of a quarter. Disgusting! He bent down, squished it with his shoe and stared under the desk. It was clear again. He waited several minutes to see where they were coming from before he was certain there were no more.

He went to put his shoe back on, when he actually saw another one coming out. Twice the size of a quarter! He squished it. Then another one came out. He grabbed one of his few moving boxes that contained his class books and dropped it onto the bug. He picked the box back up and waited.

Then, he saw a head. He jumped back, almost falling. The bug was so big, it couldn't fit through the open space! His desk reached almost to the floor except for the drawer part which was a little bit more off the floor. He didn't even want to imagine how big it had been. It moved it's head back and he waited. He breathed hard, unable to believe there was a bug that big in America!

It must have been his imagination. It must have been. Then, he saw it. It was coming round the opposite end of the desk. At least an inch in height and he couldn't even say the weight. It was purple with light green spot all around it. He could even see the antennae moving on it!

He screamed and headed out the door. The dorm was infested! He waited to see if anyone else was coming out yet, but no one was in the halls. Then, he looked toward his dorm room door. In his hurry, he left it open.

He saw a head, trying to come out of the the door! The antennae were massive, it was massive, it couldn't even fit through the door! Duncan couldn't take it, he ran to the Resident Assistant's room and knocked viciously, demanding he needed help. When they came out, he pointed to his door.

The bug was gone. He told the RA all about it. They went with him back to his room and looked all around.

"There's nothing here, Duncan," they said to him. "There's not even bodies of bugs you said you squashed."

"But they were!" He picked up the moving box he used to squash them and showed him the bottom.

"It's clean," they said. "Everything's clean. I think you just need some sleep."

"I did not dream this up!"

"You haven't been doing anything bad or against the rules in here?" They asked him. "Knocking at my door at 11 at night about bugs being too massive to squeeze out of your dorm room doesn't sound like something a normal person not on anything would do. Do you understand?"

Shit. They thought he was on drugs? He never touched drugs, that stuff was wrong. His parents taught him years ago not to mess with drugs. "I guess. I just dreamed it."

"I think so too," The RA confirmed. "If you have any other massive bugs the size of the doorway come back, just let me know. Otherwise, I haven't heard a single report about this kind of thing. It's just your imagination. Or, if you are doing something bad in here, knock it off. Understand?"

What else could Duncan do? *It had to have been a dream.* There wasn't a single ounce of evidence that a bug was even inside the room, there was no liquid and no bodies. Nothing. "Sorry."

"No problem. See ya, Duncan. Get some rest."

Duncan closed the door and looked around the room briefly. Rest felt like the last thing he wanted to do in that room.

Unseen by him though, glowing neon green eyes shined from beneath the small area in the desk.

There was no way he could keep him out forever.



One Down.

University of Bridgeport Fine Arts Building

Duncan walked to his night class in the Fine Arts Building. Most of his jitters had been over from the beginning of the day a week ago. He started to wonder if maybe he had something spiked or he'd just not slept enough. He had no idea that not getting enough sleep could do that to him. Maybe with the added pressure of the paintings mounting on him too. Anyhow, things were okay now. A little trepidation in the night, but he saw no bugs. Nothing. He waited outside his classroom. Duncan always liked to come earlier than others. It gave him extra time to read or relax without anyone gossiping or talking. That also meant the classroom wouldn't be open yet. That was okay too though. The hallway was nice and bright. Art pictures from the nearby art class were on the walls. Bunches of shaded chairs. It probably took awhile before people got used to things. Either that or those students just all picked a chair to draw. Some were good, and some looked terrible. It was easy to see who was going to go on.

Then there was a goofy saying over the whole thing, "Put your Art into it!". Something he hadn't seen since grade school. He was glad not to be associated with that. He only had one class in the Fine Arts, and it's only because he needed that extra credit. One semester of Spanish should get him through. It was a long night class but it was only once a week. He dug his Spanish book out. Shouldn't be too bad. Duncan looked at the introductory pages.

Then saw a small bug drop on it. Small. It was like a roly poly. Still, he moved. He didn't want anything to do with any insects. He went back to looking at his book again. The hallway lights seemed to get dimmer. He didn't know why, probably a light burning out further downward. While he looked at the book, it seemed easy. Introductory phrases. If he focused on things like colors and greetings he'd probably be okay at first.

Then, the lights got dimmer again. He looked ahead and noticed that the fluorescents didn't fluoresce so bright. They weren't burnt out, just dimmed. He heard footsteps coming around the distant corner. Good, there was another student. The lighting was getting creepy, so he changed his mind about wanting to be alone anymore. Even if that person didn't talk to Duncan, someone else's presence would be now. Hopefully it would be the teacher. That would be even better. He waited but no one came around the corner. Instead he heard a light buzz on his book.

He looked down at it and instinctively dropped the book and backed away. It was a big black flying bug. It wasn't flying but it kept spreading its wings in and out, crawling on his book. It wasn't massive like in his nightmares but it wasn't the roly poly size. *This school is infested.* Maybe his lack of sleep enhanced his imagination earlier in the week, and maybe some of the bugs he saw here and there seemed bigger than usual, but he still believed they were there. He wouldn't imagine that exact buzzing noise. Those exact markings. He knew nothing about bugs, why would he be imagining unique markings? Especially that one. It was almost all black except for a strip of white on the head, a strip of white toward the back and

even legs that were half white and half black. He watched it's wings flap again. The edges were white while the wings were transparent but blacker in nature.

He decided standing up was a better idea. As the bug left his book, he waited for it to be a distance and picked it back up. He held his book. It felt disgusting but it was his book. Maybe some minor wiping with a damp paper towel would help it feel better without ruining it? It was just the introductory page and he bought it. If it was ruined on the introduction, it wouldn't be a waste.

Duncan checked his watch. This was going to be one of those straggler classes. Five minutes before school started and no one had showed up. He brought his schedule back out to look at it, to make sure he got the right time. "What?" No. That was impossible. He looked at his schedule all week, learning about each class. He couldn't have got it wrong.

He stared at the date and time. The teacher. How did he miss it? He focused on the time. 7:00. He looked at the tip of the 7. On the very tip was a tiny bug on it? *No way*. What? It was a long class during the week to make up for the missing Monday Wednesday scheduling, but it was at 1:00 PM, not 7:00. *Come on, no way*. He reached into his bookbag's siding and pulled out a pencil, knocking it off. He could understand that being a coincidental accident once, but more than once? That paper went everywhere, it had been folded up and stuffed in and out of his book bags and books. The bug just stayed there the whole time, not moving? Making him think it was 7:00?

Then another bug fell on his book. Similar to the one before but smaller. Ew. Before he dropped the book this time though, he also felt something crawling in his hood. He could feel something not touching him yet, but it's weight was shifting in his hood. No several things.

He looked up. The florescent light above him was almost pitch black but he could see thousands of things wriggling in it, and the bottom was starting to crack open. Right where he had been. He started to run and took off his bookbag and then his hoodie. Once he settled down, he'd go back for them. He ran until the lights were becoming brighter again. Damn this school. "I should have took the money." He could have got the hell out of that school. He was more than ready to go home, there wouldn't be a class tonight. He checked the lights above him. None of them were breaking like the one he ran away from. He needed his bookbag. He'd leave his hoodie, he wasn't messing with any bugs in it. Either someone would take it tomorrow or someone would pick it up and ask about it later and he'd claim it. He wouldn't lose sleep over it. He did need his bookbag though, he didn't want to rebuy any of his books or supplies.

Once he grabbed it, he checked it carefully. It was fine, no bugs. He ran away from the crack. He could still see where they were starting to fall up ahead. He went ahead and put his book bag on.

Then the florescent light above fell open. It fell to the side of him, not doing him any damage but bugs of white and black rained down on him like water in a torrential storm! He ran as fast as he could, and he heard the crunching of them beneath him along with the busting of all the florescent lights. Each time he was almost underneath, they would bust open and rain down on him. There were so many black and white insects crawling on the ground that when

he stomped on their guts, the slippery floor made him trip. Covered in insect guts, he struggled to get back up.

He was running on pure adrenaline, none of the floor was visible. Everywhere he put his hands to prop himself back up was covered in insects. He kept his mouth closed although he wanted to scream. He kept his mouth closed, not wanting any to get in. He could already feel them wanting to, and he could already feel some trying to get into his ears too. He got up and sprang forward to the door hearing the florescents breaking like a bridge. He got to the door.

It was locked. No! It couldn't be locked. He brushed his face to try and get the insects off enough to see how to unlock. How to do anything. There was nothing though.

But, he could see something else. There was light coming from the other hallway and somebody whistling a jaunty tune. He couldn't keep his eyes open long enough before he felt more bugs finding their way to his face. He tried to run that way. Not feeling the bugs underneath him anymore, he shook his body extra good, banging himself up on the siding too. When he thought he'd cleaned his face enough he had to do it. Somewhere down there, there was help, but it wasn't in the hall. They might even be in the elevator going up if they were a janitor!

He had to take the chance and screamed at the top of his lungs.

Then the florescent lights that were lit and bright suddenly burst with a downpour of his nightmares continued, now with his mouth opened. Forgetting his own senses, he rushed to the back doors, feeling them crawling and getting bitten and some going down his throat. He couldn't help but scream now. He reached for the door, it wasn't locked anymore and he ran out covered in the infestation. He ran straight out. There was a reason the front doors should be open at night and the back doors should have remain locked though. They led straight into the road.

The light was so bright and getting brighter as he ran. Comforting again, being out of the darkness.

Outside the back of the Fine Arts Building

Beetlejuice waited, out of the way as the terrified college students that hit Duncan gave him their statement to the police while an ambulance was loading up the now vacant corpse. The whole area was awash in red and blue colors now.

“Man, we didn't, he, the road, he was running out, couldn't do anything.” The guy had trouble making a legitimate sentence. The woman was crying on her friends' shoulders. They had come out to comfort her. To be fair, that trauma wasn't for those overworlders, but he couldn't control it. He'd make sure they got great karma after that night. He had to.

“Sign.”

He heard the sound and saw the paper in front of him. He signed off on it. One down. He was the easiest one. Afraid of bugs and screaming for his life everywhere. It was easy to see which one to pick off first. He never even needed to get in that dorm of his, it just took a misplaced night class. The screams. Deserved it. Panicked, desperate to escape. Deserved it all. Even at the ending, when he thought he finally got away. Deserved it. Deserved it all.

They all deserved it. Every one of them. They'd all pay for it.

Underworld: The Roadhouse

“Yeah, no, it’s great.” Lydia clapped politely as she watched Ginger the Tapdancing Spider . . . tapdance. Again. “Great performance again.”

“The more I practice, the better I am,” Ginger insisted.

Yep. Meanwhile, Beetlejuice was away again. She tried not to worry about that. After all, he wanted to keep her safe so he wouldn’t leave her alone, but he needed to get out and live his life too. It was fair. It was nice to have Ginger to talk to and watch, but at the same time, she had missed her old times. Her friends when she was alive. Nothing ever felt like it could replace them. Maybe when she got better, she would try to get out and make new friends. Making a new beginning for herself could do a lot of good.

“Hey, hey, hey, I am home!” Beetlejuice entered unexpectedly with a huge box of pizza. He laid it in front of Lydia. “I brought supper for you.”

Lydia looked at it. It looked like normal pizza, but it probably had something added to it. Beetlejuice was really good at doing it covertly though. Even the taste was always perfect, like the food she used to eat. “Looks great.”

“Tastes great too I bet.” Beetlejuice looked toward Ginger. He held up a finger toward her.

Lydia noticed that the action strangely made Ginger excited. Why? “What’s the finger for?”

“Aw, nothing. You’ll learn when you’re older,” he teased her. “Later, Ginger.”

Ginger didn’t even say goodbye, she just scuttled off as fast as possible. Lydia took her first slice. “I was wondering if you’d make it before dinnertime.” Yep, Beetlejuice picked up a slice of his own and started to dig in.

“Sorry about that,” Beetlejuice apologized. “Had to shimmy shake the ingredients just right. Not everyone’s as great at eating like me.” It was almost a boast, but not quite. There was definitely something to it. “A crunch on good food to the wrong kind of person might make them see the wrong kind of light.”

Lydia stopped a moment. For a second, she could have sworn she felt . . . something. Not quite right. Beetlejuice was fun, he was angry at times, and he did get sad but didn't like to show it either. That feeling was different than from what she just felt. Not only that, but usually his jokes made a sort of sense. She didn't get what he just said. "Are you alright?"

"You bet, Lyds," Beetlejuice answered, taking a big bite. "Why wouldn't I be?"

"I don't know. You seemed a little different just then," Lydia noted. "You feeling okay?"

"The greatest."

Simple words. Lydia should believe them. Yet, at the same time? Beetlejuice just felt a little . . . *Relax. You don't know what he's been up to. Maybe he went through something big and he doesn't want to worry you. That's all.* Still. He seemed. Just a smidge. Just the tiniest. Just something just felt . . .

evil about him.

Falling into Mysteries

Bridgeport's Funeral Home

"Such a shame. So young." Mason looked toward his son. Now that the funeral was over, they could all say their last goodbyes closer to Duncan's casket. "It isn't your fault. Not everyone is strong enough to pull through when life gets tough."

Finley looked at his dad's hand on his shoulder. Duncan was weak, he was right. A real neat freak, obsessive-compulsive. Still, he was his friend. Psychologically, he couldn't handle the Deetz thing. Maybe Duncan should have taken the ten and just headed out? Brady was still around, biding his time with Rebecca. He wasn't attending classes half as much, but he had no psychological problems he could see.

He was busy looking for the right kind of house for him and Rebecca. Finley was fine, it's not like the only messy thing he'd ever had to deal with in his life. Carter was still in the city, but he wasn't attending that year. He was going around different towns to find a new place to live and work with the ten thousand he got.

Carter and Brady did come by though, standing right next to him. Hard to believe Duncan could be so weak. It's not like he even did that much. He mainly stood in the background, not wanting to get dirty. All he did was shove a gag into the girl's mouth and watch for signs of anyone coming. He was also responsible for the bus ticket to Pleasant Pines so none of their cars were seen.

In and out strangers, moving through the backways. No one at Pleasant Pines even saw them. Oh yeah, he did make sure the place stayed meticulously clean of anything they messed with. Yeah, it drove Duncan crazy that he couldn't clean up the blood.

"I'm sorry for the loss," Mason said again, trying to be a good father. "You know what? You go ahead and split his ten percent among your friends."

The ten percent?

"Really?" Carter asked. Him and Brady hadn't been standing too far apart from us.

"That's very good of you, Mister Mason," Brady thanked him.

Really? Screw that, those guys already got ten thousand a piece. "Dad."

"No need to thank me," his father said. "You three can decide how to split it up. 3-3-2 or whatever."

Damn it! They already got paid, why did his dad have to do that? That whole ten percent should have been his! Now he had to share it with the guy who wanted to shower his wife with shit? Carter too. Duncan did more crap than him.

"Poor guy."

Finley noticed a strange teen or freshman coming up toward the casket. She didn't look familiar at all. Her face was pale white, and her hair was up in a ponytail. Her mouth looked like she could visit a dentist. Yellow and sort of greenish teeth? She rubbed her runny nose against her sleeve.

There's no way Duncan would know that girl. He wouldn't associate with germs. She didn't look real clean, and her manners for doing that? She should have had a handkerchief at a funeral. Finley even felt a little disgusted as she sneezed and reached for his hand. Man. Duncan would be rolling in his grave.

"Poor, poor guy. Poor guy." She sniffed again and walked away. She coughed loudly. "Poor Duncan! First it was Lydia, and now him!"

Lydia? Carter wasn't the only one who turned his head. However, when he looked back toward where she'd been, she was gone. There was nothing there except a handkerchief she had never used on the ground.

"Holy shit."

Finley looked toward Brady. "What?"

"Dude." Brady looked spaced out as he looked around again. "That's her."

"Who?"

"That had to be her." Brady looked toward Carter. "That was her, wasn't it?"

"What are you boys talking about?" Mason asked them.

"Shit, that was her." Brady started to move around, looking around the pews.

"Who the hell was that?" Finley looked toward Carter since Brady was flipping out.

"Shortly after, you know?" Carter looked back toward Brady. He scratched his chin. "Duncan was a little freaked out. He said there was a girl, messy germy girl, looking for someone named Lydia. Wrote Lydia on his dry erase board. He didn't bother telling us at first, he thought he was losing it. She was there and just gone. Moved too fast. Every time he tried to catch up, she was just gone."

"Shit, she's real. It's real." Brady came back toward Finley and Mason. "She knows Lydia, she's the one Duncan must have seen. She even got out right now. The entrance is way too far away to make in the time we looked back."

"She probably crawled through the pews to frighten you," Finley reasoned. "If she had anything on us, she would have gone to the authorities." She could suspect all she wanted. She did look kind of freaky. Probably a friend to the freaky girl Lydia.

"What do we do about her?" Brady asked.

Find her and kill her. If she was nosing around that much, she deserved it. "We get her out of the way."

"A simple girl, probably saw something that frightened her," his dad said slowly. "Thought she saw something she couldn't see. I'll just have to go down to Peaceful Pines and see if there might be a touch more artwork."

It was his father's way of saying it was time to find her and kill her. The weird bug fetish about a week ago before Duncan's death, was she responsible for that? Could she be the reason Duncan was lying there in that casket?

"Freaks, man, those weird devil worshipping goth freaks." Brady shook his arms slightly in anger, but not enough to make a scene. "I should have known this wouldn't be so easy. We should have backed out as soon as we saw 'she' wasn't a normal girl. That room of hers. She probably worships satan."

"Hey!" Mason took his finger, and moved it across his throat. "Zip it."

Too loud. They got away with murder, but anyone could overhear. No one was at the church anymore except one elderly woman in the very back. Still, there was a friend of Lydia's out there who could be trying to pull out some kind of-

"Poor Duncan, oooh!"

Finley watched as the strange girl from before was now right beside the casket again. How the hell did she make it all the way over there again? "Hey, you."

"Who, me?"

Finley heard another voice from behind them. Another person, also quite disheveled and his hair a mess. Finley turned away to look toward the teenage girl again.

She was gone though. He looked back around toward the other disheveled man.

He was gone now too.

"Shit, dudes, no one could reach a pew fast enough without any of us looking!" Brady was starting to flip out. "That girl and that guy, man. I mean, where would she go?" He ran toward the other side of the casket. "Shit. Nothing."

"It's just a little freakout." Carter tried to keep it under control. "She planned on it. There's mirrors or holograms. It's fine. We just need to find out where she's from. Trace her back to the source. When are we going? I have to go, I can't just stay now."

"We aren't," Mason answered. "You stay here, and keep a level head. Stop talking about issues. That is what she wants."

Neitherworld

Lydia was reading a book while Jacques exercised in his room. She was biding her time for lunch. Beetlejuice was probably having fun around the Neitherworld while she spent time with her friends. Right now, she was biding time with Jacques in his room. She still couldn't be trusted too far by herself, but BJ still needed to leave and be himself. Just? Hopefully he wasn't getting into too much trouble.

It was actually good that he pulled away. She was worried about learning to make it in the Neitherworld now that she was dead, but he had been her support, every step of the way. She'd even worried that something might be happening to him because of her. Maybe he'd been around her too much, or worried too much?

About two weeks ago, he had a strange look in his eye. Something that she hadn't ever noticed before. Almost, frightening, but that was all it had been. A simple look. After a little bit of time, that look faded away and Beetlejuice seemed more like himself again. Well, not completely, but that was understandable. She wasn't quite herself either.

"You know, maybe you could see if you qualify for the Neitherworld college?" Jacques pointed out. "It might make you feel more a part of zis wonderful world."

Hey, maybe she could qualify? That would give her a goal, but would it be okay? She only stopped falling through the ground about a week ago. It still felt sometimes like she was treading water. "When would it start?" She might have to pick up some classes to get there, but since people didn't die on schedules. There was probably a way for her to get what she needed to move on.

"College, huh? That sounds boring, but perfect for you." Beetlejuice came through the door. "You might want to hold off on that a little bit longer. You only stopped soaring through the ground like a week ago."

BJ thought it was a good idea too though? All those times he was just so ready for her to be out of school and play. It was different when she was around him 24/7. "You'd finally have me out of the house."

"No way, Babe," Beej insisted. "You can't totally move out just to go to school. Besides, it's still a little ways away."

Hm. He seemed to want to encourage it, but he was holding something back too. "Well, maybe next semester?"

"Good idea," he agreed.

"Sure." If she was still alive, she'd probably be going by now. "Prudence and Bertha must have started college by now." She looked back at her book, trying to find her previous position, but . . . "We would have all gone together. To the community college. I wonder if they still went there, or if they went somewhere else."

"Umm?" Jacques looked toward Beetlejuice. "Do you know?"

Did he? She looked toward Beetlejuice. Could the Neitherworld tell him about the other world? About what happened to her friends? About-

Aim higher or he's going to bleed to death.

A loud scream pierced her skull along with a face she didn't know. Aim higher? Aim what higher? That voice. Something . . . Lydia looked toward her hands where the book had been. It had dropped. It sounded like the sound of metal dropping though. Not a book.

"Lyd!"

Not a book. Lydia heard her name but she felt herself falling. Not like last time, she wasn't just falling through the ground. She felt like she was Alice from Wonderland, falling down the hole, head first. Falling and falling, with nothing to catch her. Falling and falling. She could hear echoes and she tried to reach out, but there was nothing to reach out for.

"Lydia!"

"Beetlejuice?" She was falling toward something. A house. Her old house. There was a large sound, like a firecracker. As she fell past it, she saw a sudden burst of light, then darkness with a terrifying scream.

Her scream.

Then she was back. She wasn't falling anymore. She was safe, tight within Beetlejuice's embrace. "What was that?" She looked toward Beetlejuice. If it was possible to be anymore pale for him? He had been. "Beej." She hugged him back so tightly. His hand was nowhere when she was falling, she had only found his voice. "I couldn't find your hand. I was falling. I saw a bright light in my house, a firecracker and a scream."

"I didn't grab your hand," BJ said as he continued to hold her. "I grabbed your whole damn body before it plunged away."

Plunged away? "Why?" Lydia didn't feel any more sensation of falling. She felt grounded, right in his arms. "BJ. If I died from being sick, why'd I see that . . ." That . . . that light and that sound. "Was there a gun?" A gun. That was it. She saw a gun go off in a dark house.

She looked around herself. She had been juiced back to Beetlejuice's place but he still hadn't let go. His grip had stayed tight. She could tell, even though he wasn't looking at her, that she was right. "Was I . . . murdered?"

He didn't want to answer. "Babe, you know the Neitherworld isn't an easy place to dwell when your psychologically all scrambled in the head. You couldn't even walk on the ground." He was almost pouting, but he was clearly serious.

It was out now though. Her mind couldn't hide the truth, dangerous or not. "I was murdered." She knew it. Somehow. In the house.

"Yeah." Beetlejuice must have known he couldn't hide it.

Murdered. "How?"

"What did I just say about speed, huh?" Beetlejuice scolded her. "This was fast enough. Your whole body is . . ." He seemed to stall. Like he wanted to say something, but didn't. "You need to calm down. You'll get everything bit by bit, but right now, you can't even touch the floor."

Oh. "Back to beds and chairs." Murder. She was murdered. By who? By a stranger? Someone she knew? Did they find out who did it?

"Nope, no bed or chairs. You'll fall in them too right now." Beetlejuice let go, but she was held up in the air by his juice. He lowered her slightly, almost touching the ground. "If I'm not holding you directly, my juice has to."

What? Lydia almost felt herself lose her balance again. That was impossible with Beetlejuice's juice.

He quickly scooped her back up. "There's a reason for the 125 years. Can't push, Babe."

"I just kept falling deeper and deeper. Even when I reached my house, and I just kept falling," Lydia told him. "I couldn't touch anything, and I couldn't reach anything. I'm sorry, I couldn't find you."

"It doesn't matter," Beetlejuice said. "Even when you are falling, I'm already there holding you."

Murder. She was murdered. Lydia gave herself a few minutes to calm down. Sickness or murder. In the end, she was still dead. Still in the same position. She had to remember that. "BJ. I know I can get through this."

"Sure, but not in a night. I can't trust my juice when I sleep either." He tried to give her a light smile. "Do you know how many times I wake up falling from levitation? Yep, too dangerous for you." He carried her over to the fridge. "We can get you some supper. Watch some TV. Then get some rest. Maybe you'll be a little better tomorrow."

"I'm going to do all that with you holding me?" Her heart. For being dead, it was hammering. She was still confused about her feelings for Beetlejuice, and now he would be carrying her this close for the night?

