

## I Dream of Dead Mom

Posted originally on the [Archive of Our Own](http://archiveofourown.org/works/21624094) at <http://archiveofourown.org/works/21624094>.

Rating:	<a href="#">Teen And Up Audiences</a>
Archive Warnings:	<a href="#">No Archive Warnings Apply</a> , <a href="#">Creator Chose Not To Use Archive Warnings</a>
Category:	<a href="#">Gen</a>
Fandoms:	<a href="#">Beetlejuice - All Media Types</a> , <a href="#">Vocaloid</a>
Relationships:	<a href="#">Adam Maitland/Barbara Maitland</a> , <a href="#">Beetlejuice &amp; Lydia Deetz</a> , <a href="#">Beetlejuice/Adam Maitland/Barbara Maitland</a> , <a href="#">Charles Deetz &amp; Delia Deetz &amp; Lydia Deetz</a> , <a href="#">Lydia Deetz &amp; Adam Maitland &amp; Barbara Maitland</a>
Characters:	<a href="#">Lydia Deetz</a> , <a href="#">Beetlejuice (Beetlejuice)</a> , <a href="#">The Maitlands (Beetlejuice)</a> , <a href="#">Charles Deetz</a> , <a href="#">Delia Deetz</a> , <a href="#">Kagamine Len</a> , <a href="#">Emily Deetz</a>
Additional Tags:	<a href="#">Musicals</a> , <a href="#">Fluff and Angst</a> , <a href="#">Family Feels</a> , <a href="#">Family Fluff</a> , <a href="#">Family Bonding</a> , <a href="#">Dreams and Nightmares</a> , <a href="#">Action/Adventure</a>
Language:	English
Collections:	<a href="#">Favorite Beetlejuice Writings</a> , <a href="#">Fanfiction Writers United Musical Collection</a> , <a href="#">General musical based fics</a> , <a href="#">Musical Fanfiction</a>
Stats:	Published: 2019-12-01 Completed: 2019-12-09 Words: 24,334 Chapters: 11/11

# I Dream of Dead Mom

by [Catipurr](#)

## Summary

It's been almost two months after the event of the musical. Even with her new family of four, Lydia still finds herself dreaming of Dead Mom. But when a certain rat-bastard makes a guest appearance, the teen's not sure if this is just a result of tricky demon magic or something more.

## Notes

Strap in, everyone; this is what happens when you and your-equally-obsessed best friend start wondering outside of the musical's stated canon.

Now with some much-needed edits after...what, sitting on it for two-to-three years? x'D

# Chapter 1

Lydia was pretty sure it was bad how numb she'd grown to this particular nightmare.

But there were only so many times she could grieve her mom's passing. It was scary, at first, not to feel as distraught as she did in the past. Part of her thought this was the first step into her worst fear imaginable. But, deep down, Mama wouldn't want her wasting any more time than she had already.

Still, it was unnerving, to say the least.

The scene was etched into her memory; impossible to forget, as every detail remained the same with each visit. An overcast sky as depressing as the people veiled in black, the stoic face of Daddy, staring off into a thought--a feeling--Lydia only recently got to see. Then there was the casket, dangling over a pit in the ground, ready and eager to swallow Mama whole.

Lydia was always in the middle of Daddy and her younger self, a drab and dreary girl with tumbling dark hair and tears heavier than the downpour. Hands clenched over Little Lydia's chest as they shared the same thought; maybe, just maybe, Mama would suddenly lift the lid and ask someone to pass an umbrella. She'd breathe life back into everyone's chest, and brighten the sky with that coy smile Lydia had seen in framed photos.

If she was lucky, there were days she'd catch herself making a perfect copy in the mirror.

The priest's blessing was a mumble in the background, fuzzy memory or dream logic being its cause. Everything started to skip after that, like an old video cassette wound back one too many times.

Skip--the coffin began its jittery descent into the ground.

Skip--people dispersed the grounds, cars vanishing as quickly as their engines roared to life.

Skip--Daddy's umbrella partially angled, hiding Little Lydia's face as they slugged through the mud.

Skip--Little Lydia stared out the back window of the family's car, Daddy in mid-turn as the car readied to pull away.

Lydia's arms crossed over her chest, slowly walking beside the jittery car as she blankly stared at her younger self. Her voice adopted a high-pitched tone, a sugary-sweet grin cutting across her face. "Heey, Lydia, it's the Universe calling! Just wanted to put this on repeat so you don't forget about the worst day of your life."

She groaned, propping her weight against the car as the 'cassette' froze in place. "Delia was right; the Universe is female. Only a bitch would think this is funny to watch."

She glanced through the tinted window, expression softening at little Lydia's tear-stained face. "Promise it gets better, kid." Her hand rested against the window, overshadowing little Lydia's easily. "Daddy'll come around, and Delia's not as bad as you think." A small smile managed across her lips as she added, "Plus, you get a pair of ghost parents, too! And they'll all drive you crazy with all the, 'I love you's, okay?'"

She paused, registering how...okay, that actually sounded to her. That feeling of peace used to

be terrifying, but she wasn't alone this time.  
She wasn't invisible anymore.

Lydia gave her younger self one more glance, knowing full this was always the end of the road. "You'll get through this. You'll be okay, and,"  
Again, she paused, squinting hard at the window's reflection. Her hand fell to her side, rubbing her eyes furiously before giving it a second glance. Was that...?

It couldn't be.

Dream or not, Lydia felt her heart skip a beat. She staggered away, fighting for balance as she craned her neck. Little Lydia's face distorted in the tint of the glass, the graveyard appearing more and more in focus. Black overcoats, the skeletal fingers of trees; the dream refused to let her turn around, but there was no way she'd misplace that pinstripe monstrosity. A short, stocky individual hung out by her mother's grave, a mess of bright green hair perfectly styled with a millennium of grime and grease.

"Beetlejuice?"

Lydia sat upright, staring at a wall adorned with dangling spiderlights and developed photographs. A few plastic jack'o'lanterns flickered alongside the amber fluorescence, scattered across her room to help piece reality back together. She blinked, drawing the shape of the partially-closed closet door, of her work desk covered in camera parts and maps circled with photoshoot ideas. The pitter-patter of rain plucked against the nearby window, gel cutouts of witches, pumpkins, and ghosts practically melted onto the glass surface. She used the noise as an anchor, short breaths bringing her back slowly, but surely. Her gaze turned to her nightstand, biting back a squeal at the skeletal grin of her alarm clock read three in the morning.

"Okay, maybe 'too much Halloween' is a bad interior design choice..."

Lydia rubbed her eyes, trying to hold fast to the slivers of her dream slipping away. Was that him? Actually him? That dream was as familiar as the back of her hand, but she'd never seen him before. And she refused to believe she just hadn't noticed him; there was no way she was that inattentive, especially to something--for someone--so important.

"Beetlejuice..?"

Lydia bit her lip, the word worming its way out before she could stop it. Her chest tightened, ears tuning in to every creak and groan from the old hilltop house. The rain continued its tranquil beat outside, the house itself shifting uncomfortably from the damp like the bones of

some old guy. A beat passed.

Another.

But no one came bursting through her door to chide her for even accidentally saying that name.

She sat up, mind now abuzz with intent. It wasn't like she meant to say it, after all. And, Delia always told her not to leave something half-finished, so really, this was just another step towards self-actualization.

Or whatever she said during life-coaching lessons.

Daddy slept like a rock, so she wasn't going to bother him, either. And the Maitlands didn't really have the sixth sense that came through being parents, so if anything, she was just helping them develop it.

"Besides," Lydia added. "He won't be here long enough to make trouble."

She nodded curtly; this was nothing more than a formality. She'd ask him about the dream, and he'd be on his way. Easy as that.

"Of course, if he wants a snack, I'm obliged as a hostess to offer him something." With dramatic flourish, her blanket flew across the air and crumpled to the ground, Lydia's legs swinging over her bed as she hopped down. "And I mean, it's raining, so I can't not offer him something warm to drink." She strolled across, pushing her closet completely open and pulling a black hoodie off its hanger. "And, I mean, it'd be rude of me not to ask how he's been. A terrible hostess is one who holds one-sided conversations, after all."

She slipped the hoodie over her nightdress, adjusting the pull strings before side-stepping to a full-length mirror propped to the side. It was...certainly an eclectic look; pale lacing across the dress lent itself to spiderwebs, brightly contrasted against the hoodie itself. Her nose scrunched at her bedhead, contemplating a quick comb before shaking her head. "Like he actually cares what I look like."

Lydia took a deep breath, mustering whatever nerve she had left before letting the name slip quietly out between her lips.

"Beeeeetlejuice~?"