He handed her a burger and they sat down to watch TV. It wasn't a time for questions. The old her would have demanded an answer and facts. Wanted to know every detail. But? Just from the little she did know, she was now being carried by Beetlejuice or his magic not to fall.

Death was different. She needed to remember that. There was no hurry to learn all of the painful truths. The who, what, where, and especially the why. BJ too? Maybe when he did leave, he was doing something about the murderer? Was that possible?

If it was, he'd be taking it. Beetlejuice was certainly about revenge. She wanted to ask, but it wasn't time. From what little she knew, she was already in such a dire position.

Who knew what happened when she fell, and no one reached out back to her?

Poor Lyds slept in his arms. He pretended to go to sleep, so she would eventually fade off. Her entire body needed rest. Anyone else besides the ghost with the most, and she would have been a dead shadow.

Even now, he couldn't risk letting her go. He had tried to grab her like normal, but he could feel her not just drifting, but plummeting away. He grabbed her quickly, but her body was like holding water. Few could handle her right now.

There was no doubt in his mind taking her from Mister Deetz was the right thing to do. Even trying to just float her to the ground being held by his juice was risky. He figured a low setting would be fine, it always had been. He had to crank it to a medium juice, low juicing was still making her lose her balance.

To hold her now with his juice took about as much power as levitating everything in the room. That wasn't something that was impossible to do for him, but it wasn't a good sign. That level and she only figured out the fact she wasn't sick. *It doesn't matter, Lyds. If I end up having to hold you for eternity, then I will.* The stress of suddenly knowing made it risky to let her go right now. He couldn't risk playing levitation while he slept. He preferred it. Levitating felt nicer, and even when he was rudely awakened and fell, it was still worth it. Yet, that was just it. If even one split second he lost his concentration with his magic?

She'd fall, and he couldn't save her. For tonight, she'd get some rest and relax. Maybe by morning, she'd be able to lie in a bed.

She would be sure to stress even more, but if she kept it under control, she'd be fine. In the meantime, he'd have to get some extra help to watch her while he was gone. More than Ginger or Jacques. Someone who had just as much juice as him.

Housewarming

This one? Oh, this one felt like the one. Brady looked around at the house the realtor was showing him. This would be a beautiful home for his future. Everything was just perfect, except for the realtor. She seemed a little more eccentric.

“It’s really perfect for someone who wants to start a family right away,” they said, like they almost knew him. “I can tell you and your lovely wife would be so at home here, that I am willing to cut down the asking price just for you.”

“Really?” Rebecca was intrigued. “There’s like an upstairs and a downstairs. This isn’t like any other house we’ve seen in our budget.”

“Oh, well?” The realtor waved her hand slightly. “I should inform you that the last residents died here, and there were some excessive claims of it being haunted that sprinkled on local TV just a bit. So, yes, I can work with this price in your budget.”

“How in our budget?” The woman showed Rebecca the price. “OMG, that’s like, the same as the others! Brady!” She ran over and hugged him. “This one, Honey. This one.”

“Last residents died how?” Brady asked. He wanted to make Rebecca happy, and this seemed like the next step after giving her the ring. He also remembered the funeral though. The strange events at the funeral. That strange girl. That strange man.

He stared at the realtor. She was a different height. Different hair. Different eyes. She still had a slightly creepy feeling to her though. He gestured to the patch on her lapel. “Is that a realtor honor?”

She simply smiled. “Oh, that’s another business of mine. I deal with compromises between personal business. It’s not an easy time.”

“Compromises? Like, what kind of compromises?” Brady asked.

“Brady,” Rebecca said holding him tightly. “Why are you butting into the private business of the realtor that wants to cut such a great deal for us?”

“In essence, my duty is to get things strategically done when someone else can’t currently be on their own duty.” She had a funny, strange laugh. “You aren’t very far from the local college, nor are you far from the hustle and bustle from downtown. Yet, you are far enough behind the trees that you can’t be bothered by all the noise. A wonderful place for a starting family.”

“I want this house,” Rebecca insisted to Brady. “Please?”

“I don’t know about the whole starting family,” Brady said to the realtor. “We are just engaged so far.”

“Mm?” She looked odd. “I have seen enough people to know that when senses start tingling in one direction, it’s usually an instinct to something coming.” She just smiled. “Little ones soon or not, you’ll want a big house for anything unexpected.”

“Uh?” Rebecca gawked. “Do you think that like, I’m pregnant, and that’s why I’m jumping for this so fast?”

“No way,” Brady said. “She hardly knows us.”

“She sells to people all the time and has great instinct,” Rebecca whined. “OMG, what if I am? We need this house, Brady!”

Brady groaned. The house was beautiful, but this realtor was not feeling right. “Can I see your credentials?” She held her ID towards him. “Miss Second Chance? Is that even a real name?”

“Oh.” She looked appaled a moment. “It’s pronounced ‘Segund Shans’,” she corrected him.

Rebecca smacked him on his side. “That was so prejudice, Brady! Her name is foreign!”

“Sorry.” Still. She felt weird. Rebecca had fallen for that house though, and there was nothing else that they could afford that could come close to that house.

For Rebecca. He’d do anything for Rebecca. Plus, if that realtor was right and they were both being driven by some kind of need to start a family? Well. Then, that would be their future too.

Miss Second Chance walked away. This was usually not part of her business; she didn’t come to the surface to sell nice houses to evil hearted people. However, the fact that Lydia Deetz would have become a dead shadow if it hadn’t been for Beetlejuice, meant that he would not be able to leave her presence for some time. There would need to be considerable help for him to leave her side before he could continue Lex Talionis.

In the meantime, some extra help would be given to make sure the targets weren’t lost to time.

Lydia tried to do what BJ asked. To take it easy on learning the truth. The Neitherworld was dangerous for her, and now she couldn’t even walk on the floor.

This wasn't like last time either, when she learned that she was dead. She had fallen through the floor for a little while, but she had made some progress day by day.

This one? It was his hand or juice. Physical contact or magic, not even allowed to touch the ground. BJ had tried to make her feel better by placing her as close as she could to the ground, but it might as well have been water.

She never felt safe even when he was holding her with her juice. Her body felt like it constantly wanted to just fall somewhere. To her home. Where she was probably murdered. By who?

Not helping. She knew that wasn't helping. She couldn't start thinking about that, it just made her want to drop even faster.

Aim higher or he's going to bleed to death.

That phrase too, it played over and over in her head. The light spark she saw in her house was probably a gun, but the scream? That sounded like her scream. And that phrase.

Lydia knew she needed to stop thinking about it, but it didn't mean her mind was going to listen. *Back and forth, back and forth, there is no progress in this at all. No one looks at me with a smile, BJ can't manage a joke, I am so stuck. I need to know what happened.*

She looked at his hand. Even in the dead of night, he was always holding her hand. He was always there. *He would hold me for my entire afterlife.* She wiped a tear away. *I don't know what's waiting for me, but I can't do this anymore.* They were going on months with no progress. Months. Not once had BJ complained, but everyone looked at her like she was hopeless. No one encouraged her to take a step. No one wanted her to leave his presence.

But? Lydia could only take so much. The answers to what she wanted were down there, at wherever she had to fall. *The results of knowing, I know this isn't going to be good. I've tried, BJ, I've tried to wait. I can't keep making you hold me forever. I need to know.*

Her future, good or bad, it was down there. She had to know.

She let go of BJ's hand.

Falling. Falling. Not hearing him, not feeling him, not seeing a hand. She was never one to keep hanging on forever like an infant, and even with some kind of peril against her, she couldn't just continue that way.

It had been months. BJ couldn't be tied to her like some prisoner forever.

She saw her house. A spark. That had to be the gun. A scream. It didn't sound like her mom's scream, it was different than hers. Her scream, she knew the sound of her own scream. It was her scream.

The words came back to her as echoes all around her.

Aim higher or he's going to bleed to death.

Aim higher or he's going to bleed to death.

"Aim higher or he's going to bleed to death."

Lydia opened her eyes. She was no longer falling. There was a gun in her hand, and her parents were both standing on the top balcony on the upstairs, with ropes loose around their necks, hooked to the ceiling.

"Don't cheat and shoot above, or we'll just shoot you," someone she'd never seen before said to her. "This is a nicer way to go. You mess up, we'll shoot the balcony from beneath them and they'll strangle to death instead."

Strangle to death? Lydia looked at the gun. She tried to drop it, but it wouldn't fall from her hands. She watched in terror as it started to raise toward her parents. *No, stop, don't, don't!* Her body wouldn't listen.

Her vision was impaired with all of the tears in her eyes. *Why?* She wanted to speak, but she couldn't. She wanted to lower the gun, but she couldn't.

She watched as the person aimed a gun at her head.

"No, Lydia!" Her father yelled from on high. "No, you promised you'd leave her be!"

"If she does as we say," the person said again. "If she doesn't, all three of you die."

Why? Why?

"Just, aim where you think it'll be," her father said. "I-it's okay if you don't cut the rope. I love you either way, Lydia."

A game. It was a game? Lydia looked at her gun. She looked at her parents. If she shot the rope they had loosely around themselves, they were supposed to go free. Probably.

Probably. Beetlejuice, Beetlejuice, Beetlejuice! Beetlejuice, Beetlejuice, Beetlejuice! Beetlejuice, Beetlejuice, Beetlejuice! Then, she realized there was a gag in her mouth.

She was actually trapped. Her feet were bound. Her mouth had been bound. The only things free were her eyes to see, and her hands with the gun.

There were more voices too. Anxious voices, but they weren't in the room.

She could feel her hands trembling, feeling them raise and lower. Her mother looked completely out of it. She wasn't saying anything. *Beetlejuice, Beetlejuice, Beetlejuice!* Being gagged, he could never hear her.

He could never hear. Her arms lowered and raised, again and again while she cried.

"I'll always love you, Pumpkin," her father said to her. "No matter what-"

Lydia felt herself suddenly being pulled straight up. Wait, no, her parents. Her parents were still in trouble!

She opened her eyes and found herself being held tightly by BJ on the bed. It was so tight. She would almost complain, but she was trembling too hard. "I. I had to."

Before he could respond, someone else had entered into the roadhouse.

The strangest thing Miss Second Chance had seen. Impossible. When she felt the inevitable fall, she arrived to curb damages Beetlejuice may cause due to the hopelessness of the fall.

Yet, that isn't what she had seen. Beetlejuice stared at her, like he was looking for any kind of help, but he'd already received it. No, now it was her own obsession to know the answer. "Hold onto her and follow me."

Lydia was too distraught to talk to Miss Second Chance, but Beetlejuice would. When she asked about other friends and boyfriends, he flinched a little and admitted to a spider named Ginger helping her recently.

Miss Second Chance interviewed Ginger, and found the answer. "You say that Lydia was regressing even before she realized her death hadn't been pleasant?"

"Yes. I told Beetlejuice that he should go to the living world and find a boy she liked," Ginger said. "He didn't seem to know who it could be."

Miss Second Chance pushed her glasses up. "You know who the boy is, Miss Ginger the Spider?"

The spider didn't understand. "She had a couple of girlfriends, but I don't think it was either of them. She really didn't spend time with anyone else that I know of. It must have been in

school.”

“Why does it have to be in school?”

“Well, because the rest of the time she was always with . . .” Ah. The spider was realizing it.
“What? No way.”

“You’ve discovered it too,” Miss Second Chance revealed. “Destiny is an interesting thing.”

“But who in their right mind?” Ginger had problems believing it completely. “Lydia is sweet and fun and nice. Why would she ever? Him? Why? It doesn’t . . . really?”

“Some relationships are hard to understand. It’s not our place to judge it.”

“I don’t get it. I don’t understand,” Ginger whined. “Why?” She was practically whining.
“Really?”

Now that they were on the same page, Miss Second Chance would use Ginger to create an ally. “Lex Talionis is a very risky procedure.”

“I know.” Ginger didn’t really meet her eyes. “Lydia and her family deserve justice. Beetlejuice couldn’t be told no.”

“So you offer support?”

“Well? Well, y-you are the one with the contract signing and everything,” Ginger blamed her.

“I am the official overseer when things get involved. It’s my duty.” She leaned forward. “It’s not the same process I would use with those outside of business matters.” Miss Second Chance was trying to get Ginger to bend. “I wouldn’t use it with anyone I care about.”

“It wouldn’t matter, Beetlejuice wants revenge. I never said to do it, no one else said to do it, he decided it!” Ginger started to cry.

Miss Second Chance was unphased by the crying. “Will you cry like that if Beetlejuice loses himself?”

Ginger didn’t say anything.

“Will you pout when he’s turned into something demonic and sent to hell instead of living in the comfort of the Neitherworld anymore? Will you moan or cry unfair when he becomes so lost that Lydia falls and becomes a dead shadow?”

“Beetlejuice is very strong,” Ginger told her. “He has a lot of juice, nothing can beat him.”

“Killing others, one after another, by making their worst nightmares happen. It changes everyone. That’s why it is so often banned, it results in nothing good.” Miss Second Chance stood up. “Lydia gains justice, and Beetlejuice is sent to hell.”

Ginger wiped her eyes. She didn't look at Miss Second Chance. "You really don't think Beetlejuice would be okay?"

"If it was just one, yes. Two, maybe. I have never seen someone remain in the Neitherworld after taking it out more than three," she admitted.

"But, this is your job, and you are just now talking about how dangerous it is?!" Ginger turned it around on her.

"Yes, because I do not get personally involved," she admitted. "Beetlejuice signed everything, knowing all of the risks. Besides, Lydia Deetz would eventually fall into being a dead shadow. It was only a matter of time. No need to get invested."

"Crude!" Ginger yelled at her. "You have no confidence in Lydia at all?"

"No, and she already became it," Miss Second Chance revealed. "Officially, she became a dead shadow."

Of course, Ginger was confused. "She was close, but Beetlejuice pulled her out.

"No, she was a dead shadow," Miss Second Chance said again. "Beetlejuice had enough influence to bring her back. I had never seen that before. Once they fall for good, that's it."

"But? But if she fell? Beetlejuice said he wanted to take her place."

"He could if he fell with her and faster. He didn't, she fell," she continued to spell out for her. "Even now, Lydia Deetz is officially a dead shadow."

"What do you mean she is?" Ginger pulled herself up from the chair to her desk. "He brought her back."

"There is no coming back once someone becomes a dead shadow. Only Beetlejuice's comforting presence is keeping her from being where she belongs."

"But? But?" Ginger looked at a paper Miss Second Chance pushed in front of her. "She isn't part of the Neitherworld anymore? She's just a visitor like before? Then? But?" She started to cry again briefly. "She belongs in phase three!"

Yes. Past the Neitherworld. "Her eternity is set."

"No, it can't be. It can't be. But, she's right there. She's not very far away right now, she's with Beetlejuice," she claimed. Trying to deny it. Not wanting to see it. "The afterlife, the place after the Neitherworld, that . . . that can't be for her. Lydia's good, she's so good."

"She is a visitor," Miss Second Chance said. "She must return to her eternity, just like she had to return to her living world when that was her origin."

Now, Ginger's tears were much more real. There was nothing comical. Her whole spider body was just lying down on her desk, as if it couldn't even rise. "How long can she stay before sh-sh-she has to leave?"

“Beetlejuice knows.”

“Can’t we do anything? Please? Anything?” Ginger just couldn’t lift her body anymore.

“As long as Beetlejuice is Beetlejuice, and he doesn’t get possessed into hell with the actions he is taking, she is safe to visit. She can visit for days or months. As long as Beetlejuice is Beetlejuice.”

“But if Beetlejuice goes through the whole Lex Talionis, he’ll lose himself, and her.”

Yes, the spider was starting to understand. “It is a sad fate.”

“He’s not just holding on for her not to fall. He needs to hold on to keep her eternity from getting her.”

“Yes, until or if, he makes the Neitherworld suitable for her again.” Miss Second Chance smiled. “Miss Ginger the Spider? What Beetlejuice is even doing now is unheard of. To hold onto a dead shadow like this, it’s not just power. There’s only one thing strong enough to do that.”

“Her weird crush on Beetlejuice?” Ginger said softly.

No. No, it took more than just a crush. “Beetlejuice has been most aggressively annoying to everyone here, especially in the upper ranks, and there’s really only a couple of ways to get rid of him. For your sake, I will tell you that they didn’t plan any of this terrible tragedy that fell upon Lydia Deetz.”

“No.” Ginger pulled herself up even more. “No, but they connected him to probably the only person in history who could ever stand him?”

Miss Second Chance pulled out a contract for her. “Professional advice. Sign this, and there is a good chance Lydia Deetz and Beetlejuice could both have a better future than what has been set.”

Ginger didn’t want to mess with it. “Why me?”

“You have a stake in this.”

“What do you mean, I’m just a friend,” Ginger insisted. Miss Second Chance pulled out another paper. “What?!”

Yes. “Beetlejuice put your name as the co-supporter. Funds have already been deducted from your account for housing issues on the surface.”

“Beeeeeetlejuuuuuice!” Ginger yelled.

Yes. Beetlejuice did seem to have that effect on people. “When he did that, he gave you say over things. Understanding now the influence Lydia and Beetlejuice truly have on each other? Their love is unfathomable.”

“Lydia’s nuts, Beetlejuice is such scum,” Ginger whined.

“He is scum to you. For her, he was willing to go to hell and take over her nightmares for her eternity.”

“Love is weird. Really weird.” Ginger looked over the contract. “He is going to get really mad if I sign this, are you crazy? He’ll come after me. Plus, I mean? They were always just really, really, good friends. Lydia might have realized it’s more, but what if Beetlejuice is just a really, really, good friend?”

Miss Second Chance simply stared at her for a time.

“He’s going to come after me,” she said weakly again. “Are you sure about this?” Her whininess just wouldn’t end. “Oh, there’s a clause to protect me in here.”

Yes, she made sure Ginger the Spider would be safe until Beetlejuice and Lydia understood.

“So, this’ll keep Lydia in the visiting space of Neitherworld, where she’ll be safe. And. This will keep Beetlejuice from becoming dark?”

“The first is a guarantee,” Miss Second Chance confirmed. “The second cannot be guaranteed. He is killing those who essentially sentenced Lydia to being a dead shadow. Revenge will darken him.”

“Can’t I just take Lex Talionis away from him?” Ginger asked. “Lydia’s already sentenced to her eternity, does it still even matter now? If he sees them, he can just prank them so bad they move on quickly. Right?”

A small smile escaped Miss Second Chance. “If only afterlife were that simple.” Her face became serious again. “When Lydia’s visiting time is over, and he loses her, he will *not* be satisfied with pranks in 125 years.”

“But can he really get her out again to visit?” she had to ask. “Is that guaranteed?”

“There is little connection between the Neitherworld and eternal afterlife. Yet, there are some *very* small ones. Yes, it *is* allowing him in.”

“I still don’t like it, I don’t care if he’s upset or not, we should take Lex Talionis away from him,” Ginger insisted. “You can already see how much you put in this contract, we should just take it out too.”

“There is another reason now. Lydia’s attachment is generating something new . . .” Oh, how should she put it? “If those who created the dead shadow lose themselves, with her being so drawn to the Neitherworld as a second home, maybe she can be restored to this world again?”

“Them?” Ginger asked. “All of them?”

“Beetlejuice took out the first in the contract,” Miss Second Chance told her. “His spirit is not haunting his abode for 125 years. It’s on look out, making sure no one is coming to the house, and it’s cleaning up any mess left behind. Eternally.”

Ginger started to whine again. “Oh no, oh no, oh no, th-they deserve it, but now she’ll be, she has to see them like them-them? Like?”

“When Beetlejuice completes Lex Talionis, we’ll know for sure.” Miss Second Chance sighed. “Otherwise? There’s only one way to remove visitor status.”

“Yeah, I get it,” Ginger insisted. “After this contract is done, Beetlejuice is going to haunt me forever.”

Miss Second Chance just let out a small chuckle. No. If Ginger pulled this off? Beetlejuice would have her to thank for saving them. She watched as the spider tapped and signed her signature.

Now, to deliver all the news.

A Vision of a Shadow Screaming

“You let go!” Beetlejuice accused her while he once again almost suffocated her with his embrace. “You’re smarter than than, Lyds, you knew how dangerous that had been!”

“I couldn’t just stay in your arms forever,” she told him. “My parents are in trouble.”

“Were,” he corrected her.

Were. Were. “I was in trouble. I was gagged, I couldn’t call you.”

Yeah. He knew it all. His look said it all.

“I didn’t make the shot for dad, did I?” She had to know. BJ didn’t want to answer. “Please! I can already put things together, so just tell me!”

“Chuck calls you, Lyd,” BJ said simply. “He’s calling you from your house, with your mom, where they are haunting for 125 years.”

“So, I took the shots and failed, and they killed me.”

“No,” he corrected her.

“I killed them, and I killed myself, because I killed them?” She started to waver.

“No, no, no! This was so stupid, you were supposed to get this all slowly. Lyds, you are with me because you are on the verge of becoming a dead shadow,” he admitted. “I’m using soooo much juice to just try and keep you out of there.”

“Dead shadow?”

“When you plummet to when you die, and relive it over and over again. It doesn’t stop. You can’t change it, you can’t change the outcome or say or move or do anything else. It’s the same thing, your death, over and over for eternity!” he warned her. “It’s a hell, and you . . . y-y-you . . .”

She already became that. “I was there, behind the gun.” He didn’t say anything. “I’m sorry,” she apologized, “but I had to know.”

“I know,” he admitted. “I know you, Babe, of course you had to let go to know one day. I’d have done the same thing, and even sooner.”

“Who was that person?” Lydia had to ask. “Do you know?” Yep, that look too. “Are you doing something to them?”

“I am legally doing things for the Neitherworld,” he told her. “Was. I can return without any kind of summoning now.”

“Which is a terrible, terrible, terrible, terrible, terrible idea thing they never should have allowed!”

Huh? Donnie?

Finally, but late. “You were beyond a little late,” BJ complained to him. “I actually call for my brother, for the first time in how long? It’s been months since I called you!”

“The longer between the kills, the better your sanity,” Donnie said.

Oh, he just had to say that. Now Lyds was staring at him.

“What does he mean by kills and sanity?” she asked.

“Tattletale.” He couldn’t even talk to his brother in private. “She fell again, real deep.”

“I had to know,” Lyd said again.

“Oh, no, don’t ever do that willingly,” Donnie said as he approached her closer. “Really, if you get stuck, you’ll be sent to the afterlife and Beetlejuice will-”

“Stop yacking!” Beetlejuice threatened him. She didn’t need to know everything.

“Beetlejuice will what?”

“Take your place as a dead shadow,” Donnie of course had to say. “Trapped in a nightmare forever. You must be very cautious. Good thoughts. Don’t let go of any ghost helping you.”

“Until when?” she asked.

“Oh. Forever I should think,” Donnie answered. Oh boy, he wasn’t helping things at all.

“Not forever.” Not forever. “Lyds just has to get past her death, that’s all.”

“She murdered her parents and killed herself,” Donnie warned him. “She will be falling for the rest of her afterlife.”

“She’ll learn magic, and then she won’t fall as easy,” Beetlejuice reminded him. “So, knock it off.”

“She’ll need more than a little scrap of magic that the passed-on people receive. Even with her magic, she’ll still have to have constant supervision by someone with lots of magic.”

“Beetlejuice?” Oh, her eyes were right on him. “If I become this dead shadow, you’re going to take my place?”

“It’s a right since he is performing Lex Talionis,” Donnie said.

“Quiet!” Beetlejuice threatened him. She did not need to know that. “I really regret trying to contact you, you’ve been zero help.” He was hoping Donnie would have enough juice to just watch Lydia for the smallest amount of time so he could-

Oh? “Hey, room service.” Finally. Miss Second Chance showed up. She also showed up with Ginger the Spider?

“Hello,” Donnie introduced himself politely. “I’m Donnie Juice.”

Miss Second Chance didn’t shake his hand, and Ginger didn’t look well either.

Miss Second Chance gestured to Lydia. “You can let go now. You won’t fall anymore.”

Beetlejuice didn’t really believe that. He let go for a second, ready to grab her again. Huh.

Lydia was fine, she didn’t move through the bed at all. “I can move around now?”

“Yes,” Miss Second Chance said. “You can walk around here the same way you did when you were alive.”

“Wait a minute.” Beetlejuice watched Lydia move away to test the theory. “How come?”

“Beetlejuice. Lydia.” Ginger spoke now. “I’m real sorry.”