The house creaked in reply, rain now pelting loudly against the rooftop. Lydia stared into her reflection, the passing seconds slowly forming a knot in her stomach. Did she say it too slowly? Maybe that was a new addition to the curse? She wouldn't put it past Juno to do something like that.

"Where is he...?"

She nearly jumped out of her skin as something tapped her on the shoulder, a yellow-toothed grin manifesting soon after in the mirror's reflection. Her hand shoved against his face, turning to face the absolute ghost with the most as a dramatic scowl crossed her face. "You're slipping, Beej! That's the slowest I've ever seen you heed the call."

The demon straightened his suit, mock anger coating that gravelly undertone. "Not my fault you talk a mile a minute! I was on actual pins and needles, waiting for you to say it a third time."

Lydia giggled, a finger raising to her lips.

"What? The Lydia Deetz wants me to respect others' sleep schedules?" His hands began to flatten, edging and glimmering in reflective brass before shaping into cymbals.

"Yes, she does!" A squealing cackle escaped as Lydia flew forward, wrapping her arms into a tight hug with her head perfectly placed between the cymbals. "If everyone's awake, that means I lose exclusive hugging rights!"

He considered this for a moment, cymbal awkwardly rubbing beneath his chin. "You make...excellent points." Shaking his hands violently, the demon's hands soon returned and grabbed under Lydia's arms, making some attempt to hoist the teen off her feet. "But you don't know what you signed yourself up for, kid!"

Lydia wrestled with her laughter, returning the gesture as she easily lifted Beetlejuice up. "I missed you, Beej."

"You could've called earlier," Beetlejuice pointed out.

Lydia put the demon back down, though refused to end their hug early. "I had to let things cool down a bit."

"Is, 'a bit' always two months for you breathers?"

"It is after the impression you left."

He opened his mouth to reply, closed it, and shrugged. "This is entirely fair; I leave a lasting impression, after all." The demon's foot began to bounce, hands awkwardly pulling back to his side as he cleared his throat. "Okay, well, don't go for a world record, here."

Lydia obliged, pulling away with a cough of her own. "Yeah. Sorry."

They stood, something unspoken weighing the air around them.

"Well, um..." Lydia offered her hand, an awkward smile crossing her face. "Can I invite you to our kitchen, good sir? I'm sure I saw a cockroach or two underneath the fridge with your name on it."

Beetlejuice adopted an air of snobbery, nose upright as took Lydia's hand. It was freezing cold, a touch grimy--Lydia swore she felt something crawl across her knuckles--she so desperately missed it. "I would be quite humbled, m'lady, to partake in the snacking of all things grotesque within the confines of your eatery."

Whatever tension had tried pulling between them seemed to loosen, after that. With a sigh of relief, Lydia led Beetlejuice towards the door, unable to leave that feeling behind as they slipped out to the hallway.



## Chapter 2

### Chapter Summary

It's been almost two months after the event of the musical. Even with her new family of four, Lydia still finds herself dreaming of Dead Mom. But when a certain rat-bastard makes a guest appearance, the teen's not sure if this is just a result of tricky demon magic or something more.

### Chapter Notes

In which Lydia shares in some kitchen hi-jinks with her favorite demon-uncle-slash-brother.

It was so had to stay quiet. Between the two's giggling and shushing, Lydia was amazed they'd made it downstairs without alerting anyone else. She opted to keep the lights off in the kitchen, pulling the curtains aside so only the moon was witness to their shenaniganry. "Make yourself at home," she began. "I'll grab something for us to drink."

Beetlejuice happily obliged, having at some point, changed into a pair of striped, footie pajamas. An old sleeper cap had attempted to sit on his head, but the wild beast that was his hair refused to let that happen.

"Alright, up yah go!" He waved a black-nailed hand to the fridge, it quickly growing a pair of legs before hiking itself upward. A number of multi-legged creatures made a mad dash to another corner of the house, only to get scooped up and shoved into the aforementioned nightcap.

"What we got on the menu tonight...?" The demon stuck his hand impossibly deep, digging around like a kid with a bag of Halloween candy. "Got a few spiders here, my promised cockroaches, and--!"

He plucked out a garter snake in between his thumb and forefinger, grinning like an idiot as his hair turned a bright, neon green. "Lyds, you shouldn't have~! This is high-quality stuff back in the Netherworld."