“Lydia Deetz, the Neitherworld officially welcomes your visitation rights,” Miss Second Chance told her. “All the rules from before with Beetlejuice when you were alive now apply again.”

“How?” Lydia asked.

Visiting rules? Visiting rules?! He had been so focused on holding her, he hadn’t even bothered to notice how dark she had become. No, impossible, she couldn’t be! “No one comes back from it.”

“It was allowed,” Miss Second Chance said. “Would you like to explain to her, or should I?”

Lydia was starting to look at herself now too. She moved around more toward the front door cautiously. When she went outside, it was lovely and bright.

But she was dark. Beetlejuice floated over toward her. She was confused. Someone would have to explain.

“There’s plenty of light out here, but I’m just?” Lydia looked at herself again. “It’s like standing under a cloud on a sunny day, I can’t get any light on myself.” She looked at the ground. “It’s kind of like when I visited, but I don’t have any kind of shadow.” She stared at Beetlejuice.

Yeah. “I didn’t save you, Babe,” he said to her slowly. “I pulled you up for a visit.” Lydia stepped back a bit, but he wouldn’t let her go far. He showed up right behind her as she turned around.

“I’m a dead shadow?” she asked. “Visiting?”

“Yeah, which I gotta say? Stinks!” Beetlejuice turned into a skunk briefly before turning back into himself again. “Miss Second Chance, no one ever comes back from their eternity, what gives?!”

“From their eternity?” Lydia asked him. “Beej.”

“They don’t, except for certain allowances. Your time with her alive, and dead, may have swayed fate slightly.” Miss Second Chance pushed her glasses up. “We have much to discuss. May we go back to your home and sit down in a comfortable position?”

Ginger.

Ginger.

“You stupid spider!” Beetlejuice yelled at that tap dancing idiot. He tried to juice her for that stunt, but it didn’t work.

“She’s protected,” Miss Second Chance said.

“Beej?”

Beetlejuice had no idea how to answer what Lydia would want to know. Damn it, he just wanted to make sure he was covered by any damages, he didn’t have much in the amount of actual money. Instead, Ginger used that to her advantage.

Lydia gestured toward the paper. “What’s Lex Talionis? Why is this paper about murder and revenge? And?”

“You can still accomplish it,” Ginger said weakly to him. “It’s just that, you have to do other stuff now too.”

“This is just the weirdest most ridiculous thing ever.” What was he supposed to do about that? Why was it in there? “I don’t know if someone helped you write that ridiculous thing? But you may have missed a huge thing in it.” He grabbed the paper and shoved it into Ginger’s tapdancing face, pointing directly to the problem.

Ginger didn’t really say much, just shrugged a couple of legs.

Really? He shoved it deeper into her face.

“Who is murdering?” Lydia was distracted with that more. “BJ?”

“Oh! Oh, well, it was to help you get back to normal death and stuff,” Ginger said quickly. Real quickly. “Now, it’s needed even more because you’re a dead shadow and it might actually pull you from your eternity back to the Neitherworld.”

Wait, what? Beetlejuice glanced toward Miss Second Chance.

She nodded her head. “A good chance. The last human went down as a dead shadow. If they all surface down there, she might be able to return.”

“But I’m here,” Lydia sputtered. “I’m here, I’m right here. I’m not there. Murder? Beej?”

Ooh. Not a conversation he would have nicely or willingly.

“It’s going to pull you from your eternity,” Ginger told here.

“It’s either that or hook up with Beetlejuice,” Miss Second Chance said clearly. “The afterlife is a chance to live a life you didn’t live. If he yanked you up here, your eternity could be in limbo. However?” She gestured toward Beetlejuice. “If you fall into complete darkness, the tether to visit this world will disappear.”

Uh, what? “Nevermind that, you said if I complete that thing, Lydia could be free here again?”

“But, I’m here,” Lydia said again. “I’m right here.”

She didn’t get it yet. Beetlejuice wished she didn’t have to get it. “Lyd? You know how you come visit the Neitherworld for awhile, and then you eventually leave back home?”

“Yeah, I had school, my family, and my friends,” she said.

“Yeah. Thing is, if you decided not to ever go back home, that wouldn’t be a choice,” he revealed. “You can only stay so long as a visitor.”

“A visitor of the living world.”

“A visitor of anywhere.” Oh, he didn’t want to say it. It wasn’t right and it wasn’t fair, she was just curious and he didn’t want to tell her. “When visiting time is up, you have to go back.”

“Back?” Lydia’s mouth was half open, almost like she wanted to gag. “Back down?”

It wouldn’t be long, not anymore. This was more than revenge now, killing those murderers could free Lyd! *But, there’s a stupid balance.* He knew that balance. He felt it the first time he really took out that Duncan freak. Lydia looked at him differently for a little while. Move too fast, and he’d lose to darkness.

Which meant, he’d lose her. Unless? *Nah, nah, no way. Best friend, forever, not ever gonna go for something like that. I mean, she could be okay, but? No way, they’d know it wasn’t serious. That way won’t work.* If they did have a relationship between them, he could do it, they were right. But? They wouldn’t be fooling anybody, and eternity didn’t turn a blind eye to lies.

Then again, he didn’t have much to lose? *So, the recently deceased chick was the one who put that relationship stuff in.* “So, how does that relationship thing between the killings go?”

Yep, Lydia's eyes sprung straight to him. Might as well say it for what it was, she knew now.

"Beej. You. You can't. Kill."

Uh huh. Can't kill the people who made her kill her parents? Her voice was pathetic, even she didn't believe that. "You want your eternity to be a dead shadow?" No response. Exactly. "Second Chance, how long can she visit?" It would fluctuate between times that Beetlejuice knew would never be a problem before. Lydia was always ready to go home.

Now, Lyd wouldn't want to go 'home'.

"The first visit isn't long," Miss Second Chance confirmed to him. "Do you remember it?"

"It was short but memorable," Lydia said for him. "It was amazing, seeing everything so different." She was smiling, but also starting to cry. Trying to hide it to be brave. She was starting to get the hint of what everyone was saying. "I stayed until I had to go home for supper. That was usually how it went."

Beetlejuice looked back toward Miss Second Chance. He checked the time. It was up to them how they should do this. "You could come every day if you wanted to back then, because you never always here. It's a give and take, Lyd."

"A few hours here, and a few hours there," Miss Second Chance told her. "I recommend not staying months for months. The longer without each other, the worse you each could become."

"Contract," Ginger said as she pointed to it. "Can't they just say they'll be a couple and not send her back at all?"

"That isn't the way it works," Miss Second Chance corrected her. "You can't use trickery in that matter. But--"

"You gotta honor contracts." Oh, that weird relationship thing was making sense now. "Those dates don't count as visits."

"Correct, and they will keep you healthier as you continue Lex Talionis."

Got it. "Okay, Lyd, here!" He took the contract again and showed her. "See? So, if you spent a couple hours here each day, then you can double that if we do this relationship date thing. It'll keep you here longer."

"Oh." Lyd didn't look right. "Four hours. Out of twenty-four hours?"

"Eternity isn't an hour thing," he said, trying to explain. "Time's not gonna move really. Be a thing. Your just stuck in a moment."

"Where I kill my parents. Where I have no control over myself." She looked at him square in the eye? "Repeating? Do I remember each time?"

“I don’t know,” he admitted. “Neitherworld doesn’t know a lot about eternities.” He couldn’t answer much to her. “Time moves here though, so I’ll keep real good track of it. Whenever you can visit, I’ll get you, and we’ll do these date things to increase the time ‘cause they don’t count, they are part of the contract. Not visits, mandatory actions.” So dark, in the bright light of the Neitherworld, it didn’t fit her. “I don’t care if we are chilling in the roadhouse or talking over spaghetti and meatbeatles, every time you can be here, I’ll be here!”

He felt her grab him desperately for a hug. He was supposed to keep her from falling. He was supposed to take her place if she fell. This wasn’t right! “Can’t we work out something, changing spots? I asked for it before, Second Chance!”

“You have to beat her down in falling, to take her place. What’s done is done,” Miss Second Chance answered. “You have one more hour with her. The first visiting day is the shortest.”

“How do I make it back to BJ?” Lydia asked. “I’m. I’m. Gagged. Over there, I can’t call for him.”

Not anymore. “I’m not bound to that,” he said softly to her. “Babe, that’s why I couldn’t reach you last time, they can’t put that weight on me again.” Weight appeared on his shoulders as he balanced it. “Ever. I’ll be there.”

“I just!” She started to break down as she took another hug.

“I see. I should have come sooner.” Donnie just had to butt in. No one cared. All that mattered right now was Lydia. “Is there anything I can do?”

“You could help Beetlejuice,” Miss Second Chance told him, “if you are willing to kill.”

Yeah right, Donnie wouldn’t do that.

“Would it help him *not* to become dark, so he and Lydia will be fine?” Donnie asked.

“Yes it’s possible, but it could make you dark,” she warned him.

“The sooner this matter is resolved, the sooner Lydia and my brother will be safe,” Donnie decided. “I’ll help however I can.”

Wasted breath. Beetlejuice didn’t need help taking down those humans. All of them had weaknesses. He’d beat every one of them and free Lydia for good. Still? Balance. Without balance, he could lose Lyds. “If Second Chance knows something, fine.”

“I do,” Miss Second Chance said. “I need a home decorator.”

Beetlejuice didn’t even bother to find out if she was kidding, trying to get a free decorator, or actually serious. The only thing he was focused on was Lydia. “I got an idea, let’s take Doomie and go for a spin in the Neitherworld. Anywhere you want to go. Anything you want.”

Lydia didn't leave her spot though. They both tried to have a nice conversation about their friends in the Neitherworld, plans for what they'd do when she visited. But?

It didn't take long. He really didn't even have a chance as she literally sunk into the ground behind her. Just the vision of a shadow screaming, burned into the pavement.

He looked toward Miss Second Chance and Donny Juice. "Where's the wanna be husband and his future asylum wife?"

"Brother? She hasn't even been gone two seconds-" Donnie tried to stop him.

"Help or get out of the way," Beetlejuice insisted.

"I housed Brady and his probably not future wife, Rebecca."

Okay. He was allowed to drive her crazy, but Brady was his next kill. No more haunting each place and finding all the knick knack pesterings. No more light tricks.

No more light for anyone.

Beetle on the Gun

“And wouldn’t it be so cool if like the yes’ all came in at once too?”

Lydia looked around herself. She wasn’t stuck in the house with a gun aimed at her parents. She was walking on a sidewalk with Bertha and Prudence. What? She looked down at herself. School uniform.

“It’d be so awesome if we all knew on the same day!” Bertha said louder. “We are going to be so awesome in college.” She looked toward Lydia. “It’s going to be so rad. Imagine us in college, Lydia.”

Oh. Lydia remembered it now. BJ had told her he didn’t know much about her eternity. It wasn’t even starting in the house. It was earlier that day. She tried to break from walking, to try and leave so she wouldn’t have to go home, but her feet were like concrete when she tried to move them in a different direction.

They just kept going straight. Words from her mouth came too, before she could stop them. They were all just walking and having a conversation together.

The day had been so normal. The sun had shone so bright. Everything looked calm and peaceful, except her. She still looked like she was beneath some large shadow.

And as much as she didn’t want to, she found herself heading right back to her home. Right back to her door. She went up the steps and felt herself wanting to cry as she heard her mother’s delightful greeting.

She reached her room, pulled off her bookbag and set her homework out.

Then, she saw a face that made her feel so much better. A face that wasn’t a face, just staring at her from her pencil case.

“Hey, hey, Babe!”

“Homework.” It fell out of her mouth so fast. Her life was just a script she had no choice but to play. *I thought I would at least get to forget all this, do I really have to remember everything over and over?* “Beetlejuice. Not tonight.”

“Aww.” He complained for a little while before leaving her alone.

Don’t go. She found herself picking up her pencil and starting her math problems. Even the smaller rebel of trying to keep the pencil still instead of moving it across the paper was so hard. The delay just wasn’t long.

Every action she took that day, even the tiniest pencil mistake, was remade. The words were the same. Everything was the same.

She tried to look outside when she could, but it wouldn't be daylight soon. It would be supper. Then shortly after, bed. Then.

Then. *Beetlejuice, Beetlejuice, Beetlejuice!* Even if it was pointless to think it, trapped in that terrible loop, she found herself doing it anyway. Even if his juice, that could do just about anything couldn't do anything? *I need to rely on more than just his juice.* Bea Juice had said that. *My mind is still mine. Maybe my actions aren't mine, but I can still think!*

Let her hand follow the homework, let her actions do what they would, her mind was still hers. Instead? She started to think of happy thoughts. Daydreaming. Daydreaming of a different place and time.

Opening their one-day business in the Neitherworld that only had one customer. The night Beetlejuice had brought home party monsters from a can. Weird moments the thought had been stressful but had actually been just fine. Betty Juice going camping with her friends. Beetlejuice turning into a dog and her mom falling for that silly pooch.

The more she thought about all the things they had once gotten into, the more she felt better. This wasn't the end, there was a way out of it. Even though she didn't want to admit it, as much as she wanted to scream it was wrong? *Please kill them. Kill them but stay safe. Please. Don't get consumed by darkness.* It would trap her there forever, but it would also do more. As terrible as her eternity could be, it wasn't hell. If he lost to darkness, he would go to hell.

If this eternity was just a looped timeline, then what was hell? Would he turn into a demon? As much as she wanted him to just take care of things, to just do something, he had to be careful too. *I'm going to kill my parents tonight, and then myself. I'm allowed to be a little selfish right now. Let those people die that did this to me!* Why did they even do this? Why bother, what did they get out of it? Were they just a bunch of insane people, what did they have to do this for?

What was worth her parents lives? What was worth trapping her as a dead shadow? *No! Your thoughts are all you have, you can't do anything else. Happy thoughts. Happy thoughts. Beej will do what he will do, you couldn't convince him anyway. You wouldn't want to convince him anyway. Just, to be careful. I won't lose Beetlejuice in the name of revenge or escape.*

Right. Happy memories. Happy memories.

Brady walked up with his fiancée. Opening the doors to their new house, it was exciting. They had even thrown in house decorating for free so they didn't need to worry about furniture right away.

He was glad Rebecca had been happy with just her engagement ring so far. When he told his father about everything, along with the prices, he was so proud of him. He didn't tell him

about the art, just that he made smart investments for the future he wanted. Even his dad agreed when he brought him by that he made a great deal on the place. The plumbing was sound, there was no insects, and there was an upstairs and a downstairs.

His father wanted him to continue with his college too, not just to stop with family life. Rebecca seemed okay with it, but she was also ready to start their new life together. They hadn't made any more crucial decisions yet, not until they got a feel for how it would work.

First step? Success. They walked into their new home.

Rebecca literally screamed.

“What the fuck?” Brady stared at the walls. Instead of the beautiful dream home they had seen before, the walls were dark, an eerie dark blue. The lights from outside that should light the room seemed to be gone, with only some eerie lights from candles being casted against the walls.

Even the doorways. They were weird. Crooked, like they split in an earthquake and someone who didn't know about repair just rejoined it together with new wood or something.

“Oh, that free stupid decorator they offered. Fucking joke!” Rebecca complained. She looked around the house and came back. “The whole house is messed up now. We can't buy it like this.”

“We already bought it, the inspections were done and everything,” Brady reminded her. They couldn't go back on the purchase. “I guess since we were buying something that was claimed to be haunted the decorator used some artistic freedom with the theme?”

“We can't invite my parents over tonight in this place like this,” Rebecca insisted. “I thought the decorator would have done great to show off. No way. We have to get this fixed.”

No way. “I don't have money for that, Rebecca. We need our money for the marriage and to help with rent. This'll cost thousands to fix.”

“At the very least, lights. We need lots of lamps so this whole darkness goes away,” she added. “We need lamps, Brady.” She moved into the kitchen. “It's so weird. It's like, how? It was free, so I thought some simple furniture. This is bullshit, this probably cost thousands to reverse our pretty house.” She grabbed at her head. “Such a nightmare.”

Brady looked at the legged table. Glass, but the weirdest bronze legs that curled like octopus feet. There was even art all over the walls that was just as freaky.

There was even one he thought he might have recognized. He moved closer to it. “This is the Deetz' painting.”

“Another rich painting?” Rebecca came over. “Can we sell that and get this mess fixed, Brady?”

“No, not a rich painting by her.” He removed it from the wall and looked at it. It wasn't a Deetz painting, it was a different artist they had in their living room. Strange. “Don't ever

open the door to someone that looks disheveled.” Betty Juice. The funeral. Things were starting to come back to him. “Be careful.”

“Why would I open the door to anyone that I don’t know?” Rebecca asked him. “I’m going to start bringing some stuff in. Hopefully there’s a room somewhere that wasn’t hit by the stupid decorator.”

Brady stared at the painting.

“I so should have married the other one.”

What? “What did you just say, Rebecca?” Brady looked back toward her.

“Nothing,” she said as she was leaving.

Another guy? What other guy did she want to marry? *She isn’t over her ex yet? But, it’s been a year since then. Yeah, they were a crazy item the school liked, but she’s mine now. This is sealed. It was a done deal. I’m the only one with my name on this house. If she doesn’t like it, would she up and leave me before the marriage?*

No. No, it would be okay. Some lamps and things to brighten it up for now. Rebecca loved him. Him. He did so much for her. She would never do that.

His paranoia though, about her being honorable. It had trouble staying down. All day long, he was unconsciously whispering about it to himself. When he was around her, he swore he heard things too, just out of earshot. She was muttering them when she thought he was too far away. Things like-

‘He never would have made me live in this freak house’.

I wonder if he still thinks of me?

Is it completely over between us?

I can’t believe I’m going to marry such a loser.

“I lowered my expectations too far. Sweetie, how about here?”

“What?” Brady stared at her.

“Here?” she asked. “Mom can sit here, and dad could sit over there. It’s the less creepiest spot with the most lamps.” She looked away and straightened the chair. “That you could barely even afford, Loser.” She looked back toward him with a smile. “What do you think?”

“Things’ll get better, I promise,” Brady said to her.

“I know,” she answered. She looked back away. “But is it enough? I just don’t know anymore.” She looked back at him again with a smile.

He went to grab her hand. “Just give me a chance. We are going to have a fantastic time with your parents tonight.”

“I know.” She patted his hand while he looked down at hers. “It’ll be a night we’ll never forget.”

Brady tried his best to greet and stay mature with her parents. Tonight, they would be judging everything, and their house looking like something out of a horror film wouldn’t help.

“It was this weird decorator’s fault,” Rebecca said as she hugged her father. “I hate this house so much now.” She let go. “We’ll make it all work.”

How could she say that? “The house will get better. It was a mistake and we’ll make it better,” Brady insisted. He felt himself getting so warm as they headed to the kitchen to relax.

“Interesting table,” her mother said. “It’s different. It’s expensive though, no doubt about that. I would expect this kind of thing in a successful art person’s house. Not a starter home.”

“I agree. It’s okay, Hon,” Rebecca’s father said. “We didn’t expect everything to be perfect, we didn’t even expect a dinner. We just wanted to help you get moved in.”

“I know, but I expected more. The decorator just took it and made it theirs,” Rebecca said as she seated her parents. “Murder someone for a better life, and Brady still couldn’t get the perfect house thing right.”

What?! “Rebecca, don’t say that,” Brady warned her. Why did up and say that? To her parents? “It was a joke,” he tried to tell them.

“I don’t think the decorator was making it into a joke,” Rebecca told him as he sat down. “It was just, they had different taste.”

“No, the other thing was a joke,” Brady insisted.

“What other thing?” Rebecca’s father asked.

“Just? The murdering someone part?” Brady said confused. “It was a joke.”

“Honey?” Her mom looked at her. “Rebecca, what’s he talking about?”

“I seriously don’t know.” Now Rebecca was glaring at him. “Don’t get weird, Brady. It’s just the house.” She sighed and looked upward. “It’s haunted you know.” She looked back at him. “Calm down before you screw something up. Can we just get started on dinner?”

Right. Dinner. Right after everything she just said? Brady left with a heavy step to the kitchen to grab the food. While he started to cut the meat, he heard them speaking in the next room.

“Are you sure about this, Rebecca? He is off his rocker.”

“I know, and he killed someone for this all too. A girl named Lydia Deetz from Peaceful Pines. He helped frame her into killing her own parents, and then she killed herself.”

“Really? He got away with murder?”

“I’m starting to get scared of him, I want to get out of here. I try to smile and be ignorant to everything, but I can’t take much more.”

“Don’t make a scene. Sneak out tonight, we’ll be ready to get you. You won’t sleep one night in this place.”

“But I know he killed the Deetz’, I’m his alibi.”

“We can talk to a lawyer, you’ll be okay if you tell the authorities right now.”

“No!” Brady yelled as he held the knife strongly and went to the next room. “How dare you, you bitch!” He held the knife out toward her. “You think you won’t get in trouble because you didn’t kill the Deetz’? You knew about it, there’s no going back!”

“What the everloving fuck, Brady?!” She yelled right back out to him. “No one knew shit!”

“What the hell is going on?” Her father stood up.

“I heard you, you’re telling them all about it!” He wouldn’t be tricked. “I did it all for you. I got the money for you. I knew you were the one, and I did everything for you!” He held the knife toward her.

“Calm down, calm down!” Her parents tried to help, but Brady ran straight at her.

The entire table moved with the carpet, making him miss. His knife plunged into the wall. He tried to pull it out as they were starting to escape out the front door. “Get back here you bitch! You’re going to fry if you tell anyone!” He struggled to get it free.

Fuck it, he had another. Everything. He did everything for her. Everything.

Everything. He went to their moving boxes, looking for his guns. Why didn’t he label which one they were in? He eventually found them and grabbed his favorite. He pulled out his shells and started to load it. “That bitch is going to die. She isn’t telling anyone. Anyone.”

Then, he heard noises and looked behind him. There were cops standing in his house, their guns trained on him. He didn’t know what to do. He just laughed. “You can’t come into my house.”

“Sir, put the gun down!” the most decorated looking one said to him.

“It’s my house,” he insisted. “I was having dinner.” He was just having dinner when she started to talk about everything. “She drove me to this!”

“Sir, put down the gun,” the most decorated officer said again.

Brady looked at the gun in his hands. How did they go from coming to their new house, to their new life, to this? He watched as a strange black and white beetle landed on his gun. “The house is haunted. We bought it knowing that, but that’s what’s wrong,” he insisted. The officers didn’t move. “It’s the house, not us.” No. “No, it’s this girl named Betty Juice! She’s been haunting my friends, and she even killed one of them!” No. No, now he sounded like he was crazy.

“Sir. Calm down, and let’s discuss this downtown. Put the gun down.”

Brady stared at the gun. His new life. His future wife. First meal with his in-laws. All gone. All the reputation he had. His father?

He looked at the beetle at the back of his gun, and then saw right past the cops.

Betty Juice. It was Betty Juice. “Leave me alone!” he demanded as he aimed his gun right at her.

“Two down,” Miss Second Chance noted in her book. “Duncan and Brady are taken care of. Rebecca was almost killed.”

“I moved the carpet,” Beetlejuice reminded her. He looked toward Donny. His brother was very quiet now. Donny actually did most of the work this time. Every time Brady couldn’t see Rebecca’s face, he threw his voice so only Brady could hear it. “Ginger isn’t responsible for her medical bills.”

“Trauma can be done to the bystander,” Miss Second Chance agreed. “Therapy for years to come, Miss Ginger the Spider will not pay a cent.”

Yeah. She knew about what happened to Lydia. Amazingly, Donny’s words might have done something Beetlejuice didn’t plan on happening. “Is that prison bird singing for her meal?” He turned into a bird briefly.

“Yes. The Deetz’ case is bound to get reopened,” Miss Second Chance confirmed. “Justice.”

Justice? Lyd wasn’t getting justice, she was stuck as a dead shadow. Eternally, unless he could free her. “Who’s next?”

“No more than one a day,” Donny reminded him. “I also need to . . . to go home. Clean. I really need to clean, I feel like everything around me is very dirty. I feel very strange.”

Beetlejuice did too, but he didn't care about the feeling. He'd have let it consume him if Lydia wasn't on the line.

Lydia. "Okay, what do I need to do this relationship part of the contract?" He was getting that extra two hours.

There's A Raisin For A Date

She was up, but she wasn't. Lydia was in a sleeping position. Had been for some time. Waiting for it to happen. She could hear the sounds now of them sneaking in she hadn't before. Her body wouldn't let her move though. She felt herself being gagged, and allowed to open her eyes.

Then she started to move away from everything, rising upward.

Neitherworld

No more gag was on her. She stood right in the middle of a restaurant. Beetlejuice was across from her at a fancy table with a maroon suit on. "Beej?" She ran over and gave him a hug. What timing. "I can visit again?"

"Close enough, we got to go on a date to get relationship points so you can stay longer," he said as he squashed a tiny date under his foot. "Have a seat." He juiced a chair on the other side. He sat down. "Order real light, I can only do this once a day."

And he could take that once a day. "I just ate supper," she told him. He seemed surprised. "I'm not reliving the moment, over and over. I think I'm reliving the day. I showed up walking with Beatrice and Prudence."

"So, you're on a time scale after all?" he asked. "You ate supper."

"I was just gagged, and then, I was here." Would being there skip more time, like it did in her living world? "When I go back, will I miss it all?"

Beetlejuice looked at his watch. "It happens at eight here. We'll have to make sure you have visits every time at this time, and it'll be okay."

"How long can we be on this date?" she asked. Could they really ignore it all?

"Two hours, each night that I . . ." He paused slightly. "Thirty minutes if it's just an average day." Yeah, his eyes spelled it out, but he said it anyway. "It wasn't an average day."

Thirty minutes but tonight two hours. Lydia watched as someone poured her some beverage. She ignored the comments she heard about her complexion, and about Beetlejuice being let into the establishment. "Thank you."

"I told you," he said oddly. "Time with you is, is time with you. Time for dating or hanging out at the roadhouse, as much as I can keep you out of there is fine with me." He spit out a date from a calendar.

“Eight O’ clock,” she said. “On an average night, could you pick me up a little after?” Maybe she could bypass the whole terror. If it worked like visits in her world. It was hard to say. Would that loop keep going without her, or did it stop? She’d ask, but he wouldn’t know either.

Instead, she looked toward him. Especially his eyes. “Are you okay?”

“Yeah, yeah no problem,” he said. “No worries, Babe. I can’t risk falling if you’re on the line.”

“But you . . .?” Yeah. No. Should they talk about this? “Beej.”

“Don’t gotta,” he said for her. “Food should be here soon.” Still, it was awkward. “Two hours. We can eat and talk for awhile, then we gotta go do something else for a date.” He threw another date out of his mouth. “Things are worse than chewing sunflower seeds.”

“Can we just walk?” she asked.

“As long as we are doing something together, somewhere, and I’m spending a little bit of money. I guess,” he said. “We can if you want. We can go visit someone if you want. We can go prank someone if you want.”

Oh, that sound. A playful prank. *He probably really needs that.* “Who do have in mind?”

“Really?” BJ asked. “You really don’t mind if we go pranking around for our date time? You never let me prank.”

“I just want you to be . . . the most *you* that you can be.” The weirdest phrase she said, but she meant it. For so long, she would bet he was either obsessed with taking care of her, or leaving to take care of duties still dealing with her. Something light. “What do you think, Beettlejuice?”

“Yeah,” he agreed with a decent smile from him. “Let’s go visit a pair of old jittery bones.”

It wasn’t something Lydia liked to do, go around with Beetlejuice while he played pranks on people. It was usually something she tried to ignore, but something she had to harp about it. But? He seemed pretty happy, having fun, especially since the first time?

She was participating. She covered her ears as Ginger opened her fridge.

“Beetlejuice!” Ginger yelled as they both took off. “Against the contract!”

No, it wasn’t, because she did it and not him. Beetlejuice could not stop laughing as they ran. When they were far enough, he snagged her and swung her around in a circle as they floated in mid-air.

Happy. He was so happy.

“I can’t believe you actually did that,” BJ said to her. He turned into a bucket. “Something off the old bucket list. We should do that on our dates.” He spit out another date.

“Probably not all the time,” she corrected him, “but I liked seeing you smile for real.”

He seemed a little strange by that comment. “Lyds. Uh? I, uh.” Awkward. “I kind of half guessed you’d never want to talk to me again once you knew things. Let alone want me to. To smile.”

“Yeah. I know it’s not exactly something to talk about, but. I don’t judge you for what you are doing. I’m not going to tell you to keep going or to stop. I just. I just want you to be safe, and never lose yourself. Okay, Beej?”

“I have to be safe,” he agreed. “If I don’t, I lose you.”

“You lose yourself too. Everyone loses,” she said softly. “Be careful and keep being Beetlejuice. The Beetlejuice that pranks, and is funny, and . . .” Ugh. “I don’t want to be serious, I just want to enjoy my time with you.” It was hard to know how long she would have to endure her eternity. Would it be an eternity? Would BJ be able to get her out?

“No time to waste being serious,” he agreed as he took her hand and floated away with her across the Neitherworld sky. “You can talk while we move on. How about the Grossery Store?”

When they laughed and entered the grossery store, Lydia started looking at everything. It wasn’t just a casual trip, it was a chance to get away. Everything was wonderful to experience.

“Why are you all dressed up, Beetlejuice?” one of the employees asked him. “You better not be up to something.”

“Not up to anything except my height,” he said as a ruler appeared behind him. “I’m on a date.” He stood on a giant date this time. His juice was becoming funnier again. “There’s a raisin for that.” Now he stood on a raisin with the date.

Lydia laughed. He was so much better again. In the moment. Now.

“You’re on a date?” The employee looked at Lydia. “With her? Beetlejuice is on a date with Lydia? You are really on a date?” he asked her.

“Yeah.” It was technically called a date. She didn’t want to botch anything up by calling it something the contract didn’t. Neitherworld things were tricky sometimes. She took BJ’s hand as he pulled her on top of the date, stacked on top of the raisin and they rolled out of the store.

They rolled down the street, hearing others complain, but neither one caring to stop. They wanted to savor the small moments together. Two hours.

They ended up high on a cliff, standing on the silly date and raisin now. “Best date ever, Beetlejuice,” she joked.

“Good. Haven’t had many successful ones, maybe this rolling with the motion would help more?” he joked back. “You ever want . . .” He was trying to say something. “Is there some guy you liked back in your world, that you would have wanted to be rolling around with like this?”

“Did I want to date someone in the living world?” What an odd question. “No.”

“You sure?” Beetlejuice said suspiciously. “I mean, ‘cause it was probably causing some regression. Unfinished business and all that. Guess it’s not a thing now, but if there was somebody? I could help tell them for you?”

She shook her head. “When would I ever like someone?”

Now, BJ really rolled his eyes. “Ginger said you did. Lying spider.”

Oh. Oh! So much had happened, she forgot about Ginger asking that. She couldn’t tell her it was Beetlejuice, so she had gone along with Ginger’s assumptions. “Well? Um? I think, I was just confused by the question she asked or something. I was always with friends, or you, or you and friends.”

“Oh.” He straightened his maroon bow tie. “Good thing ‘cause now you are dating me.” A date fell on his head. “Probably have a lot of dates with me.” A lot of dates started to rain on BJ.

Lydia just smiled. “I don’t mind it. I like spending time with you.”

“Yeah, I do too, and I promise. I’ll think ahead about the next one,” he said. “I’ll probably have 30 minutes tomorrow, but I can also have you visit some time too. Two and a half hours total.”

“Can we press all the time together?” she asked. It would help assure that she could skip the night part better.

“I don’t think it works that way,” he said slowly. “I’ll check, but I doubt we can go on a date and then suddenly just visit. Sounds like a great cheat. We can’t risk a cheat in this kind of thing. If it backfires.”

If it backfires, she was a goner. “Did you talk to my dad yet?”

“Haven’t been wanting to jump to that,” BJ said. “I will. Eventually.”

“You don’t have to dread it,” she told him. “There’s enough to stress about. When you do, don’t let anything he says get to you. You did everything you could, I was the one who had to know.”

“I’ll tell Chuck eventually,” he promised. “It isn’t-”

Gone. She was gone again. Nothing could stop her leaving, he didn't even get a chance to use juice. Once again, just a burnt in mark on their date. Literally. He hopped off the date and juiced the raisin and date away.

For a little while. He'd been happy. At least, hopefully, he had great timing and she missed the terrible events. Hopefully.

Two more. Duncan and Brady were down. Carter and Finley were left. He went back to the Roadhouse, planning on keeping the schedule as much as the same as possible when he got an odd call.

From his mom.

About Donny.

Beetlejuice's Parents Home

"Not everyone can do the things you do," his mom warned him as she cleaned a dish in her hand.

"Yeah, I know." Beetlejuice was trying to be more cautious for Lydia, but darkness was changing his brother right in front of him. "Yo? Donny?"

Donny's eyes were rounder, and that smile wasn't Donny's annoyingly sweet smile. It looked a lot more like . . . his. "Yo!" He patted Beetlejuice on the back harder than usual. "Mom's having this minor freakout. She begged me to visit after I told her about what happened, and then when I walked in, she swore I was you. Just 'cause I tracked a little bit of dirt inside."

Yep, changing. "You can't help me again, Donny."

"Lift the shoes, lift the shoes," their mother insisted of Donny. "You two are about as dirty as each other, and Beetlejuice has had years on you."

"Eh, whatever." Donny picked at his ear.

"It'll be temporary," Beetlejuice told his mom. "Probably." He'd have to ask about it.

"Beetlejuice," his mom warned him. "My sweet, polite son turned into you after one round of helping you. I know you are strong, but don't go back there again. We can't lose you to hell."

Now his mom was getting worried. "I can totally handle it. I'll be fine," he insisted.

"You better get some more help," she insisted. "Have your father help you."

His dad? “Dad’s working.”

“Your dad needs to help you. You can’t handle all of it alone.”

“I’m not Donny,” Beetlejuice reminded her. Although, the way Donny now looked and felt more like him? Wasn’t such a good feeling. “What if it changes him too?”

“You find out how long people helping get changed,” she insisted. “Don’t you dare go out and do anything reckless though. Not right now.” She looked toward Donny. “If he hadn’t have helped, you could have gotten worse.”

“This is stupid,” he insisted. “Ma, don’t push this.”

“I know my boys’ eyes,” she told him. “I know the way he acts. How often he jokes. How he acts when he’s annoyed.”

“Whatever,” Donny remarked.

“Donny won’t help anymore,” Beetlejuice insisted.

“I was talking about you,” she insisted right back as she put her dish up. She went over beside him and cleaned his ears. “You be safe.”

“I know to be safe, Lyds is on the line, you think I don’t get that?” Ugh. “I gotta go.” He glanced toward Donny. “I’ll find out about this stuff. I’m sure he’ll be fine.”

Yeah. He’d be fine.

Neitherworld Has A Better Idea

Carter Adler heard something fall behind him. He ignored it as always. A month ago, he had to go to another funeral. Brady's. Things got worse once investigations opened up about the Deetz' family from Pleasant Pines because of Rebecca Beckett. She knew Brady was there along with 'friends', but she didn't know which ones.

While the 10k was helpful, he had been ready to just get out. He had hoped that getting away, saving the money and getting some other job for a little while would drain the guilt from him? It didn't.

Worse. The guilt had eaten at Duncan and Brady. Brady went crazy, but he was the idiot that bought a haunted house for his future with Rebecca. She stated Brady just went nuts. She was so distraught from the whole thing, that she quit school all together when it turned out she was pregnant.

They had wanted to start a family early he guessed. So, Duncan and Brady both went crazy and got themselves killed. He knew Duncan ran out into the road at night, and Brady apparently kept hearing voices and tried to stab Rebecca with a knife.

When he went to the funeral with Finley, he warned him not to believe in anything he heard. Voices. Strange sounds. He believed that Lydia's friend Betty Juice was trying to scare them into some kind of insanity.

Carter didn't really believe in ghosts, but he believed Finley. The way they took out Lydia had somehow triggered her friend to go insane and start hunting them down somehow. Betty Juice never got her hands dirty though.

It was hard to tell what was Betty Juice's antics, and what was his own guilt. Carter never had to hold a gun, make any real big plans, or even see any of the aftermath. Getting Delia and Charles Deetz to the upstairs balcony required another person. Brady and Finley couldn't do it alone and leave Duncan to handle Lydia. Duncan was on lookout and agreed to take care of the mess with his knowledge of cleaning stuff.

Carter needed money to continue going to school, his family was in debt, and his grandfather was in need of surgery. He needed money and his friends knew that. They knew he needed money and that he'd never roll over on his friends.

All he had to do was be there, help getting Delia and Charles Deetz into position, and he was gone. He waited in another room until it was time to leave again.

He heard something else fall again and tried to ignore it. After that, he couldn't concentrate on school anymore. Even if he didn't have to kill anyone, he helped them get in position and he kept the secret. It really did eat at him.

He gave most of his money to his grandmother and parents out of guilt, telling them it was his savings and he wasn't doing well in college anymore. He got his own little place and his own little job. Just, trying to move on.

As far as he knew, Rebecca didn't even know he was involved.

He saw a paper next to him with spilled ink that spelled out killer. He just moved it out of the way. He stood up and went past the bathroom. He saw murderer on a fogged up window in the bathroom where the water had been turned on. He just erased it, checked the tub, and ignored it.

Neither guilt or some girl's tricks were going to make him lose his sanity. He was young still, and he could rise above this mistake. Finley had the same problems, but they both agreed to ignore everything. Even voices they heard, as Finley was convinced Betty Juice could fake throwing voices which ended up getting Brady in the end.

She was really good at holograms and magic tricks, but Carter believed that's all it had been. Nothing he saw or heard would change that.

Neitherworld

This was . . . "Hm." Miss Second Chance crossed her legs behind her desk chair. The Mayor Maynot had visited her, letting her know that some opinions had changed. Or more than likely, they saw potential in the tragedy.

"It's nothing against Lydia Deetz, I'm sure your client was a nice person. I've seen her personally here many times," he said to her. "It's just that . . . well?"

The chances Beetlejuice could actually get through the entire Lex Talionis was already slim, but now it seems, nonexistent. "You allowed him to connect to the living world. You allowed him to see her."

"It seemed like it would calm him down and get him settled later."

"According to the papers you gave me, you allowed him entry to build a connection with someone alive, so he could finally start settling down in the future. Girlfriend. Marriage. Kids. Next step."

"Yes, it was, but? Well, there's more than just me that thinks we could do better."

"Better."

“Yes. Forget Sandworms! We could be rid of Beetlejuice forever if he is consumed by Lex Talionis.”

“My client would suffer.”

“But on the grand scale? It would not mean you are a failure,” he ensured her. “The Neitherworld would really be more lenient, and you might find yourself with a more comfortable pay job?”

Miss Second Chance had to step lightly. For one, she did not like the way this sounded. “He is already advancing as he can.”

“He’s stalled. He needs to be pushed faster,” Mayor Maynot disagreed. “While we can’t connect to other eternities like Beetlejuice has somehow managed to do? We can disallow entrance here.”

What? “You are voiding the contract of visitor?”

“Just until he gets back at it. He can do better, we know it. He needs to.”

“I would like to talk to my client.”

“It’s tough to do this when you can’t reach her, isn’t it?”

Miss Second Chance approached Beetlejuice. He had made good time on the first two kills, but the next ones were harder. They were more prepared, ready for the tricks, and ready to play dirty. This wasn’t going to turn out well. “Progress?”

He didn’t say much. “I got a 30 minute date with Lyds in an hour,” he grumped. “What more do you want me to say?!” He stood up. “I have to go farther with these last two, they aren’t getting scared let alone scared to death.”

Non-believers. “You may need someone to help again.”

“It took two weeks before Donny even wanted a bath again,” Beetlejuice warned her. “I’m not risking it.”

Hmm. “Then discuss ideas with others.”

“What ideas?” he once again complained. “I’ve got enough juice to take a whole neighborhood out, but how am I supposed to scare them to kill themselves? I’ve pulled out all my best material because she’s stuck down there in that loop every day!”

Which, he already knew when to take her out to make sure she didn't suffer the most. She had to apparently go through the terror, but never had to shoot them or herself.

That was a stroke of wonderful luck for them, but Beetlejuice was only halfway through to possibly freeing her. As for the other avenue? The dates were still just a term he was using to be part of the contract and gain a small amount of extra time. Neither of them really danced or kissed or treated it any differently.

Ginger encouraged him to try better, especially after Beetlejuice accused her of lying about Lydia liking someone in the living world.

But fancy restaurants and fancy clothes did not make a couple fall in love and admit feelings. Calling it a 'date' had done nothing, which irked the spider so much she barely went to go see him now.

It didn't bother Miss Second Chance. Everything had its own space of time to get everything taken care of. Even this standstill that Beetlejuice was at would have eventually had a crack come through. A chance to get under the skin of the living and make them slip into shadows.

For best results, rushing was not advised. For him though, nothing would help. "Find someone with different ideas."

"Beat it already." He brushed off his clothing. He wasn't going to get anyone else involved.

Fine.

Lydia arrived predictably when he reached down for her. He put another date dress on her, and they sat down to eat. Neither of them looked as lively as usual. "So?" She poked at the food. "Ordered ahead this time?"

"They are just getting used to the order," BJ told her. "Didn't order yet at all. Hey? Let's order something different just so we don't have to pay for this?"

Lydia scratched her. "I'm not real hungry. There's only thirty minutes anyway. Right?"

"Yeah," he said. "Only thirty minutes."

"Beej'? Is it too hard?" she had to ask. "If it's getting to you morally-"

"Whoah, whoah, whoah," he stopped her. "Morals? Barely know the word," he teased. "Nah, no moral issues."

He took out two people. He took out one, and then took out another one the same night she was first sucked down into being a dead shadow. It was a nice two hours where they rolled

around on a date and a raisin.

Every night since then, there hadn't been any luck. Bringing up the topic wasn't something she wanted to do. It was involving killing people. It felt taboo, but, they had killed her. And? And it's like, they were at this standstill.

It felt like when she was constantly holding onto Beetlejuice, knowing one day she just had to let herself fall. "Do you need any help?"

Beetlejuice didn't look happy about that. "We just got 30 minutes."

"Are they more prepared than the others?" she asked, not wanting to give up. "Can I help?"

He didn't look like he wanted to answer at all. But, after a slight whine. "They aren't getting scared. I've done everything I did with the other two and more. I also can't get any help, Donny changed a bit for awhile because he helped. Everything feels like a waste right now, but something will come up."

They weren't falling for any haunted tricks. "Then what do they think is causing everything?"

"Guilt and Betty Juice's tricks." He threw his hands down. "Even raining beetles doesn't help, they just have umbrellas they carry around with them everywhere."

"You could put the beetles in the umbrellas?" she recommended.

"Doesn't work. They cursed but they didn't run off."

Hmm. "Any phobias or fears?"

"Jail fear. Parent fear."

Oh. They couldn't work with those. "Why did they do it?" She hadn't asked before. She had really been trying to keep her time with him on happy thoughts, and keeping her memories into happy memories. But, it wasn't going to last forever. She really wanted to know.

"Your dead, Babe, what's it matter why?"

"BJ, please tell me?" She needed to know. "Why make all of this happen. Me and my family were good, so why?" He still didn't want to answer. "BJ."

"It was your mom," he finally revealed. "Some art dealer found others that actually thought her work was worth something. It'd be worth even more when the artist was dead."

She lowered her head. Her mom. "They wanted to kill mom." Why them then too? "Why make me . . .?"

"They never deserved anything but hell in the first place!" BJ interrupted her. "It was because of your style. They pinned it on you."

"Pinned what on me?"

“Your parent’s death.” Beetlejuice was not wanting to share any of it. He’d been keeping it back for some time. Up until she really wanted to know. “They labeled you as some psychopath that killed your parents and then committed suicide.”

A scapegoat. They made her the scapegoat. “Because of my style?”

“You had the best style,” Beetlejuice told her. “Forget all that makeup and lipstick and flowery stupid clothes, you had the best style of anyone in Pleasant Pines.”

Yeah. “It made me the target.” Her collection. Her clothes. “Did Bertha and Prudence-”

“Never believed, neither one! Not even Prudence with her whole ‘study the facts’ thing, they never believed it,” he told her. “Friends to the end.”

“Were they okay?”

“They were after awhile. Bertha and Prudence, they both went to awesome colleges. Their whole families moved for a new start,” he insisted. “Prudence got the scholarship and money for it, while Bertha got a bit of help from Betty.”

“Good.” *Don’t cry.* “They deserved brand new starts. Thanks, Betty.”

He nodded. “Sucky date.” A date fell on him and started to suck on him. He knocked it off. “Not much time left, can we do something uplifting?”

Oops. Lydia found herself being lifted from the table with BJ. They were rising higher. “Wrong words.” They were being yelled at now.

Beetlejuice grabbed her and jumped down from the mess and the restaurant. They ran for a little while, to make sure no one chased them down for that. When it was safer, they walked again. “Case opened back up,” he told her. “They are starting to piece some of the truth together, but they still don’t have the smoking gun.” A smoking gun appeared in his hand coughing.

“The art.” Her whole family. Killed for art. Sentenced to being a dead shadow, just for some art. She couldn’t handle much more. “I try to hold it together, but I just needed to know, and I’m sorry I wasted the time, and it’s partly my fault that happened.” He was trying to uplift her and his juice did just that. “I just wanted to have a happy time with you.”

“Yeah, but we can’t always just ignore everything. I get it,” he admitted. “You were ready to know. I know there hasn’t been any progress either.” His face turned into a meter with the word progress. “I don’t know how to move the needle back in my direction.” The needle moved on his face to the side called ‘other direction’ before it changed back. “Maybe I need to go for the parental fears again.”

Again. Lydia came forward and hugged him. He hugged her back. She hugged him harder. She just wanted it to be over. Living world was over, she came to terms with that, but she was tired of being a dead shadow. She was tired of the same thing everyday. The same actions. The same dialogue. “I live for the times I finally get to see you.”

“Should be all the time,” he answered her. “At least we got this all balanced out, so you miss the worst times.”

“I miss the good times. I miss the changing times.” She hugged him harder. “I miss coming to see you after school, calling to you, spending time with you. It’s just not the same.”

“Need more than thirty minutes. I know, Babe.”

“I shouldn’t have to visit, I should just be here with you.” She felt him rubbing her back. “I want to stay here. Why can’t I just stay here?” She looked up toward him. Disheveled hair. Messy clothes. No hygiene. The same as he’d ever been. “I want to stay with you forever.”

He smiled at that, showing off a lone beetle piece in his mouth. Something she never cared about much before, and something she really didn’t care about at all now. “Yeah, I always wanted to hear that from you a long time ago. I always wanted to keep you here.” He gently took her hand. “Maybe we can turn some points in for a visit now?”

“A real visit, where I can stay for a long while?” she asked.

“Yeah, probably. I’ll have to ask Miss Second Chance if we accumulated enough points for it,” he said. “It could be really great, imagine having a nice sleepover again.”

She felt her whole body become warm. Sleepover, it felt like it had a different connotation with him now.

“You okay?” he asked. “You got a weird look in your eyes, Babe.”

Weird. Right. “When Ginger?” Ugh. She didn’t want to do this. Time moved on though, it had to move on. She couldn’t just keep doing this. “When Ginger said I had someone I liked in the living world, did that bother you?” She watched his expression.

“Bother me?” He just looked confused. “I thought you said there wasn’t anyone?”

“I didn’t want to involve you in it,” she said quickly, looking for any kind of sign of jealousy. Or, anything.

“I’m the only one who can give a message.” No jealousy at all. No feeling at all.

“I can’t say anything,” she said, “because I don’t know if he has the same kind of feelings.”

“Your dead, Lyd, that doesn’t really matter anymore.” He really didn’t get it. “Name and where I can find them. I’ll send off some lost lovey dovey letter you can write.”

Nothing. There was nothing. Nothing serious in his eyes. *Bea Juice made it seem like . . .* even the fact that he could pull her from her eternity for visits to the Neitherworld. But? There was nothing. No jealousy. Not a big deal that she liked anyone. “I want to tell him that I care for him. A lot. More than a lot, I really think that I . . .”

BJ just juiced some paper to her along with a pencil. “Here you go. Just write out the mushy gushy stuff and I’ll get it to them.”

Mushy. Gushy. *Friends to the end*. “I can’t because he’s just my friend. That’s all he’ll ever be, he’s just my very good friend ‘til the end.” She could feel tears start to overtake her, but she tried to hold them back. Friends.

Good friends.

That’s all they would ever be.

“Friends to the end?” Beetlejuice looked odd now. “I’d know about that, I know all your friends, you’ve got no real close friends who are boys, just me, and I’m not a boy, but I am a friend, but I am uh?” He raised an eyebrow. “Is he a living guy?”

She didn’t even want to look at him.

“Are you talking about me?” His voice didn’t sound disgusted though. “I’m not Prince Charming.” His face looked like Prince Vince. “He’s the guy at the castle I make fun of.”

She couldn’t help a very slight smile. “I never said you were Prince Vince or Prince Charming.”

“Yeah, well, Vincy wanted you at one time.” His face went back to normal.

Wait. She started to look toward him. There was a sense of jealousy now? “You didn’t like me with Prince Vince, but the living world guy you didn’t have any problem with?”

“Yeah, ‘cause your dead,” BJ said. “You’re not living. Those living guys don’t get anything, except maybe some lame last letter.”

Lydia started to smile and looked more at him. Was there something? “Beetlejuice?”

She felt herself falling through the ground, but this time, it felt different. Not only that, they still had ten minutes left. She was falling ten minutes early.

She heard him cry out for her, also concerned about the messing up of time. She only heard him once though, before she was back in her eternity. She couldn’t move or hear anything. She couldn’t see anything.

From the time, she was probably already dead, unable to see or do anything. Just alone with her thoughts, once again, until she woke up to her friends. Talking about college again.

“Lydiiaaaa!” Beetlejuice kept trying to grab through the pavement. What the hell? He had ten minutes left with her! He watched Miss Second Chance appear. “Hey, you. Our date was cut short, isn’t that against the contract?”

“Visitations have ended.” She gave him a red pass.

What?! “What do you mean visitations have ended?!” No way. “She can’t just stay down there, and we still have dates too.”

“A red pass means it’s over. You can’t yank her to you anymore. The contract is nullified.”

What? “Why?” He didn’t get it.

“The overseers of the Neitherworld felt your Lex Talionis pursuit has stalled,” she said. “Mayor Maynot says you have one week to kill, or everything will be canceled. If you kill within one week, everything will be restored.”

“Without visits, Lydia has to go through the whole time alone!” he reminded her. “I can’t just leave her like that.” He tried to see a way to reach down through the spot she fell.

“Lyyyyyyd!”

“I know.” Miss Second Chance told him. “My condolences. It’s your only choice now.”

“Everything has it’s time, huh?” he blamed her. “Don’t worry about how long things take, let them happen naturally. Get help, make sure you don’t do everything yourself. Liar!”

“My philosophy is not Mayor Maynots or anyone else’s,” she informed him. “I do encourage you to ask for help. If you take out both quickly, you will not have a chance of escaping the darkness and hell. Then, the overseers win what *they* want.”

Oooh. Beetlejuice glared, but it wasn’t meant for Miss Second Chance. He caught her attitude toward the end of what was going on. “Maynot wants me to go to hell so I can’t stay in the Neitherworld.”

“If you do go to hell, then you’ll lose Lydia to her eternity, eternally,” Miss Second Chance warned him. “Find a way to compromise to save Lydia, and yourself.”

“Or there’s no saving Lyds.” Damn Neitherworld leaders! Okay, so he was a pain sometimes. Did some things wrong sometimes. Played pranks sometimes. Made life a little bit difficult at times. It wasn’t right to use Lydia’s situation against him.

Okay. Help. He was going to need more help. There was only one place he could think of that would help him.

It Takes A Working Family Guy

Beetlejuice rested his head on his parents table. His mom wanted his dad to give him some kind of tips to help. He didn't really see what his dad could offer, but he had tried for a whole month. And now? Lyds was cut off, for good, until he killed one of them.

"I just don't know what to say," his father said to him. "I'm sorry about your friend. It feels wrong to kill the living, and I saw Donny after helping last time. Even you? You look a little different. This changes people."

"I'm not asking you to make the kill," he said again, "I'm just wasting *my* time asking for any advice!"

"Beetlejuice, if I change like you, then I won't work. Then who's going to provide for the family?" he asked.

"Oh, good point," his mom agreed. "We should figure that out."

Money. Working. Time was sliding by so fast, and if he didn't figure out how to kill one of them, Lyds would have to go through murdering her parents again.

"I just don't see how you can go through with this, Son. Making someone be afraid who isn't afraid? Who doesn't have any easy fears to prey on? This is harder than work, and you hate work. I don't see you getting through this any time soon."

"Great, just great! You know, a little bit of believing in me would go a long way!" he scolded him. "Yeah, it's harder than work. I don't care, I'm going to get this done and save Lydia."

"If you hardly ever work, then it's hard to work when you have to," his father said. "You can't expect miracles."

"Not an ounce of faith." Beetlejuice held up an ounce cup with the word faith in it. He poured it out. He looked at his mom. She didn't even care, she was reading something. "Your son is over here pouring his faith out, and you're just reading?" He grabbed her book abruptly.

What? He looked away from the page and at the title of the book. "Raising Clean Grand Ghost Kids, Edition 379?"

"I believe," she said as she reached back for her book. "I'm preparing."

Raising Clean Grand Ghost Kids? "Something I don't know about Donny?"

She just shook her head. "Now, head up from the table, Beetlejuice, you are getting it all dirty. You need a bath too. Try looking a little better for when you get this done." She gestured to the book. "Brush your teeth, get out most of the beetle parts. No one likes to kiss with food in the mouth."

Beetlejuice just gave his mom a small . . . smirk. He poured the faith back in and lifted his head. His mom didn't just believe that he could get this done. She believed that- "Wait? Whoah. I never told you I like Lyds."

"Pretty obvious, Dear," his mom said. "Fate had you visiting her while she was alive, so she'd have a chance to get to know the one person who can get her out of being a dead shadow. It's just like cleaning a very stubborn stain, you can't just throw it together, you need several things and extra time to pull it off."

"Yuh huh. Leave it to you to take hell, eternity and shadows and make a point with cleaning stains." Like he should have expected anything else?

"Now, I've been waiting awhile. I really want a ghostboy and a ghostgirl for grandkids, but I don't know if she could handle two from our genes."

Well? Death was weird. Beetlejuice couldn't say yes or no to that thinking. "Wait, wait, wait! Even *if* Lyds is freed, who said anything about grand ghost kids?"

"Grand ghost kids with Lydia?" his father said surprised. "Lydia is finally going to give us some grandkids?"

Boy, they were both in their own daydreams. "I need to save her first," he reminded his dad.

"Well, if I'm saving my future Daughter-in-Law, then I will help." His father stood up. "Come on, let's go to that living world together. I don't know how to scare someone to death, but I bet if I watch long enough, I can hit him where it hurts. What have you tried so far to ruin him?"

Oh. Oh boy, did he have a list for him.

Living World

"Hey, Carter, we need you to come back in again. Everything's messing up again."

Carter looked at the time. "I'm already on overtime."

"If we don't get this fixed, no one has a job. The only other one who knows how to do it is sick."

He was practically sick. "Do you have any idea how much sleep I've gotten?"

"You are the only one that seems to fix the machines."

“I don’t know why they work when I use them and it doesn’t work for anyone else,” he said. “I’m not fixing them, I’m just using them.”

“Come in. Now.”

Damn. Carter pulled himself away from his home and to his car. He needed to get it taken in, it took at least three starts before it turned over now. He headed to work and went over to the company machines. They worked just fine. “See?”

“Good. We close in two hours, just take over for two hours,” they insisted. “We’ll get someone to look at it tomorrow.”

“You said that yesterday,” he complained but they had already left. Damn. Stuck at work for two hours. He swore that coworker was just kidding around with him to make him keep coming in. The company was going to hate giving him all this overtime just because of his prank.

All of the machines worked fine. He fixed the drinks just fine. He gave out the drinks just fine.

“This doesn’t taste right.”

“This is not vanilla.”

“The milk isn’t separated.”

“I can tell you didn’t make this right.”

Except the customers were biting his head off today. Usually he gets all the orders just right. “It’s a 20 oz macchiato with light ice and two espresso shots with caramel.”

“It’s not, it tastes like there’s six espresso shots in there!” his customer complained. “Remake it.”

Remake. Remake. Remake. Every customer he tried to help, ended up leaving with an unhappy smile. Most of them told him he needed to learn how long to press buttons, or maybe check the machine for the right amount of coffee. They even complained for something as simple as a cold brew being the wrong flavor.

Every order was absolutely wrong, and it didn’t take long before his boss found out. He was on the phone with him, while trying to take the next orders. “Sir, I’m doing everything normally as I usually do. I know my flavors. Yes. I’m not adding anything extra. No. Yes, I know I’m not supposed to be working but there were complaints about the machines not working.” He tried to make the next drink and give it out between the conversation.

“Oh, this is disgusting, what is that?” they complained. “That is not chocolate in that mocha, it tastes like shit. I want a refund.”

“I’m making them right!” Carter was getting frustrated. Being yelled at by customers and by his boss. He heard the dinging of the toaster oven too for the little breakfast sandwiches the

chain also produced. Still on the phone, he took it out with one hand and tried to put it together. He sacked it and gave it to the customer.

The customer took it out. "You forgot the egg and cheese. On a sausage, egg, and cheese sandwich."

Damn. He took it back and made another one. Meanwhile, the line was somehow getting even longer than usual. They mostly complained and yelled that he wasn't moving fast enough, the ones upfront stuck around because he was getting their orders wrong, and his boss was chewing him out on the phone.

And when you get frustrated, busy, and stop paying attention to things?

"Mother fucker!" he yelled as he cut himself with the knife he split another sandwich with.

"Hey, I didn't pay for blood on my sandwich!" he heard from behind him.

They couldn't even be nice enough to give him two seconds to stop the bleeding and grab a bandage? He ran his hands beneath the water but heard a ton of complaints from the customers, along with complaints from his boss. "This isn't stopping." The blood was still running. "Sir, I think I need to go to the hospital."

"On your time off," his boss said on the phone. "After your shift in two hours, you can go."

"Sir, I am bleeding. I can't stay, it won't stop. The customers are going to get bloody drinks."

"Then remake the drinks. Put fresh gloves on each time."

Was he in hell? "No, I'm going to the hospital!"

"Leave and you are fired!"

"You can't fire me, I quit!" He hung up the phone and walked past everyone, holding his poor hand. He needed a hospital right away.

Betty Juice looked onward, along with 'her' dad. "Leave it to you to know how to make a worker lose it." His dad's work stunts threw him so off balance that throwing voices was working again.

"Some work days are hell, Son," his dad said to him. "You'll know that one day." He watched as the next worker came in that the boss had actually promised would replace Carter immediately so he could go to the hospital. Something Carter didn't hear through the thrown voices.

The replacement had everything fixed, the customers happy, and the place cleaned up in a few minutes. "I hate when that happens. All the credit will go to them."

“Yeah, but Carter quit now.” Betty Juice still needed to make him end himself, but their best vehicle to frustrate him to get it done was gone. He wasn’t going to get scared to death, but a kill was a kill, and they lost the way to do that.

“He’s going to the hospital. We just need to follow. It won’t take much for this next part. I know how to take him out from here.”

Hospital

Carter couldn’t believe the fee he had to come up with to get his hand fixed. “Take it in payments then.”

“Do you have a job?”

“I have another good paycheck,” Carter tried to convince him. “My boss fired me for coming in to stop the bleeding.”

“I doubt that,” the doctor said. “If so, they could probably be sued. Your finger is nearly off.”

Nearly off? Carter looked at it close. “Oh, it’s barely hanging on?” It felt surreal. He almost sliced his finger off. With just a simple cutting knife?

“Yeah, you are going to need surgery to reattach that. We’ll get you scheduled for it. Come with me.”

He was circled around to different offices while he kept a wet rag around his finger. Later he was in an isolated room, coming to terms with what happened. “I quit my job?” He quit it right before this happened. He was going to need help to get these bills paid.

He called up his parents. “Hey, I need some help.”

“You aren’t the only one. Carter, we have some bad news. Nana passed away.”

Nana? “Grandma didn’t make it?”

“No. The surgery was risky, even if we had the money at the time.”

“Did she have the surgery?”

“Yes, she died after it.”

Damn. No. “I’m sorry. I loved Nana.” He closed his eyes.

“The money you lent us is gone too, Carter.”

What? “I gave you a lot of money to get through everything.”

“Your mother went to drop it off and someone attacked her at the ATM.”

“I gave you the money a long time ago.”

“I know. We didn’t want to tell you, we didn’t want you to get upset, but we needed to tell you again. Your mom isn’t doing so well now. Do you have anything extra we can borrow for a little while?”

Money? “Dad. I called because I needed money.”

“Could you get a loan for everyone? I’m afraid we are just too low to qualify for anything anymore.”

A loan? “I don’t even have a job, I just quit today.”

“Carter, what?! Why did you quit?”

“My boss wouldn’t let me go to the hospital to take care of my hand.”

“He probably didn’t understand the seriousness. Call him back right away. You’re really the family’s last hope, we need your help.”

Damn! “Okay.” He hung up and tried to call his boss. He wasn’t answering at first. When he did, he wasn’t happy. “I’m sorry I left, Sir, it was an emergency.”

“You chose it,” his boss said. “There was no reason to choose that, but you chose it. Get your hand fixed and I wish you well in the future.”

Damn! “Sir, I’m sorry, it was an emergency! Sir!” He hung up. Ugh! He probably could sue him, if he had some kind of money to sue for this. Crap. He called his dad back when the doctors came in and injected him with something.

When Carter woke up, his legs felt weird.

“It was a success, Mister Adler. It was touch and go but the growth stopped.”

Growth? “What do you mean?” he asked.

“The gangrene in your leg,” the doctor or nurse said.

Gangrene?! “I didn’t have any gangrene!”

“Sir, your leg was full of gangrene. We had to amputate very high.”

Amputate? “I don’t have a leg?”

“Just relax now. That’s the most important thing,” the doctor said before they left.

Carter looked at his thumb. It was patched up too now, but his leg? His leg? How was he going to afford this?

“So much worse than it was before, huh?”

Carter looked toward the door. Betty Juice was just standing there. She waved at him. “You murdered Duncan and Brady.”

“You murdered the Deetzes,” she said back. “Did you think murdering someone to help others was okay?” She glared at him.

“I just helped support the bodies upstairs,” he said to her. “I didn’t murder anyone.”

“You knew what they were doing, you didn’t say a word, you are guilty!” She pointed straight at him.

“I’m less guilty than Mister Jennings!” He watched as some nurse went right past the hologram of Betty Juice to give him another injection. “Don’t you see her? The hologram of her? The girl by the door?”

The nurse looked toward the door. “There’s no one there, Sir.”

“It’s a hologram!” Carter insisted. “You can walk through her because she’s a hologram, but you must see Betty Juice.”

“Sir, there is no one there. Just relax, the medication affects everyone differently.”

“Yeah, Carter,” Betty Juice said. “It’s *just* your medication. Only your imagination. I’m not even real, am I? Never found anything about me in your little look ins at Pleasant Pines, did you?”

“Who are you?!” he yelled at her.

“Already dead, and I’m helping the memory and justice of a friend you hurt. Don’t mess with the dead, Carter. They have no problems with torturing the living. Now, sit back.” She smiled. “Sorry about the gangrene. The job. The calls. Getting mugged before the ATM. Grandma dying. You get nothing from Lydia’s death. The rest of your life will be this way too. You’ll lose every limb, every job, and every family member before I *ever* let you go.”

“Don’t you see her? Don’t you see her?!” Carter yelled, pointing to the door.

“Just relax, Sir,” The nurse gave him another injection. “There is nothing there.”

“Right, Carter. Nothing there. I’m nobody. Don’t get fond of any of your body parts, I bet something will be gone again when you wake up.”

“No!” He yanked his IV out to stop the medication. He was bleeding out, pushed the nurse away and tried to get away on his one leg. He reached for the door.

Beetlejuice and his father, dressed as Betty Juice, watched the ending of the little weasel’s life. Beetlejuice wasn’t supposed to make direct contact with them as himself in a threatening manner, but his father never signed the contract. A little bit of voice throwing and changing the old man to look like Betty Juice, and they had it solid.

The leg was probably the part that got him. He’d been so convinced he lost his leg, he couldn’t feel it when he was ready to flee. Beetlejuice never thought it would be the most disbelieving one that would be scared to death. Now? Lydia could come back and avoid the painful night. “Thanks, Dad.”

“The old human ticker can only take so much,” his dad said. “I feel a little weird now.”

“It’ll go away in about two weeks,” he told his dad. He just couldn’t involve him anymore. Everyone seemed to get one by themselves with just some side effects.

One more. He just had one more.

Finley Jennings.

“You are going to get a two-hour date with her tonight,” her father reminded him as they watched doctors trying to save Carter with a defibrillator. “Make it special.” His father waved his hand in front of him. “Beetlejuice? You okay?”

The light seemed gone. Most of what he saw was black or shaded in greys. *Finley*. Finley. “Finley Jennings and Mister Jennings.” Mister Jennings. “They never would have pulled that stunt if it wasn’t for that art collector.”

“Uh?” His father looked confused like some idiot. “Beetlejuice? You’re only required to kill Finley Jennings, then Lydia will be given back.”

“No she won’t,” he corrected him. “It’s a theory. Something nice to believe in.” But when did anything nice happen to him? “This is revenge, plain and simple. Revenge for what they did.”

“I don’t feel so good,” he told Beetlejuice. “You’re definitely not very good either. We should go home.”

Roadhouse.

“Well, it’s a home,” his father said.

“I’m going to kill Finley.” It was time. “Both Finleys.”

“No, Beetlejuice, that’s not part of the deal,” his father tried to stop him. “Beetlejuice. Listen? You’ve been involved in three revenge deaths. You’ve shared the burden of two, but you’re still taking damage as well. This is too far. Just, relax. There’s no need to go after anyone else for a little while. You have a date to keep. With your lovely friend.”

He was going to kill them.

“If you mess up, you will lose her,” he reminded him. “You are already showing signs you want to mess up. You can’t let her become a dead shadow for eternity. You don’t even want to leave her in there when it gets really bad,” he tried to convince him.

He was going to kill them. His dad left somewhere else, he didn’t know where. Didn’t care. It was time to take care of this.

Lydia’s Eternity

Lydia had her eyes closed. She couldn’t cry, but she wanted to. *Beetlejuice, Beetlejuice, Beetlejuice. Beetlejuice, Beetlejuice, Beetlejuice. I need you.* She could feel a hard disconnect when she had fallen ten minutes early. He would have ranted and raved, and taken some of the other visitation time they earned to make sure she was okay.

None of that happened. They were locked away from each other. She heard someone coming in for her. She felt the gag being put in her mouth. She found herself actually going down the stairs this time.

There was only one person there, but she heard someone head away in the back. She could look at her parents, already at the balcony. She could hear her father trying to comfort her.

Beetlejuice definitely would have gotten her by now if he could. She raised the gun, and lowered the gun, and raised the gun again. *Please! I don’t want to see this, I don’t want to see this, someone!* She couldn’t close her eyes. There was nothing she could do.

Neitherworld

“Beetlejuice!” She reached for him, seeing him right in front of her. While she felt so much relief, it was starting to leave just as fast. BJ didn’t look like himself. He’d already been less funny, and less pranky, a little different before. But now?

His eyes were almost nothing but black, barely any white at all. He had no real emotion on his face.

She moved backward. He felt so strange. Had he gone too far? *This is my fault. I never said not to do anything, I just wanted revenge too. But now, I’m losing him.* “BJ?” Nothing. “Beej?”

Then, his eyes seemed to focus on her again. “Lydia?” He blinked and then seemed better again. “Hey, hey! You know I wouldn’t leave you hanging if I could help it,” he told her as he hugged her.

“How?” she asked, still very worried. “You were having such problems.”

“My dad helped,” he admitted. “He took all of the things I tried on him and made them all hit at the same time. It turns out a working family guy is pretty good at killing another working family guy.”

Working family guy? “Did he have kids?”

“Obsessed with helping his parents and grandparents. Too obsessed,” BJ answered. “Sorry, that was longer than last time. I think?” He looked really confused. “Contracts suck.”

Lydia looked around herself. They weren’t in a restaurant this time. “We’re in the Roadhouse?”

“Yeah?” He was just as surprised. “Must have come back. I know dad took off. Uh? Well, let’s try something different for a date then,” he answered. He snapped his fingers and dressed in his favorite black and white suit.

Beetlejuice. *That was so much better.*

When he juiced her, she found herself in her most beautiful outfit he had made when she first came down there as a Neitherworlder. “The spider webs are still just as cool-looking.” She looked back toward him and noticed he had something else in his hands.

“Only rule is I spend money, right? So, uh, I figured we might try this.” He showed off what he was hiding in his hands. “Meant to give it at some point.”

Oh. She reached for it from his hands. It was a beautiful black and white beetle lapel pin. “Deadly vu!” She pinned it on and watched his juice actually create three black and white

beetles crawl on her. "It's beautiful, thanks Beej." She pulled one of the beetles off and held it out to him.

"Uh? Not right now. I'm holding off on food," he said oddly.

She watched as confetti started to fall from the ceiling while she found a party horn in her mouth while he was blowing on his. He grabbed her and spun her around. He had even juiced on some music.

Some familiar music they used to dance to together.

Miss Second Chance watched from some bugs, spying bugs, in Beetlejuice's roadhouse. This was getting bad. She knew from the beginning how it would end. She tried to help people increase their chances with help or hope, but this was too many.

Though Beetlejuice had more juice than most ghosts, he would still succumb to the curse of Lex Talionis as well. One or two, perhaps he could have pulled through. She had known this, but tried to help anyway. She even tried a lover angle with Ginger the Spider to increase the chances of keeping a connection to keep the evil away.

There were still too many to take revenge against, and the Neitherworld even kept one in their pocket: the father of Finley Jennings. Just to increase the chances he would fall if Finley himself weren't enough.

She could tell from Beetlejuice's report he was not an easy ghost to get along with for the higher ups, so as hard as Lex Talionis had been? It was ten times as hard when everyone was cheering for him to lose.

She had no vested interest, only to complete her job to full satisfaction. She would rise up in ranks the better she had done with her clients. But, seeing this?

These two. It was easy to see how Beetlejuice and Lydia had broken the barriers between. Even if she hadn't known their history, their silly dancing with their silly music. The looks in their eyes. The fact that Beetlejuice's change to evil had been brushed away like it was nothing while confetti rained down on them while they danced.

Miss Second Chance would be rewarded and seen as accomplishing her duty well no matter what happened. At this rate, the smiling Lydia would be screaming inside and forced to stay a dead shadow for eternity, while Beetlejuice would be entering hell once he took the last life. Probably within three days or so, this cute little scene would never happen again.

But? *They broke into a connection of eternity. Something few have ever done before.* The chances this would work. The chances this would even help the clear catastrophic destination for these two? It was so slim.

Sorry, but this dance must end. She was going to steal the rest of Lydia's visiting time.

They deserved that slim chance.

Burnt shadow in the middle of the Roadhouse? “Aaaah Damn it! What the hell?” He earned that, he earned her! He had a whole two hours he was supposed to get.

Playing with his emotions. *Fine*. That’s all that mattered to them. He was tired of letting the higher ups of Neitherworld jerk around Lydia just so they could win against him. “Fine, forget it! I am going to take out Finley, and then I’m getting Lydia back!”

He’d stay strong. He’d remember Lydia was on the line. He wouldn’t go dark. Just, one more time. That’s it.

Just one more time.

Lydia's Only Chance

Lydia was surprised to find herself in an office. The desk in it had a sign for Miss Second Chance.

“Lydia Deetz.” Miss Second Chance, she definitely recognized her after the contract thing with Ginger the Spider. “Do you have any idea how much the Neitherworld wants Beetlejuice to pass onto his eternity?”

Huh?

“Enough to sacrifice a perfectly fine recently dead person.” She gestured to her. “Enough not to care where he ends up.” She looked disturbed as she scooted closer. “Do you know why Lex Talionis was banned?”

The revenge. “It was bad?”

“It can make a good person become evil with its influence,” she said to her. “Even the affect it’s had on you, have you noticed? You never once said that he shouldn’t pursue it, though it would open him up to becoming evil and going to hell.”

Lydia pulled back. “He’s got a lot of juice, and he knows what’s at stake.”

“You.”

“Yes.”

“And hell.”

“ . . . yes.”

“Just because he knows, doesn’t mean he can win against it.”

Lydia closed her eyes. She didn’t want to hear it, but to ignore what she had seen? “He’s been . . . changing.”

“Yes.”

“But he’s also fine?” she reasoned.

“You make him better. You help pull him back toward his own self,” Miss Second Chance stated. “It should be expected, with an impossible connection that shouldn’t exist between eternity. It only goes so far though. It only lasts so long.”

“Is he . . .?” She didn’t know what to say.

“He needs to kill two more people,” Miss Second Chance informed her. “He needs to kill one, but he could kill another one. Someone who wasn’t there, but planned it. If he kills both,

there is no chance of anything saving him. He will leave the Neitherworld.”

No! Lydia covered up her face in shame. “I thought he was strong enough, and I wanted to leave the dead shadow eternity so bad, that I . . .” No. “Save him? I don’t care what happens, just save him.”

“It doesn’t work like that. No one can stop him but himself, and you know that he won’t stop and let you suffer.”

“I don’t care!” Lydia slammed her hands on her desk. “Miss Second Chance, I’m lost either way! It’s either me, or it’s me and him.” She grabbed her head. “Beetlejuice.”

“Lydia Deetz? Did you understand why I set up dates inside of that contract with Ginger the Spiders permission?”

Lydia shook her head. “It gave me more chances to get away.”

“I wouldn’t care about that. I explained before that becoming an official couple would bring you back to the Neitherworld.”

“But Beetlejuice said we couldn’t cheat,” she added. “It takes more than dates.”

“Yes, it does.” Miss Second Chance stood up and went over to Lydia. “It takes much more.” She showed her a ring in her hand. “Standard issue, standard cost, not expensive nor cheap. I will hold onto it since you can’t ever take anything with you to your eternity.”

A ring? That was . . . “Wait. Is that?” No way. “I don’t have to marry Beetlejuice to make it count, do I?”

“Oh, it’s not just that simple,” Miss Second Chance told her, “but it is the start. You also have to consummate the marriage.”

Lydia’s eyes went wide. Yeah, she could see why Beetlejuice wouldn’t risk using the trick at all. “We’re just friends. He . . . doesn’t like me in that way, but it’s okay.”

“What makes you think that?”

Well? “He didn’t get jealous, I guess?”

“That doesn’t sound confident.”

“Okay, he was sort of? But I’m like his best friend. He doesn’t like to share, especially his best friend,” she said. “It doesn’t mean that he loves me. We’re so close because we’ve just always been real close. He’s like? I don’t know. Like a soulmate. Platonic soulmate.”

Miss Second Chance smacked her lips. “If you are a hundred percent sure that is the case, then this is all a waste of time. No one will win, you will suffer in agony in your eternity, and Beetlejuice will go straight to hell. I say no more than three days, if you are lucky to get that.” She spun the ring on her finger. “If there is even the slightest chance you think there

could be something, you should take it.” She stopped spinning the ring and held it tightly. “Is there a chance?”

A chance? “A chance to be Mrs. Beetlejuice Juice? Uh, Beetle Juice. Mrs. Beetle Juice.” It was hopeless if he didn’t have the same kind of feelings. “It’s tough to say.”

“This is not the time to be coy and flirtatious with it,” Miss Second Chance warned her. “You and he will suffer for an eternity if you don’t straighten up and ask for real. Now? He will probably assume since I stole the rest of your date time that the Neitherworld is messing with him again. He will probably go to kill, thinking that will finally give him to you.”

What?! “Then send me back!”

“The higher ups of the Neitherworld want Beetlejuice to pass onto his own eternity, I had to do this to speak with you. Beetlejuice will reach point 1 when he kills next time. I have convinced the higher ups to have one last conversation with you before he kills the last time and reaches point 2.”

A conversation? “Point 1 and point 2.”

“Point 1 he has a chance of turning back, if he has the same kind of feelings as you. By point 2, there would be no stopping it,” she told her. “Not . . . many around here appreciate Beetlejuice. Less would ever see any potential for love in him. I am using that to create a scenario. They think that I have put you up to telling him that he was never anything to you. His heart will be crushed, and any redemption would be gone.”

“Put up to . . .?” Huh?

“Yes. You are supposed to crush his heart. Instead, you will save it,” she told her. “You need to propose to him as well, to make sure the Neitherworld cannot split you apart. You will be bound to each other until you are both ready to move onto your eternities.”

“But?” She touched her hair. “Did you just make that up, like you wanted to convince them that he liked me and I could be used that way? Or do you, do you know . . .?” If he did like her.

“The first,” she said to her. “You need to figure out the second.”

Oh. “Thanks.” She looked toward Miss Second Chance. “Everyone wants Beetlejuice to move on except you. You barely knew him. Why put yourself on the line so much?”

“It’s not him I care about,” she told her as she pushed her glasses up. “I took on your case. It is you I am interested in. I help the recently deceased because the afterlife is difficult to navigate. Yours is much harder. If you don’t make it through this, I won’t be fired. If you do make it through this? There are many advancements for someone who was the first to pull someone back from their eternity.”

Hm. Career advancement. “Whatever the reason, than-?!.”

Time up.

Falling Into Stardom

Finley didn't answer his phone at first as it rang. When it left a voicemail though, he decided he better call back. "Hello, is this Rebecca?"

"Jennings? Oh no! I've got really bad news. So like, my fiancée went psycho. He actually tried to kill me and the cops had to take him down."

Really? "That doesn't sound like Brady, you were his life."

"Well, he kept saying things, like hearing things that weren't there. The cops killed him now. I don't know how to feel about it. Being his close friend, I thought you should know."

Huh. "This isn't Brady's number, did you get my number from his phone?"

"No."

No? "Then how did you get this number? I wouldn't give you my number."

"I just wanted you to know. Brady went psycho and he's dead. Then not long after that, poor Carter died too. A leg amputation gone wrong."

Carter? Did she ever even meet Carter? "What do you mean, what went wrong? Are you kidding me?" Both of them? He hung up on her. She was weird.

He tried to call Carter. No answer. He dug online and found the number for Carter's parents. "Hello? Is Carter okay?"

"Our son? I don't know. Things are tough right now, fool just quit his job. He said he needed money but we needed money from him too. His mother's not doing so well."

"Sorry to hear that. Let me know when he's back please." Finley hung up. He watched as Rebecca's number appeared again. "Hey, his parents said he was stressed, but not dead."

"They don't know yet," she insisted. "He kept seeing this girl called Betty Juice, and he kept thinking his leg was amputated. It was terrible, you should have been there. Really. You should have been there."

But? "Carter's parents don't know that yet."

"Oh no, it didn't happen very long ago. Details will be released shortly."

"You were Brady's chick, how would you be with Carter to know everything before his parents?"

"It's private, Brady! Look, if you want to know the real details, then call me at this number in ten minutes."

Brady wrote down the number. It probably had something to do with the murders. Was Betty Juice killing them? Did she see her? He waited ten minutes and then called her.

“Hello?”

“Okay, so now give me the details.”

“What details?”

“About Carter and Brady.”

“Who is this?”

Oh, this didn't sound good. “Rebecca, this is Finley. How's Brady?” She started to break down over the phone but he definitely heard mumbles of ‘hearing voices, psycho, tried to kill me’ and ‘killed by cops’. “What about Carter?”

“Who? Look, I already told you what I know. I don't know anything about anyone named Carter. I have to go now.” She hung up.

Shit. Betty Juice was messing with him. She wouldn't get away with that.

“Nice painting.”

Finley looked behind him. “Fuckin?” One of Delia Deetz' paintings he sold was hanging right behind him. Even stranger? He moved closer to the painting. There was a little girl inside of it.

One that looked like Betty Juice. Was that in the painting last time? *Relax! Okay, this is fine. Betty Juice was a strange friend to Lydia Deetz. Delia just painted her inside as inspiration or something.* Although, she was clearly out trying to murder them. All of his friends that were involved with the Deetz' murder was dead.

Duncan. Carter. Brady. The only one left was him and his dad.

“Hey, Dude, do you want to come with me?” his roommate Will asked. “I just won fifty bucks off a lottery ticket again.”

“No,” Brady said. “I don't want to leave my house.” Then again? “Do you know how that painting was put up?”

His roommate looked at it. “That thing is creepy. No, I don't know. Did Liberty put it up?”

Hmm. Maybe he would go with his friend to the theatres after all.

“What are we seeing?” Finley asked Will.

“Oh, I wanted to watch a horror,” Will answered. “I also got free tickets this week. I was going to go with Liberty, but she just won some tickets to a concert somewhere.”

They went in to find their seat as the previews came on. It was dark and quiet, only the sound of people sipping soda and munching on popcorn. Finley actually didn't mind that.

“Hey, how come you haven't hanged out with Brady or Carter lately?” Finley asked. “I thought you guys were close friends. Especially after Duncan, you guys became real close.”

They were dead. “I was just ready to leave.” He clung to the chair. While he looked at the movie, he felt something roll over toward him. It touched his foot. It was round.

He looked at the floor and saw an eyeball with the same color as Brady. “Fuck!” He backed up in his seat further.

Will turned to look at him, then at the ground. “What's wrong, Man? It's just a bouncy ball.”

A bouncy ball. Right. He settled down and looked at it closely. A bouncy ball.

The bouncy ball blinked at him. “Did you see that?” Finley pointed to it to Will. “It is not a bouncy ball, it blinked.”

“Man, you trippin'.” Will picked up the eyeball like it was harmless. He even bounced it up and down. “It's just a kids bouncy ball. The eye don't even look that realistic.” He tossed it to him. “See?”

Finley caught it and looked at it. It didn't feel like a bouncy ball, it was smushy. And? It changed it's eye location from in front to him, to the right. “It's eye moved.” He threw it back toward Will. “The eye moved it's not in the center.”

Will groaned and picked it up. “The eye didn't move. The eye is still dead in the center. I think you aren't over Duncan's death yet.” He picked the eyeball up and pocketed it. “Maybe you shouldn't see this movie with me.”

“I'm fine.” Finley stared at the eye Will put in his pocket. It didn't move or do anything. *Damn, Will is right. Ignore everything. Betty Juice killed the others because they got scared and dumb. I am not dumb. I cannot get scared. That isn't an eye, no matter how much I think it is. It's nothing, it's a dumb ball. Just like Betty Juice in that painting. I am fine, as long as I remain cool.* “No, it's fine. You're right, I'm over reacting. I'll be cool from now on.”

When he said that, his whole body felt cold. When he looked at his hands, they were turned into sticks, and even past that further, his eyes saw snow on his seat. Where he'd been at.

He screamed, and was back to normal.

“Dude!” Will complained. “Finley, maybe you should go. You're starting to piss people off. We'll watch something else together that's safer for you right now. Just go.”

“Fine.” He wasn’t going to put up a fight, it was probably a good idea to get out of that place. He stood up from his movie chair and headed out.

In the back, there were never lights. It was just a small bend before he reached the doors, so he was fine with it. But, the back area wasn’t ending.

It kept curving. He ended up coming back out into the movie theatre.

“They killed her mother and father.”

Finley heard the words from the movie screen. *Don’t get worked up. I just missed the door. Maybe it was on the other side.* He went back in and felt around the sides. Door, door. He moved to the other side and checked for the door over there.

This time, he felt it. He opened the door and went out.

Instead of finding himself in the bright lobby area, it was only slightly more bright. He continued down the way, seeing some people walking beside him in the dimly lit lobby. As they passed, he heard, “that show scared the shit out of me. That girl was too real.

He pushed open the doors that should have taken him out of the theatre.

Instead he found himself right back in the Theatre again.

This time though, no one else was there. No one had remained to watch the movie.

“Hold them steadier, Carter.”

He stared at the screen. Lydia Deetz and him were on the screen. He felt his heart start to bang harder. *It’s a trick. It’s a trick. It’s a trick.*

“A complete trick,” his figure on the screen said to him. “It’s totally possible for a teen to trap you for eternity into a movie theatre, watching yourself on screen. Watching yourself, where you messed up. Where you ended your life, for nothing but some money.”

Finley tried to back out again. All of his friends had died, they’d all been tricked. Maybe she knew the owner of the theatre? Maybe she had a hobby in making films? Maybe. Maybe.

He went back out the doors, grabbed a hold of the second door, and pushed open the third door.

He ended right back at the movie screen again.

“Hop in,” he told himself. “You can’t escape. This is where you belong. You’ve got a part to play, or you’ll never be freed. Come closer and take your place.”

Finley ran back out, tugged on the doors, pushed doors open, and ended back up there again. He tried again, and ended right back there again. “Stop it!” he finally yelled. “Let me go!”

“There’s only one way to go,” Finley on screen said to himself. “You need to take your part in the show. Come closer.”

Finley repeated the same action over and over, and it wouldn’t change. Opening doors, tugging doors, pushing doors, just to end up back there. How was Betty Juice doing this?

“Keep going then,” his movie self called out as he came back around. “We have all of eternity.”

Finley stopped. *I can’t get out.* He forcefully kept putting all his energy into ripping off a movie chair that was attached to the ground. He had even cut himself trying to use his fingernails to unscrew it.

He got his treasure though. *No door? Then I’ll make a new door!* He carried the seat out of the theatre and then started hitting the side of the wall instead of the door. He kept banging on it furiously as he finally started to make dents in the wall.

His back was sore. His hands were sore. He knew three friends had already died to Betty Juice, and he wasn’t going to go down easily. He finally knocked out the siding.

He was in the lobby. It was still not lit very bright, but he continued to do the same thing. He just used every muscle to put a whole in the wall with the chair.

When he made a hole, he looked through it.

He was right back in the theatre with the film playing. “No escape,” he told himself.

He went back to the lobby doors and pushed them open.

It was there too. “No escape,” he told himself from the screen again. “You’re trapped for eternity, or you come join the cast. Again.”

“Come on, Finley!” The camera shifted to Duncan who was on lookout. “We miss you.”

“Yeah.” It flipped to Brady and Carter up by the stairs. “We’re waiting.”

“Waiting for you,” Finley said to himself on screen. “You gonna come, or just keep throwing chairs through everything? I mean, this? It was the crowning achievement of your life. Get on in here, you’re the main star in the film.”

“Somebody help!” He tried to call out as he went through the whole puzzle of the theatre again. One time he did see people in the lobby. “Help, help! I need help.” Ooh, someone was coming. Two teenage girls. “Help me, please. I can’t get out of here. Where’s the exit?”

One of the girls gestured behind her. “It’s just out the door.”

“It’s not out that door,” he said to them. He grabbed one of them as she started to yell at him. Maybe it was just him who was cursed? If he could grab a normal person, maybe it would be okay?

The other one started to hit him on the back as he dragged one of the teen girls to the door with him. "Open it up!" he demanded of her. He pushed her into the doors. He saw a glimpse of daylight and her grumbling on the other side. Her friend was yelling and trying to get through the door too.

Another glimpse of daylight. "I did it."

"But for how long can you stay out of the dark?" a thick voice said to him.

He pushed through the doors and saw the normal world again. He breathed in relief. The sun was shining through the glass doors ahead. He could smell the popcorn wafting over to him from the concession stands.

He was safe. He moved towards the doors to go out.

He was back in the theatre staring at the screen.

"Show can't go on without you," he said to himself from the big screen. "Haven't you always wanted to be somebody. You're a star, and you need to take your spot."

"I was out. I was out!" He screamed at the movie screen. "I was out! This isn't fair!"

"Dude?" His onscreen self just shook his head. "Fair? You made a girl kill her parents for some art. You wanna mention fair?"

"Look. Betty Juice, right?" She never appeared onscreen, but it had to be her. "I'm sorry about what happened."

"No, you aren't," he answered himself. "You are just sorry that you are stuck."

"You want to break free," Duncan said from the door on screen. "We all do. We can't now. This is our punishment. Just take your spot. You might see glimpses of sun, but it'll just be crueler on you."

"Every door you go down," Carter and Brady said in unison, "will have this theatre at the end of it. You can't escape."

"You can't escape," Duncan said from the front door on the screen. "None of us can."

Finley grabbed at his head. *Okay, okay! I interact in the hall with people. No one else is in here.* The hall, somewhere in the hall was the answer. It was the only place he could interact with people.

He moved through the back of the theatre, searched for the hall door and went in.

He waited in the hall. After a few minutes, an elderly couple came out of some doors. Instead of scaring them, he just caught the door before it closed.

Sunlight, but it was getting darker. Sort of a strange green sky, weird. He followed them out the front doors. Outside, he was outside. Safe. "Beat her." He beat Betty Juice. He wouldn't

see another horror film in a theatre ever in his life again, but he beat the odds.

He moved toward his car. It looked a little shorter than usual. A little deeper green than he remembered, but he got in. He strapped himself in. He tried to put the keys into the ignition, but it already started up?

He felt the car pulling backwards, and there were a ton of buckles flying all over him to strap him in! He tried to scream, but he even had buckles forcing his mouth shut too.

He watched as the car pulled out of the parking lot. He realized this really wasn't his car at all!

It was this weird putrid green looking car, and it was driving him right into traffic. Not just into traffic, but against traffic. It was driving in the wrong direction! Other cars cursed and honked as it kept going. He was too strapped to make any motion at all.

Evenutally, he heard the sounds of cops behind him, and the car stopped. He felt all the straps go away except the original seatbelt.

“Get out of the car!” A policeman yelled with their pistol trained on him.

Finley put his hands up carefully. The way that car moved, there was no doubt he injured or killed someone. “The car just went crazy,” he said. They didn't believe him.

He stayed still as he did as he was told. He was pressed against the ground while handcuffs were added to his wrists. He heard his rights, and when he went up, the putrid green was gone.

It was back to looking like his car.

He was driven to the station, went through the basics of getting arrested, knowing his father was going to shit bricks when he found out his son was arrested.

And oh yes, he did. His father yelled up a storm at him, and even took the small bank account he had made for his future away. Finley made him look bad, and he'd pay for making him look bad.

That was all real. That was no illusion. The traffic, the accidents, the car, his father's wrath, it was all real.

“You are lucky your dumb stunts didn't kill anyone,” one of the cops said as they started to walk down the corridor to his jail cell. It was a long walk to his jail cell.

Then he was pushed in.

Instead of being in a jail cell, he was back in the theatre, now with handcuffs in the back of him.

“Told you,” his onscreen self said to him. “You won't stay out of the darkness for long. Do you want this the rest of your life? Stop delaying it. Become the star you need to be.”

“Yeah, we’re waiting for you Jennings,” Duncan said from the door.

“Come on, Finley,” Brady and Carter said from up the stairs.

“It’s a long trip down,” his onscreen self told him. “You really should get started.”

Finley started to climb up the movie stairs. No one was ever there. When he did get out, he ended up getting jailed and yelled at by his father. “Now or not now. It doesn’t really matter, does it?” he had to ask.

Even when he escaped, he couldn’t escape for long. The darkness would find him, and lead him back to that theatre.

“There you go.” His onscreen self applauded him, while holding Lydia still. Duncan applauded him from the door, and his other friends applauded him from the stairs. “Just step forward. Take your place, Star.”

Finley stood on top of the movie chair. He put his foot forward and swore it felt solid beneath him. He kept moving forward on the air. “I have to do this, there’s no way out.” He kept taking steps forward until he was high above the other chairs, getting higher and higher from them.

Chair after chair, he could feel how high he’d been. “What happens when I go into the movie?”

“Nothing,” the sound of Lydia cracked all concentration as she stared right at him. “It’s a picture screen. Movies can’t talk. And?”

“Humans can’t float,” everyone said in unison.

“But they can die,” Lydia said, “and then, you’ll be a big star where you are going.”

Will screamed along with everyone else in the movie theatre as he saw Finley drop from literally right at the top of the movie screen! How did he even get there? He went to go check on him.

There had been people lower than Will sit, and they were in the way from seeing anything.

“Stay back,” someone warned him. “It’s not pretty.”

“I was sitting with him,” Will said. Man, didn’t he get scared of the little rubber ball and go home. “He was supposed to go home. I need to see.”

“There’s nothing to see,” another person stopped him. “You can see him at his funeral, you stay away or you’ll be traumatized.”

Man. Will stopped getting close. He was taken out by a police officer to have questions asked of him. Man, poor Finley. What did he ever do to deserve that?

Deep Breath, Lydia

Neitherworld

“Okay, deep breath, Lydia,” Lydia tried to convince herself as she waited at the Roadhouse. She got a pretty black rose she figured she could use in place of the ring just in case she did fall back down as a dead shadow. “You are just going to take your fun friendship to a new level. Not dating. Just, marriage. You know, just that little thing called marriage!” She basically yelled at herself.

This was so bad. “Beej doesn’t even like the L word. He even calls it the L word.” That didn’t help convince her she was making the right action. “He doesn’t do mushy or romantic or even polite. He does . . . himself.” And that’s what he had been. Himself. He didn’t put on a show for people, unless he was deceiving them, which was also a part of himself.

“Okay, straighten up.” Lydia looked at the time. Impossible to tell with nothing but a seven and three, but a good guess was 4:35. Still didn’t mean anything. She didn’t know when he’d come.

Miss Second Chance was right, Mayor Maynot brought her straight up there to wait. He even gave her some advice, trying to make her believe she could escape as a dead shadow and a fate with Beetlejuice, if she just let him kill the last person on his own. What a cruel man.

Lydia swung the rose around. “Even if he cares, this is so fast. And what if he doesn’t? Because that’s so much more likely.” She walked around the Roadhouse. Pacing. “I’ve known him when I was just reaching an age to even want to like boys. Stuck between child and woman.” She groaned. “At 18, I still feel that way. I was his human friend, so how am I supposed to go from that, to . . .” Mrs. Beetle Juice. Or, Mrs. Beetlejuice Juice? “His mom didn’t call him Beetle, she called him Beetlejuice too. See?!” It’s like she was trying to make a point to herself. “I don’t even know the right name.”

She bent down and rubbed the black rose against the ground. “I want to save him from hell, I don’t want him to ever go, and I don’t want to become a dead shadow either. If he doesn’t feel the same way, then we are doomed.” She looked toward the door. “I mean he’s doomed. He’ll take out the last one freeing me.” She closed her eyes. “That’s so much worse.”

She stood up again. “I don’t have a choice, Miss Second Chance is right. I have to ask. If he doesn’t want it, then I can’t change that, but I have to ask.” She had to ask.

She had to ask for her best friend in the world to marry her and spend his afterlife with her. “But it’s such a greater chance that he isn’t going to feel anything back! He doesn’t like me

like that. So then what? He goes to hell? We figure out something else?”

Ooh, Miss Second Chance just appeared! “Miss Second Chance!” Lydia immediately went over to her. “Is there something else that we could try? I just. He can’t even say the L word, so . . .?”

“Marriage without consummation?” Miss Second Chance took the words right out of her mouth.

“Look, there isn’t a law that says love has to be physical. It could be chaste?” Lydia tried. “Anything?”

“It is literally an eternity of hell or an afterlife of marriage,” Miss Second Chance said. “Consummation brings the children of the Neitherworld.”

Um? “Okay, but when I was alive, they had a thing where people helped without the actual act. Like, the guy didn’t have to be around, just the stuff to have a baby.” *Really stretching but I have to try!* “We could do that, couldn’t we?”

“Invitro. You didn’t even need to be married to do that.” Miss Second Chance sounded like she knew a lot of the world Lydia came from.

“Then, I mean, that’s similar!”

“You want to marry Beetlejuice, and have a baby with him instead of just telling him your feelings?”

She just didn’t get it. “Beetlejuice is trying to save me from my eternity. He tried to help me from becoming a dead shadow. I *have* to save him from an eternity of hell but . . . but I can’t force anything on him. If he doesn’t love me, in that kind of way, then this will never work.”

Miss Second Chance groaned and disappeared. She reappeared soon after holding a rattle. “Let’s put this in perspective a moment.” She pushed her glasses up and shook the rattle. “You want to marry Beetlejuice and prove it’s real by having a Neitherworld baby with a more ‘scientific approach’, instead of just explaining your real feelings?”

“I have to save him!” Didn’t she get it? “I know him. I know Beej really well, better than he knows himself,” she claimed. “He gets in over his head, and he asks for my help. We always get things sorted out. This time, we are both in over our heads. I can’t help him, unless he has real love for me but . . .” Oh. “He likes the more . . . voluptuous disgusting kind. He even got in over his head for a headhunter.” Yeah. “Using his juice to impress her. I’m just still the same.” She looked at her hands. “Lighter complexion, but I had a light complexion. I was even tricked into believing I was still alive.” *Oh man. I’m really starting to cry?* She wiped away a tear. She really did care so much. “I can’t wrap him into something he doesn’t want, but I can’t let him go to hell.”

She took a few steps back, feeling the full weight of what she just said. *I am madly in love with my best friend, aren’t I?*

“I can see your point,” Miss Second Chance said. “Perhaps you are right, but do you think he is really risking hell for his eternity, and he went through Lex Talionis, just to save a mere friend from becoming a dead shadow?”

“You don’t know him like I do,” Lydia told her. “And yes, he would, and he *did*.” She choked at that last part.

Miss Second Chance just stared at her like she was an absolute idiot. “Your ridiculous, but yes, it’s an option. There’s no invitro but sadly sometimes there are unwanted children born in the Neitherworld. They stay in a state of eternal youth, unmoving, until someone comes to collect them. You could technically adopt one of those.”

Oh, that would be even better!

“Although with someone like him, I don’t know if fatherhood or hell would be worse to him.”

Lydia didn’t acknowledge the joke. *All I have to do is slow him down long enough to discuss it.* “Just, marriage brings me back up. Should I even try with him, or should I try? Prince Vince belongs to the Neitherworld.” He was ready after a second date to make her his princess. They were younger, but maybe? “I wouldn’t ruin his life.”

“Oh, recently deceased sometimes,” Miss Second Chance groaned. “Don’t share with him who it will be, let him start putting his own pieces together and see how he reacts. He might prefer to have his ‘friend’ with him no matter what, instead of her sheltering his future by sacrificing herself to a prince.”

“Oh. Yeah.” That was true, Lydia didn’t even think about it. He loved spending time with her. Would marrying the prince feel like a betrayal against everything he’d already done?

“The most important thing is to tell him as soon as possible there is a possibility of saving you without him killing the last one for Lex Talionis.”

“There we go, Doomie,” BJ put him back where he belonged. “Thanks.” Doomie didn’t look very well, but he was used to that. Involving others always screwed everyone over. But, it was worth it. Lydia was freed.

Lydia should be freed. But? “Mister Jennings was involved. He was the one who started the whole thing.” Four teens couldn’t have made it through everything without him.

“Forget Mister Jennings, forget all of them, Beetlejuice!”

He turned and saw Lydia. She had a black rose in her hand. “You’re back now.” But he should really take out Mister Jennings.

“You took Doomie,” Lydia said to him. “You’re still there.” She came closer. “Beetlejuice. I’m sorry, that I never actually said that you shouldn’t do this.”

“It’s done.” All but Mister Jennings.

“It’s not, and you can’t hide it.” She grabbed his hand and put in the black rose. It withered. “I was selfish. I should have been way more concerned about you.”

“This isn’t what she is supposed to be saying!” Mayor Maynot yelled for some reason. “Get her away, she isn’t helping!”

Huh? No way, not again! “You aren’t taking her away again!” Beetlejuice grabbed her and pulled her close.

“Revenge isn’t what I really needed,” Lydia said to him. “You were what I needed. You were always the only thing I needed.” She hugged him tighter. “Please don’t leave me, Beetlejuice.”

“I’m not going anywhere. Just to kill one more person,” he insisted.

“No, no more! If you do more, you’ll lose yourself,” she insisted. She looked at the black withered rose he had in his left hand. “Sorry, it took me so long to figure it out.”

Figure it out? He looked at the black withered rose and then watched her get sucked under again. Back to a dead shadow. *Of course. Until I finish this.*

“Oh, Beetlejuice, I forgot to tell you something,” Mayor Maynot said as he patted his arm. “You see, there is still one more that has to die to free Lydia from her eternity as a dead shadow. Once he’s gone, she will instantly be risen and belong to the Neitherworld. Nothing will hold her down anymore. No matter what.”

“Mister Jennings.” He had to kill Finley Jennings’s father. “Then she’ll be freed.” Kill him.

“But not you.” Miss Second Chance appeared and came toward him. “You will be sent to hell, your eternity sealed if you kill one more person.”

He had to kill Mister Jennings. Hell was worth it to free Lydia. He’d be the last one, they couldn’t hold her down there anymore.

“Don’t interrupt!” Mayor Maynot demanded of her. “Do not interrupt, or you will regret it.”

Miss Second Chance adjusted her glasses. At least, he thought she did. He saw in weird shades of red in one eye, while the other was seeing normally. “I didn’t get where I am because I stayed in the background.” She glanced at Beetlejuice. “If you go after him, you cannot come back.”

He didn’t care. He had to kill Mister Jennings.

“You might as well just go after Lydia. At least you’d have a chance of making it through?”

Kill Jennings. Huh? Go after Lydia? That wasn't supposed to be allowed. He wasn't supposed to be able to take her place.

"Free her by killing Jennings!" Mayor Maynot commanded. "What kind of friend are you to quit now? The others, they'll be let go if you don't take out the last one. Forgotten or not, he is the last one!" He patted both of his shoulders. "I can see that twinkle in your right eye, you want this. You *need* this. If you don't, they already skipped the haunting. Break Lex Talionis, and they'll come back, whether you can have her or not!"

Whether he can have her or not? He tried to close his burning right eye. That didn't make sense. *Gotta use the Beetlebrain.*

"Funny words, Mayor Maynot," Miss Second Chance smiled. "What do you think, Beetlejuice? If you can bring her here, maybe there's a way you can go to her too?"

It wouldn't be easy, but even Mayor Maynot slipped that it was possible without Lex Talionis. How?

He wanted to see Mister Jennings suffer.

He wanted Lydia to never have to see any of them again for the rest of her afterlife. "She deserves never to see any of it again."

"Are you sure you wouldn't rather have a hand in that? You could keep her from seeing them, and watch them suffer too?" Miss Second Chance asked. "That seems more like your style."

Make them suffer if they get too close. Hmm.

"That's quite morbid, Miss Second Chance. I can't believe you have been saying such things, I am making a note of your behavior," Mayor Maynot told her.

"You have the flower you withered," Miss Second Chance continued. "Why don't you see what she meant?"

Beetlejuice looked at the flower. Black. Cold. Withered. He crushed it.

Inside, he saw a ring. Not just any ring. As the crushed pieces of the flower flew down from his hand, he picked up the ring. He seized the ring and the burning in his right eye ceased. *Well, obviously that would be a way, but how would Lydia get around the obstacles?* How did she even get the ring? *Miss Second Chance.* "You got any idea how a little ring could keep us safe?" She looked at him like it was an annoying question, but it had to be one that could be answered. "Come on, come on! I don't have all day, could this thing work?!"

"Only if it's genuine, which it wouldn't be," Mayor Maynot told Beetlejuice. "There's no way it would happen."

"All you need is to plan out a life for a Neitherworld child to raise. It trumps everything, and that does include adoption of the tragic unmoving."

Huh. A kid? Hmm. "Eternity of hell. A Kid. Tough call," he joked. "Why didn't you say something sooner?!" He could have had all this licked a long time ago. Stupid officials being stupid about what they share.

Miss Second Chance looked impressed at him. "You've got a satanic echo in your voice, yet you've retained your humor quite well. I'm glad you found more help. Even with help again, you cannot win the last murder and stay out of hell."

Yeah, he noticed he had a bit of a difference in his voice. Vision. Hands. Thoughts.

"Just kill Mister Jennings, you can't handle a kid," Mayor Maynot said to him. "Just one more and she'll be safe."

"Keep Lydia and yourself safe," Miss Second Chance said. "Right now she is probably just about to kill her parents again. No way out. One annoying child over the sanity and life of someone you care for?"

Right. Right! "Oh, fine. Mom's been bugging me for one of those things for about a thousand years."

"But Mister Jennings!"

"Off the menu. Visiting's over, Mayor Maynot." He held up the ring, and with a wide, goofy smile he hadn't shown off in a long time? "I'm going to get my bride. Know what I mean?"

The Groom To Be

Lydia's Eternity

She felt the gag around her mouth. Of course she'd be at this part. *I should have said it faster, Miss Second Chance warned me!*

She tried to say it in her own way. A way without as much words. Beetlejuice didn't like to get too mushy anyway, so just outright. In a rose. His whole magic was seeping with negative energy, as soon as he touched it, it would wither and reveal the option.

Half his friendly smile had fangs. One of his eyes had a strange green, red, and purple flame changing inside of his pupil. One of his hands had become like claws. He was already starting to transform past the point of no return.

Idiot! I messed this up. If he kills the last one, then I go somewhere better, but he goes to hell! It's not fair! I'd rather be stuck here! I'd rather be stuck and let him have his afterlife!

Lydia saw the gun already in her hands again. *I can't change anything.* She heard her father giving her advice, and telling her it wasn't her fault again. *Beetlejuice. I'm so sorry. Beetlejuice. I wish I could have said it faster. Beetlejuice.* She raised her gun.

She fired the shot.

It hit the rope? Her father was freed.

"Nice shot, Pumpkin!" he congratulated her.

She hit the rope? How did she hit the rope?

"Babes."

Lydia turned around and saw - "BJ!" She hugged him as she started to hear screams and the sound of people running. She wasn't the only dead shadow that had been freed.

"Lyds." Beetlejuice pulled her away just enough to see her. He gave her a ring. "Not the best and charming, but neither am I," he reminded her. "Ha! I just broke your eternity using your little ring trick." He showed off the ring he found. He took the ring off and rolled it around his fingers before putting it back on. "Follow through won't be fun, but we are desperate. Those other dead shadows were freed with you."

“I don’t care,” Lydia assured him. “The Neitherworld is huge. I’ll probably never see them. They aren’t worth losing you.”

“No foolin, Lyds,” he said, his tone holding a degree of warning. “Other choice is me go to hell or you stay here. Willing to work things out for it.” He looked a little strangely at her. “I already used my last resort of Doomie, and I gotta tell ya?” He gestured toward his head. “I used to think of pranks all the time and I’m just constantly thinking of torture and killing, and that’s gotta change.”

He looked desperate. He wanted to stop everything. *I don’t know how he feels. I’m sorry, Miss Second Chance, but going from friends to Mrs. Beetle Juice is just too much without something between!* “I just want out too, Beetlejuice.” He gestured for her to continue. “Beetlejuice.”

“One more time, Babe,” he insisted as he made sure the cheap rings were on, “and we’ll go home together.”

Together. “Beetlejuice.”

Neitherworld.

“Pa-pow!” As soon as BJ got back to the Roadhouse, Mayor Maynot was there. He held out her hand and his to show off the rings. “Nothing doing. This beats dating by miles, so no more yanking her out of here!” he yelled at him.

Mayor Maynot just shook his head and glared at Lydia. “You made so many people sad tonight.”

“Yeah? Well, I’m happy, Mayor.” They survived.

“One week!” Mayor Maynot warned Beetlejuice. “You have one week. I want a ceremony with proof, with words, I’ll be attending, and I want a full description of how you plan on having your kids. Don’t expect me to fall for anything, I fully will judge this as harshly and proficiently as I can!”

“As long as they are making plans to have legitimate Neitherworld children, you cannot judge too much,” Miss Second Chance said as she handed Beetlejuice a piece of paper. “Here and here. Lydia will sign on the same pages under client.”

Beetlejuice looked at the papers, annoyed. “Figures. Not like you help out of the goodness of your heart.” He signed and gave it to Lydia. “Can’t exactly deny it.”

Lydia looked at the papers. *That really was her game?* It's not like they could object, she had helped them. It was an awkward sounding paper, but at it's core, it was true. Miss Second Chance had proof that an eternity can be flipped back into the afterlife.

"Do I get any cut of this book's profits?" Beetlejuice had to ask.

She looked at him like he was an idiot. "I'll be at your wedding."

"Probably a couple thousand more papers to sign there," Beetlejuice whispered to Lydia.

Well? *It doesn't matter. We are safe, and I don't need any money off any books.* Everything turned out perfectly fine.

Perfectly. Fine. Except, the groom. *I really need to work this out. He just assumed it was him. Now I don't know what to do.*

Lydia letted her mom fuss with her, while her dad sulked on the Roadhouse's couch. So far, BJ had brought them to her because this fell in 'important occasion time'. He was allowed to move them from the house as visitors for a short time. She hadn't told BJ anything else about who she planned on asking about marriage, he just assumed it was him.

And, so far, she hadn't corrected him.

Delia was deliriously happy and hugging her again. After death, she probably didn't think she'd get to see her daughter get married.

"See? I told you, Mister D," Beetlejuice said as he shook his hand. "The Ghost with the Most handled the problem."

Lydia's dad wasn't pleased with those words. "Handled the problem? *This* is handling the problem?"

"No more dead shadow risk," Beetlejuice insisted.

"I didn't say you were supposed to marry her to escape the problem!"

"Well, comes with the territory. I mean, you did trust a dead guy you hardly knew with your daughter. What'd you expect?"

"Beej'," Lydia warned him. "Easy with my dad."

"Yeah. Easy with my *dad* too," Beej' agreed. "Hey Chuck, you're my Father-In-Law. Pretty nifty, huh?"

“Ho-o-o-ow?” He managed to say.

“The important thing is,” Beetlejuice pointed out, “that she’s safe now.” He twisted his arms together. “Our afterlives are intertwined in the Neitherworld. She can’t even fall without me.”

“Why did you want to intertwine your afterlife with Mister Beetleman?” Charles had to ask his daughter.

Oh no, not a direct question.

“Oh, Charles, be happy. Lydia is safe and sound, and now we get to plan a wedding!” she said joyfully. “We simply must have a ceremony. What do ceremonies look like in the afterlife?”

“Oh, the best Mrs. D,” Beetlejuice said as he started to float. “Wait ‘til I take you to Bridezilla. They’ve got all the best prices with the most outrageous customers! I go there sometimes just to watch the customers. Plus, we can make it extra big for a low price with Wedding Party In a Can.”

“Beej.”

“We can pick up some buttercream and beetle-filled cake.”

“Beej.”

“Definitely cannot forget the sappy pews. Fits twenty guests that wear bathing suits.”

“Beej!” Lydia said loud enough for him to notice. *I really should tell him it could be someone else, but he’s just so . . .* He was floating. He was joking. He was excited. He seemed genuinely okay with everything. “Maybe something a little more subtle at first? We made Jacques faint when he found out, and someone hired a blimp that says ‘Beetlejuice and Lydia: it’s the end of the world’ that’s been circling the Neitherworld all day.”

“Why a ceremony?” her father asked. “Why are we celebrating this lie?”

“Not technically a lie. That’s why we gotta celebrate it,” Beetlejuice explained. “No prob, Mister D. My parents are footing the bill. They’ve been wanting a grandkid for at least a thousand years if not more.”

Bea Juice really wanted grandkids. No one’s really against the idea that matters.

“Well, I haven’t been waiting for grandchildren.” Her father was a little standoffish.

“Charles, goodness. Your daughter is safe and happy!” Delia took her fingers and was going to make a happy expression on Lydia, but she put them back down. Apparently she was already smiling. “We get special permission to be here for our daughter. We are going to be in *that* house for 125 years, Charles, so we are going to make this the best wedding possible,” Delia insisted. “Ooh, I still get to see my daughter get married even though I’m dead! I never dreamed this would happen.”

“Okay, okay. Just? Let me *ask*.” Charles stood up and looked at Beetlejuice. “This *is* because . . . it got her out of being a dead shadow, right?”

“Right,” Beetlejuice agreed. “Me out of hell too. I was real close. Great bonus.”

“Okay,” Charles said. “Having a marriage keeps my little girl safe? You didn’t really . . . really didn’t *just* steal my little Lydia under false pretenses of helping her, did you? It is you that she has to marry to stay out of her terrible eternity?”

Beetlejuice scratched his head. Some bugs started to come out from it, making her mother and father cringe. “Oh, Mayor Maynot has a sour sense of humor. I’ll be back.”

“He? He just left!” Charles complained. “I asked him a serious question and he just left.”

“Charles!” Delia went over to calm down her husband. “This is the way it is. Accept it.” She looked toward Lydia and hugged her, but gave her a low mutter. “He probably will eventually want something like a husband, just be prepared.” She pulled away. “Prepared for such a big day.”

“But! But he’s! But!” Charles pushed his hands into his pockets and kicked the couch lightly. Then regretted it as some bugs crawled out of it. “Do you have to live with a husband because our house is still fairly clean.”

“Charles!”

“Just asking, Delia.” He stared at his daughter. “Well?”

There was only one reason Beetlejuice left like that without saying something. “You left me with Beetlejuice, Father, because you knew he could protect me,” Lydia said to her father. “That’s all you’ll probably ever understand about him.” But there’s so much more to him than Father will ever understand.

A short ways away from the Roadhouse

“I hate this place, I hate this place,” Duncan said as he tip toed around another huge bug. “Everyone and everything is so disgusting and weird.”

“Stop.”

Duncan, Carter, Brady, and Finley all stopped as they saw Betty Juice.

“Do you know why *you* are in the Neitherworld now?” Betty Juice turned into an older guy with black and white stripes and really gnarly hair and teeth. “Because death is *too easy*. If any of the Deetzes see you, I will make the way I killed you feel like nothing.”

Huh? Duncan screamed as beetles rained down on him.

“Hi, Brady!” Rebecca appeared and waved at him as her old boyfriend kissed her.

“Carter! Why did you let me die?” Carter’s grandmother.

Finley yelled as he was being lifted in the air to stardom again, only to fall to the ground, bent out of proportion. He pulled himself up, but his arm was jutting out in strange directions.

“Hey, that’s just round one. Keep going straight and you’ll get a hell of a lot more,” he warned them.

“Well, then just tell us where we can go and where we can’t?” Duncan said as the beetles stopped falling on him.

“Nah, because then that’ll set borders on the Deetzes. I don’t want to do that. You just have to watch out.”

“Then how are we supposed to know?” Brady complained.

“When hell starts terrorizing you, change direction because I can tell *exactly where you are*,” he told him.

“But who are you?” Brady asked. “You aren’t a young girl.”

He pointed toward the blimp in the air.

“Beetlejuice and Lydia: End of the world,” Brady read it. “Your name’s Beetlejuice?”

“You’re clearly dead, just like us.” Finley tried to get brave. “You don’t have the same effect as you used to, we are already dead. You can’t do anything to us but scare us.”

Then, Beetlejuice was face to face with Finley. “You think because we are both dead, that you’re even with me?”

“Wh-when we learn magic, you’ll see where you stand,” Finley told him.

“Where will *you* stand? Here?” He shot a chair from the ground and took Finley up higher and higher and higher. Then secured the chair in the air. “You work on that magic then. Right up there. Until you figure out how to get down.” He made his ear bigger just to try and hear the screaming and yelling. No one else in the Neitherworld would hear it, nor would anyone really care to mess with a foreign chair or magic they didn’t create.

The chair’s stem was made jaggedly with grooves, no easy pole to slide down. Finley would either try and jump and end up dying again. He’d slowly make his way down, busting, bruising and bleeding out fingers as he made his way down. Or he might just stay up there and never do anything. Any of those were acceptable.

He looked toward the other three. “Any other objections? Or do you want me to tell you all the different ways you can actually die *again*?”

“No, no,” Duncan said first. “I’ll just go this way.” He walked in another direction. “There were more bugs that way anyhow.”

Brady and Carter didn’t say anything, just left Finley up in the air.

Great. Now that that was taken care of? He had something else to do. A surprise for Lyds. He could do more than just bring her parents back for a visit now.

Lydia discussed plans with her mom. Something between the afterlife decorations and the real world sensibility of decorations. She would bend on almost everything but the wedding dress. White isn’t the color she wanted, she wanted red like her favorite outfit Beetlejuice made her.

Meanwhile, her dad was sort of pacing, still coming to terms with everything.

“Lydia!”

Then, she heard it. Their voices with new words. New emotional words. “Bertha? Prudence?!” She went over and hugged each of them. It felt so nice to see them again.

“Hey, a wedding is a big enough cause to justify a visit for them,” Beetlejuice said as he appeared behind them.

It was so amazing! “I wanted to invite you to my wedding. Can you stay for it?”

“Lydia? You’re dead but you are getting married?” Prudence asked slowly.

“Oh, I am there!” Bertha said proudly as she took another hug. “Is Betty Juice going to be there too?”

“You know I’ll be.” Beetlejuice came over as himself. “Yeah, I may have missed a few things before bringing them over. I figured it sounded better coming from you.”

Lydia told them all about Beetlejuice, him being Betty Juice, Mister Beetleman, what he did for her not to be a dead shadow, and finally. That she was marrying him.

“Hey. I never said you didn’t have strange taste,” Bertha said looking at Beetlejuice. “Actually, I always said you had strange taste. Death didn’t change that. You?” She gestured to him. “Your marrying Lydia?” Beetlejuice nodded. “Eh. Your honeymoon is going to get weird Lydia.”

“Oh?” Lydia felt awkward. “Well? It’s not really the same kind of wedding.”

“There is no relationship.” Her father easily came over to explain. “This is the only way they can seem to keep her safe. Otherwise, Lydia would not dream of doing this - what about someone else, Sweetie? Don’t you just have to get married to anyone technically?”

Lydia gritted her teeth a little hard. *I don't even have to say it, he's making it pretty clear.*

"Dads sometimes," Bertha said to Lydia.

"I always knew that camp adventure wasn't something that could be replicated anywhere in our world," Prudence said to Lydia. "It was still lots of fun. I'll stay for the wedding too. When will it be?"

"Oh, we need to talk about how many guests, and the decorations, and things," Lydia told them. "I'll probably draw it out some, because you can visit between to help, and so can my parents. That and BJ will probably help too."

"Oh yeah, I love parties, and a wedding is supposed to be the biggest party of them all!" He blew on a noisemaker as he turned into a sort of merry go round.

So much better. Lydia couldn't help another smile. More and more, Beetlejuice was changing back to more of his old self again. The getting married, her father's words, nothing seemed to bother him. Maybe, over time? Maybe.

"Before the wedding, you just gotta ask for a ride, the same way I showed you to come here," Beetlejuice told them. "Be *real* careful with the name."

"We will!" They both said with wild enthusiasm as they both hugged Lydia once again.

"Okay, okay. This was so very wonderful," Delia said to them, "but I'm trying to measure for the dress. Thank you." Delia took another spot by the end of Lydia. "You'd still look elegant in white."

"I don't want to look elegant, I want to look rad," Lydia insisted. "Red is going to be the greatest."

"Yeah, red is always your color." Beetlejuice zapped her into a wedding dress. Red, with a red veil, and a black and white beetle charm pinned on it.

"Oh, that is really rad!" Bertha agreed. "You should wear that."

"No, no, no," Delia insisted. "The groom is not supposed to see the bride in her wedding dress before the wedding. It's very bad luck."

"Pbbt. This is the Neitherworld, that thing is just in the living world. The only bad luck is us not going through with this," Beetlejuice told Delia.

"It is really pretty." Prudence was coming around to it too. "It fits you so well."

"Of course." Beetlejuice always made things fit her perfectly, he knew her body very well. *Not that he studied it or anything. Just, we've been friends for so long, he naturally knows my shape. That's all. His juicing just knows those specifics. They'd know it for anyone. Why do I keep dwelling on this? Geez, Lydia, decide! He already gets the other options, and he isn't making a move. Do I have to?*

“You alright, Babe?” Beetlejuice asked her.

“Yeah. Just, overwhelmed. Everyone I’ve been wanting to see is all here with me.” A little overwhelming. Everyone could be there to prepare for the big day. Beetlejuice changed her out of her wedding outfit and gave her her favorite Neitherworld outfit again.

Beetlejuice looked at the whole crowd. Mister D. was sulking on the couch. Delia was helping with a dress somehow. Burp and Prune were talking up a storm. And a really hard knocking from the door made itself known.

He answered it. Ugh. Shouldn’t have answered it.

“Oh, it’s not really true, is it?” The Monster Across the Street asked. “I saw the blimp.”

“It’s not false,” Mr. D said to him. “My lovely daughter is marrying . . . Beetlejuice.”

“Beetlejuice?! Lydia?! What in tarnation! Lydia is the sweetest, most polite person in the Neitherworld. To end with Beetlejuice is a crime!”

“Oui, it is.” Jacques showed up from behind him and presented a ring. “I would gladly marry and take care of you, to keep you from this terrible fate.”

What the hell is this?

“Is he nicer?” Mister D. asked Lydia.

Lydia didn’t answer her father.

“She’s not interested!” Beetlejuice slammed the door on Jacques and Monster Across the Street.

Mister D. just watched Lydia. “Are you sure there isn’t someone else that will fit better? Someone more like you?” He looked toward Beetlejuice. “I’m sorry but I’m serious. Can you realistically take care of all the ends? You have to have a baby. That means you’ll need a job to support her and the family. And, what’s that sound?”

Nooooo. He knew that sound too. That clip-clop. No. *Damn it!* Jacques was one thing, he couldn’t be here! *Think fast, think fast, or Lydia will definitely choose him! I’d never see her again, just quick visits, to her, and her stupid royal family kids! No!* “I’ll be fine Mister D, no worries. My parents will help out if things get too rough, they’ve been waiting for me to have a kid for ages. They are super excited. Deliriously excited, they’re so excited, they’ll be here any minute.” Okay. Guilt might help?

Another knock on the door. Beetlejuice didn’t want to answer this time, but Mister D. did.

“Ah, my dear Lydia!” Prince Vince smiled at her as he came in. “I, Prince Vince, have heard of your announcement.”

“I’m gonna kick whoever put up that damn blimp,” Beetlejuice complained. Probably Jacques.

“I wanted to offer my congratulations.” He came over to Lydia and kissed her hand. “How did this come about though?”

“She has to marry someone to not be a dead shadow.” Wow, Mister D. really left it open ended.

“Yeah, but it’s settled, she’s marrying me. I’m involved too, so we both are supporting each other.” Yeah, that sounded good. *Don’t you dare offer her your damn hand.*

“Hello Prince Vince,” Bertha came over toward him. “So, you knew Lydia. She knew a Prince.” She looked toward Lydia. “Like I said, strange taste.” She looked back toward him. “There’s no ring on your hand.”

“Oh no, I’m not married,” Prince Vince said. “I tried once. I asked Lydia some time ago, but she only wanted to be friends.”

Did he have to say that?! Beetlejuice scooted his arm sleeves up unconsciously.

“You proposed?” Bertha looked toward Lydia.

“I was still really young,” Lydia said. “I didn’t want to be a princess.”

“Princess is better than a dead shadow by far.” Now Delia was flipping. “He has money and fame and a title, Lydia. Maybe you should tell him the details and ask him?”

Even Mrs. Deetz? Geez, am I just chopped liver to everyone?

“I think everyone should sit down and get all the details straight,” Mister D. insisted. “Before anything else happens, or any yes’ or no’s happen?”

“Hey, I think I hear my parents.” Screw it, he had to move fast. He juiced his parents there. Both of them were shocked, but he pulled them into the trick real well. It wasn’t the first time he’d had to do that. “Hey, Ma, glad you could make it. I knew you and dad could, not every day I get married and finally give you that grandkid you’ve been pining for.”

“... oh.” It always took them half a second to pick up on it. “Yes, excited, been waiting a very long time.”

“Yep.” Beetlejuice’s father went by Lydia. “It’s you, right?”

“Oh, pops is such a kidder.” Beetlejuice tried to cover it.

"Yeah, I'm her." Lydia didn't sound as confident now. "I'm sorry, everybody. I think I have to talk to BJ privately for a little while."

The L Word

No. No, no, no. *Come on. I got her parents, I got her friends, and I got my parents here. We're working on the party, I pulled a ton of distraction!*

He watched as Lydia went toward the door. Privacy. Outside. *I am screwed. She's gonna want someone else, not her best friend. Why did I wait so long to get my parents?* He followed her outside. "You wanted to talk?"

"We kind of have to," Lydia said. "You are my best friend, BJ. You've helped me so much, risked so much, and-"

"So then don't leave!" he yelled at her. "You're the bestest ever, it's boring without you, you make the afterlife worth afterliving. It's going to be so completely boring if you choose Prince Vince. I can handle anything, if you just stay." Just. Stay.

"I don't have to wrap you into my business anymore," Lydia said to him, "but if I do pick someone else, you're right. I won't be able to stay with you. But? I really don't know if my presence is worth all of this."

"Yeah it is." Of course it was. "I kind of risked hell for you, Babe, why would this be a thing?"

"You risked it for my eternity of being a dead shadow," she corrected. "Not just to keep me as a roommate."

Same diff. "Prince Vince isn't going to make you happy. Don't do this." *Don't do this, please don't do this. Don't do this!*

There it is again. He should be miserable in some way with the thought of ending up with her, but he was only miserable when they had to talk about it. *Maybe? Maybe it is.* "Could you put the wedding dress back on me?" He looked confused but granted her wish. She touched the dress. "Do you think it's nice?"

"Of course it's nice," Beetlejuice said. "I juiced it up, didn't I?"

That's not what I asked. "Is it nice, on me?" Yeah. He still looked confused. "I used to live in the living world, and we saw each other every day after school. So, I really think it'll be okay. You could even hang out at the castle I bet."

"Why are you doing this, Lydia?" He was using her first real name.

It made her feel worse, although she shouldn't. "I'm so confused." She walked around in the dress. "I know Prince Vince had some attraction to me, and it's better if there is mutual attraction for marriage."

"Oh." Beetlejuice looked like his whole world was falling apart. "Recent dead people kind of change with the way they feel in like the first two years so maybe something might change? Maybe this isn't such a good idea?"

You've never once whooped or drooled over my presence. Recently dead change, but you aren't recently dead. You are the best friend in the world, but that's all you can be. What kind of friend am I to make you take on all this? You've done enough for me. More than enough. She wiped away a tear. "I'm sorry."

"Nah." Beetlejuice looked terrible. Of course he did, he probably felt in second place again.

"I promise, I can take a couple of hours a day just to come see you, just like I always did. I'll get it put in the marriage," she agreed. "Everyday. Different home, but same friend."

Beetlejuice stuck his hands in his pant pockets. "I did a lot for you. I bet you've got that goody two shoe feeling of guilt for me doing all that. So, dragging me down by making me of all ghosts raise a kid, sweet Lydia just can't do that. Add in your dad that is repulsed by me, your mom that is way too jazzed about you being royalty, and . . . I'm just not an option, huh?"

"Beej!."

"Shower?" he asked. "I'll . . . I used to when I lived with my parents. I could. I could brush my teeth. Fix my hair?"

No, no, now he was feeling belittled. "No, BJ, don't ever change a thing about you. I've always liked you for you."

"You like me for me, but you don't love me for me!" he yelled at her. "And it sucks! And you're new to death attraction, and I think this is all a really bad idea. I should just knock off the last Jennings so you don't do this."

"No!" No. "You'd go to hell, I don't want that." She ran straight toward him. "Don't do that, please."

"Boy. You know, I lived a long time in the afterlife," Beetlejuice said oddly. "A real long time, but really, it was just one day. One day with one agreement. One day of agreeing to help Prince Vince get you! If he didn't know you then, he wouldn't be an option now. I knew it." He started to walk backwards. "I knew it the day I made that mistake it'd haunt me again, and it did." He pushed her away gently. "You'd rather be Princess Lydia in a nice, clean, expensive castle with someone who's got a good reputation instead of this green scum filled pile before you."

What? "No, I don't! It's just-" She watched him disappear. Not like he usually does, it didn't feel right at all. There was also a ring of fire and the smell of burning from where he was at.

"Beetlejuice?" No, it couldn't be. He never went back again! It couldn't be. *Oh no. Miss Second Chance said Mayor Maynot wanted to use my feelings against him, but there's no way this was enough!* "Beetlejuice!"

She watched as Miss Second Chance appeared before her. "Beetlejuice has been sentenced."

"But Beetlejuice didn't do anything!"

"Something just pushed him past the last of the thin edge he had."

"No!" Lydia leaned over into the burnt pile. He couldn't just leave to hell, he couldn't! She dug into the dirt. "Beetlejuice, Beetlejuice, Beetlejuice! Beetlejuice, Beetlejuice, Beetlejuice!" She said it over and over. The dirt stung her eyes along with her tears, but she kept digging anyhow.

"He's in his eternity. You don't have nearly the juice he did. It's over, Lydia Deetz."

"I don't care. He reached me, and I'm going to reach him." She had to reach him. *Beetlejuice! I have to reach you.* "I have to reach him, I have to tell him that I wasn't choosing Prince Vince because I liked him or anything. I just, I didn't want to ruin his afterlife, and he never treated me the way he did the other women he wanted!" She dug at the ground again. "Beetlejuice! I won't marry him, I promise!" She clawed at the hard ground. She dug so deep it was more like concrete to peel away. "Beetlejuice!"

"Honey, come over."

Lydia didn't move as everyone from inside gathered around her. She didn't care and she wasn't moving. As it started to bruise her fingers, she dealt with the pain but looked to her side at Bea Juice.

"Hm." For some reason, she didn't look as concerned. "Always getting taken to that other place, didn't get much time to develop much magic didja Honey?" She came over closer. "Calm down. Remember what I told you before. You two were way too close, for way too long, in opposite states."

What she said before . . .

///"You were. You were alive. You weren't from the same world, too young, different plans. Life and afterlife, it can't blend in that way." Bea held her finger up to her. "It's okay. Don't admit it out loud, it might make it harder. But, you should remember how that made you feel. Because the hardest turns are yet to be turned, but Beetlejuice is going to need you to stay strong. You can't fully rely on his power to get through it, or you'll sink both of you before you ever get a chance to be happy.///

Can't fully rely on his power. Yeah, Lydia remembered her saying that.

///How's it feel when you sink through the ground with or without him? Feel it." Bea stretched out her hand, using her magic she pulled Lydia out from the table, letting her stumble across the ground, until it became like water///

Toppling in, all the time. Lydia didn't know much magic, but she knew that feeling. The way it felt. She stood up and closed her eyes. Falling. She couldn't ever stop that feeling before, but this time, she had to create that feeling. Falling. She made herself lean backwards.

She fell, and she didn't stop. Every time she fell, someone had caught her. If it didn't work, then she would just keep falling. *Please work. You always caught me before. Even when you were with your dad, you sensed me. You always sense me. I know that you can never stop trying to catch me. Try to stop helping me. My friend 'til past the end.*

She felt a familiar grip around her hand. "Upwards, Beetlejuice." She felt it but she couldn't see him. "Up!" The grip she felt was slipping. "I'm sorry about the words, I'll never marry Prince Vince! You're right, I was being a goody two shoes, and I wanted to protect you." It was still slipping. "It's not you, it was never you, it's me. I'm not someone you'll ever think of more than as a friend!"

She knew she would lose the grip, but she couldn't hide it anymore. To get him back, she'd have to be honest. He had to understand that no part of her hated him. In fact, it loved him too much. There was no telling how their friendship would be after she said the truth, but he went because he didn't think she cared. To bring him back, he had to know she did care. She cared more than she should. "If it was just a ceremony, I could maybe do that, but, I was going to interrupt your entire life with a kid, just to prove love. I selfishly . . . didn't say anything before, I was just- I'm not tall, repulsive and disgusting! You've never looked at me the way you did the others you really liked. And, I get it. Even if I did, you'd never be happy with me."

"Babes."

She couldn't even look at him, though his full presence was probably. "I still want to be friends, I don't care. So, don't leave?"

"It's two years, minimum, to feel any attraction for the Neitherworld afterlifers. If I'da known you were actually attracted, we could have ignored this whole mess!"

Huh? When she looked toward him, he was already on her. It took a moment to adjust to his not quite clean mouth, but, it was . . .

He let go of her mouth, but she looked around and saw he had passionately tipped her over in a kiss in mid-air. She just stared at his deliriously happy smile back. "Beej?"

"Well, you did know me more than two years, and we were living together, and well, you've always been pretty amazing, Lyd," Beetlejuice answered. "When'd you figure it out?"

Oh. He. "When you took me to see your mom again. Something happened, and I just knew."

"Heh. Mom to the rescue," he responded. He brought her back up. "There, now no trading up. No kid needed either." He spun her around upward in a floating position and then the gravity changed. He brought her back down to the dirt, only to hold her in another kiss. They were back home. "That kid thing was just supposed to be proof. We got oodles of it now."

Lydia found herself dancing alongside him and then he spun her out. "You may have found a way to love me, but those senses are going to have to get some exercise to get anywhere near the repulsive acts we're gonna wanna do." He winked at her. "Know what I mean?"

Yeah, she did. His breath and his mouth were a little hard to handle. He was a little tough some days to handle. But, she'd learn.

"Should have told me after you figured it out," he said. "Aren't you the honest type that doesn't ever lie?"

"I was nervous. Like I said, you don't ever treat me like you did the others you liked."

Pfft. Your my friend too, I can't just holler at you that I'm madly in love with you."

The L word. "You said the L word. You never say that. You never get mushy."

"Yeah. Burp's been right all these years, you have strange taste," he teased her. "I can too get mushy. I can move around like runny mashed potatoes." He pulled her in close. "That should probably be for a second honeymoon." He just smiled with his very not sensual teeth.

"Can we not talk about this right in front of us!"

Oh, her dad! Everyone was still up there. Bea Juice was even starting to knit some booties.

"Yep, second." Beetlejuice didn't care. "So? Your parents, my parents, Burp, Prune, dweebs around the Roadhouse and wedding party in a can still?"

Yes. "Yes."

"Great! Hey, Mister Deetz!" Beetlejuice moved right around him. "Great news, there's no worrying about grandkids with me and Lyds yet." He looked so relieved. Good. "Yeah, 'cause I'll work it out naturally with her, but she's going to need time to get used to me. The deeper the magic level, or unhygienic level, the more practice it takes." Yeah, he didn't look so well now. "Yeah, your daughter is madly in love with me. Over a prince too." He couldn't help a small snort.

Lydia walked slowly over to everyone. "Sorry to worry everyone. It's okay again."

"Oh dear, this is not okay. It's so much worse," Mister Deetz said. "Lydia."

"It's fine now." She hugged Beetlejuice. This was where she wanted to be.

"So we shopped over at Bridezilla a bit." Beetlejuice juiced all the decorations over to the middle of the room. "Anyone want to help decorate they can, just watch the directions. Especially the living guests. Babes and I are going to have some lessons now."

"What kind of lessons?" Mister Deetz said with an extreme whine.

"Charles, don't bother them. They've been through quite enough, and I'm sure she'll need several lessons to stand her new husband."

"Oh, I was hoping she'd upgrade to a polite one." He sighed. "Ugh. I knew Mister Beetleman was trouble from the start." He looked at some of the decorations.

"We'll help too." Prudence took some of the decorations and handed them to Bertha. "We'll have it all done before they come out. Probably."

"I don't know. Depends on how deep whatever lessons Lydia is taking take to get done," Bertha said.

"Let's not talk about that. Let's just decorate." Still, he couldn't hide a groan.

"She's happy, Charles," Delia said next to him. "Try and be happy for her."

"I know." He would try. She'd gone through so much. Through death. Through eternity. Through hell. Through everything. "I can't choose her future." Still. "It would have been nice if he'd at least try and brush his teeth before the ceremony."

"Yes, it would," Beetlejuice's mother agreed as she was actually starting to clean the area up for the wedding. "I don't mind, as long as they get started on grandchildren soon."

"Well, I do mind," Charles said. "She was still fairly young. 18 going on college."

"Age doesn't play much of a role anymore, Charles," Delia reminded him. "Let's get along with our daughters new in-laws soon."

"The confetti machine isn't fixed right. I'll fix it," Beetlejuice's father insisted.

"Are you a real handy man?" Charles had to ask him.

"I test bolts, but I also know stuff around the house," he answered.

Hm. Well, if he is anything like his parents, there must be some good traits Charles was missing about Beetlejuice.

A Type of Vacation

Chapter Notes

Hey, thanks everyone for bearing through this story with me. I had lots of fun, but some parts were just more difficult to get than others. Hopefully my next Beetlejuice story writing adventure comes easier. Thanks for reading. :)

The Real World- One Year Later

“I admit, it’s very becoming,” the collector said to Mister Jennings. “It might be worth buying, but I don’t think I can. Isn’t there death attached to this artist?” Mister Jennings didn’t answer. “Everyone who has come in contact with this artist was killed, including the artist.”

Mister Jennings sighed. “How did you find out?”

“Oh, I research everything I buy. This artist had such a tragic story. So give me the details. Maybe you’ll still make the sale?”

“My son and his friends. They are all dead.” All dead. “I’m sure you know that, don’t you?”

“Yes, because they were the buyers. Everything they had somehow passed to you I see.” They turned to look at him. “How’d they die? The newspaper didn’t give very good details”

Rude. Mister Jennings took them to his office where he gave them the more precise findings.

“Hm.” The collector pushed the glasses up her nose more. “I don’t know if it’s worth it, even at regular cost. This looks cursed.” They glanced toward him. “Did they do something unsightly to get a hold of this?” He didn’t answer back right away. “Sometimes, there is more than a blood price for art. I believe in spiritual revenge. From the way they died, that is how it sounds. Have you had anyone talk to you from the corners of your mind, Mister Jennings?”

“You have to buy it,” he insisted.

“Why? Did your family dying for it not work for you? I would think not. I don’t want haunted paintings that may kill my family in my lobby.” She sighed. “I love expression, but I

love my life more. Sorry. If I were you, considering everyone has been accidentally killed in strange ways? I would see if I could make up for it. Eternity is a long time.”

“Everyone was interested!” he complained. “Every damn one of you collectors that liked your rotting hellish spooky shit. Then, this happens.”

“Sir?” she warned him. “Do not speak with such a tongue. We love art for what it is, not what it was tainted to be. Good day.” She walked away.

Mister Jennings just stood there, staring at the painting. “You weren’t worth it. You weren’t worth anything.” Nobody wanted it, and now, it just lounged along on his walls. “Four people died for you, one being my son, and now none of you paintings can even be given away!” He went to his personal kitchen and grabbed a knife. He came back and started to cut up one of the paintings.

“Oh, goodness.” The buyer came back. “You really do want to get rid of those paintings, don’t you?” She sighed and dug in her purse. “Well, maybe I have a twenty.”

“Take ‘em! Take ‘em all!” he insisted. “Hang them. Burn them. Turn them into firewood. Sell them to some crazy seance place. I don’t care.” He couldn’t do it. Four teenagers in their prime didn’t just accidentally die one after another.

And his own son. Who dies falling from the top of a theatre screen, when there’s no way to even get there? Something supernatural took them. Here, he had been worried about cops and jail, when he should have been worried about revenge from the dead.

But, he never heard a sound out of the darkness. A dimming of lights. Any bug problems. Nothing supernatural ever messed with him. Like, he had been deemed fine, free enough to escape.

Free enough for another day. While his son and his friends paid for it all. Lost. Deemed, not involved. Nothing. A waste of time.

“Oh, hello.” The buyer came toward him again. “Sorry. I feel bad about taking all of them without, you know, at least?” She patted a crunchy twenty dollar bill. “There you go.” She waved goodbye and left.

A twenty. His son was gone, for a twenty dollar bill.

A twenty.

A.

Twenty.

"Hey, it's Number 2." Beetlejuice noticed who was at his front door. "What are you doing here?" He noticed the art behind her. "Hey, excellent. Lyds will love that."

"More than her," Number 2 reminded him. "Miss Second Chance."

"Why so formal, Number 2?" Beetlejuice asked her.

She presented them once again. "They are all here. Every single piece that was stolen, has been recollected."

"Miss Second Chance?" Lydia came to the door to see what was going on. "Oh." She smiled. "Mother will be thrilled to have her paintings back. Thank you."

"Mister Jennings is miserable and depressed. He may be contemplating suicide."

"Extra credit helps," Beetlejuice asked. "Thanks."

"Don't just thank me, this is the end of the bargain."

"Oh yeah." He almost forgot. Number 2 made him and Lyds sign a boatload of things on their wedding day. She'd been watching him sign, and had been watching certain sections, making sure his juice didn't mess him up. He already knew the sections her beady eyes were on, so he made sure to pick little sections to add a very deliberate phrase to each one. Although she got all the credit for all the afterlife and eternity stuff, she also granted Beetlejuice neverending access between the Living World and the Neitherworld. With that? He was open for business. Lex Talionis was banned because personal revenge tended to effect a ghost. It tended to hurt the most kind-hearted and innocent of them all too.

Personal revenge changed them. Personal revenge required a large amount of juice. But, Beetlejuice had no personal revenge against anyone, and he was anything but kindhearted and innocent. Bleh. So he was perfectly qualified to be the first bio-exercist. He could be hired out now to deal with the living that had shamed the dead that had become dead shadows. Lydia loved that he was helping other people escape a terrible eternity, and giving them another chance in the Neitherworld. He loved it because his job was fun, and it made him a lot of money! Neitherworlders paid him a lot of money to help save their relation or their dead lovers or whatever. Since he never personally knew them, there was no effect on him.

The Neitherworld finally appreciated him for something. He didn't need book deals, he just wanted money, and he didn't want a boring job.

And he needed one after awhile since Lydia wanted to start taking care of the unmoving. She'd been moved herself too much when she heard what happened to the Neitherworld children that weren't wanted. When she gave them enough love that they started to move again, she worked on finding monsters that wanted children, and basically became an adoption agency herself.

So, yeah, he wasn't able to coast on his own yet. This shouldn't be too bad though. "End of what bargain?"

"You obtaining access to either world without restrictions," she warned him.

"Oh." He pulled out a cool little phone doodad he used. They were new, but he made enough money to have the latest thing. "Hang on one second. I just need to leave everyone a note and an automatic message, and an automatic call, to let them know that I can't continue to help save their loves from their tragic fates." He clicked on many call numbers.

Unsurprisingly, ghosts started to pop up right next to his house.

"Don't do it, please!"

"Our granddaughter is four years old and a dead shadow, how could you be so cruel? He only has two more humans to kill to free her!"

Oh yeah, all the blame was heading her way. "I think some of my customers are going to want to talk this out. I have to now go through official channels. So . . . I'm gonna need about 30 contracts for this month, but next month I already had some that paid in advance, and they are going to need-"

"He's saving people from going through what I went through," Lydia said to her gently. "No one was ever able to save them before. Everything you suggested, they were all theories. Beetlejuice has already saved twenty of them. Hang on." She went back inside and brought out some envelopes. "Please, Miss Second Chance. Please read these? I know Beej' tricked you-"

"-he messed with the contracts-"

"-but he's really doing a great job. He's doing something no one else has ever done before."

Aw, Lyds. His sweet wife. He'd rather drown Number 2 in requests and arguments and violent tendencies of loved ones to make things happen. She preferred the being nice and dull approach. He'd complain, but he'd take out his annoyance on the next human he killed instead. He was getting good and creative at it. He even took suggestions from all his excellent clients. They had some nice, murdering ideas of their own.

"Have a heart, Miss Second Chance?" Lydia asked her. "Look at all these wonderful people Beetlejuice is helping. He doesn't go out and kill random humans or anything, he's just saving others that have a terrible eternity."

Yep, she was caving. "Because you aren't squandering it, and aren't doing it for yourself. Supposedly." She groaned. "Fine, but if you upset the balance and strike any people that haven't done anything, the right will be taken back away."

There were several cheers and thanks for mercy in the air for a little while until it winded down and they all headed out. He closed the door again and went toward Lyds. "That was the

boring approach, couldn't you have let us bombard her with requests and drive her insane first? She did make money off us."

"BJ," she warned him as she picked up another unmoving. "This one should be starting to move soon."

Great, another one to drop off. Always awesome, but it didn't take long before another one would be in the Roadhouse. He heard his phone ring. A specific ring. "Hey, Ma."

"Aren't you going to visit with any grandchildren yet?"

"What do you mean? There's always one of them around."

"That's your wife's job, Dear. Those don't count."

"That's not real nice. She doesn't make any money at it."

"That's your wife's nonprofit job, Dear. It's still a thing. You've got a darling wife that helps the unmoved, and then helps them find families. That's sweet. That's not grandchildren."

Beetlejuice groaned. "Come on, that's mean. What if we adopt one for good?"

"That would be a grandchild. Do I have any grandchildren yet?"

Grr. "You can fade off to eternity without having a grandkid, Ma."

"No, I can't, Dear. You're married. You have a job. It's all still a miracle, so don't squander it, Dear."

"Well?" His mom was right. Things were good right now, but things changed overnight. Lydia was killed overnight. Turned into a dead shadow overnight. The afterlife changed fast. He was even on his way to hell, when she somehow pulled him right back. "Maybe we should start working on it." He hung up as he went toward Lyds. "Hey. You want to go on vacation, Babe?"

"But, we're really busy," she said. "I'm babysitting an unmoving and you still have thirty clients, Beej'."

"The unmoving won't move until we get back," he reasoned with her. "People will be there to kill when I get back too. And look?" He showed her his new Bio-Exorcist cards. "See? New cards came in, I might find non-local spirits that want to kill -er -save someone?"

"Hm. I guess maybe it's time," she bended. "A little break is probably good. As long as we aren't gone too awful long. What are we going to do?"

He smirked. "Nothing much."

"Beej? Are you planning on something happening? You already look guilty."

"Nah, what me? No way."

"You sound guilty too."

"Oh, come on. A nice little vacation with Beej'. That's not too scary, is it?"

"The last time you said I was on vacation, it turned out I was dead and I could turn into a dead shadow," she reminded him.

"Well, it's none of that this time."

She looked at him extra hard.

He just tried his best to smile.

"Mmm . . . okay." She gave him a small kiss. "One nice, relaxing vacation where we don't do anything."

"Yep. Just kick back and relax on a simple vacation," he agreed while he crossed his fingers behind his back.

Hey. A second honeymoon was a type of vacation.

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