"Thought it'd be a nice surprise whenever you came back." Lydia hopped up onto the counter, pushing a few boxes of herbal tea aside as she snagged a tin of hot chocolate. "Not that I have to ask, but," she gave the container a playful shake.

"Uh, yeah, why did you even ask?" The snake vanished back into his cap as Beetlejuice waved it out of existence. "There are suffocating children in Africa who could've used that air you wasted, Lydia. Jesus."

Lydia giggled, gently dropping back to the floor with the tin in hand. "Oh, so sad. Someone should cry me a river."

A snort slipped out as a gush of water nearly knocked her off her feet, originating from the plucked-out eyeballs of the demon himself. "Beej, shhhhh! Shut off the waterworks before someone hears!"

His lip stuck out in a pout, eyes blinking innocently in the palms of his hand. "You know, I don't feel great about the whole, 'forced-arranged marriage', thing,"

The genuine hurt in his tone took Lydia by surprise.

"But that seems leagues better than being the boyfriend you gotta sneak through the window." Beetlejuice popped his eyes back into his skull, dropping into one of the kitchen chairs as his arms--and legs--crossed tightly.

There was that tension again. Lydia did her best to smile, setting the tin on the countertop as she faced the demon. "I'm sorry, Beej. You know I'd," She stumbled slightly, the kitchen still flooded with those crocodile tears of his. "I'd throw the front door open if I could!"

A beat of silence passed.

She grimaced, snagging two cups from the sink before running them across the floodwater. Before she could set them back on the counter, a pair of spoons appeared in a puff of smoke, scooping the perfect amount of powder from the chocolate tin before gently stirring it into the cups. "Thanks, BJ."

He was facing her again, his own forced grin spread across his face. "I'd be a pretty shitty guest if I didn't help, right?" With a snap of his fingers, a plume of fire curled around the cups, drifting out of Lydia's hand before starting towards the kitchen table. "But what's this, 'if I could' nonsense?" His fingers looped in the air, clearly tracing a bowtie knot as a snicker slipped out. "When'd you start tying your shoelaces straight, goody-goody?"

"You know, statistics show untied laces are a fast track to breaking one's neck," Lydia pointed out.

A single brow rose from Beetlejuice as, without hesitation, he snagged his still-on-fire cup of hot chocolate.

Lydia sighed, sloshing across before dropping into her own chair. "Okay, but, I actually like Daddy now. And the Maitlands,"

"That one's just a requirement by law,"

"And Delia," Lydia continued. "We're a nest of rather eclectic birds, now, and I quite enjoy it. In comparison to how it was a few months ago?" She reached for her own cup, surprised to find the fire only warm to the touch.

"It's nice."

She felt Beetlejuice's eyes boring into her, glancing up to find an unsettling, somber look on the demon's face. The tips of his hair were bruised with purple, a guilty squirm rolling through Lydia's stomach.

"Oh, but," she put on a reassuring smile, waving her hand as a dramatic groan escaped her lips. "It's never any fun around here. Entirely too normal for my liking."

Beetlejuice's hair began returning to its typical shade. "Well, obviously."

"And you remain my main reason for sticking around," Lydia added. "Who else could've caught me if I actually swan-dove off the roof?"

A sharp-tooth grin spread across the demon's face. "These are the arms of a professional noodle-man, after all."

"Eehh...?" Lydia waved her hand in a so-so manner. "'Noodle Man' is pushing it. Now, 'Squat Pizza Box'? That's far more appropriate."

That got a cackle out from Beetlejuice, the pair soon dissolving into a fit of giggles. Much better; this was exactly how it was before everything went weird.

----

It wasn't long before a shallow pool of cocoa remained in Lydia's cup. Beetlejuice had long since finished, having started in on the rim and chewing as obnoxiously as he could. The kitchen had been dried, conversations exhausted; it was time to get to brass tacks. "So, I didn't entirely bring you here just for a visit," she admitted. "I wanted to ask about something."

"Oh." Away went the pajamas as his suit returned a pair of thickly-rimmed glasses now covering Beetlejuice's face. He shuffled through a stack of papers that came literally out of thin air, glasses sliding down the bridge of his nose as he cleared his throat. "I figured you were gonna ask eventually, but I gotta be real with you; my metrics aren't the best right now, Lyds."

"Your--what?"

"My scare metrics?" Beetlejuice sighed, pinching the bridge of his nose as a dramatic huff escaped his lips. "I know I'm the best bio-exterminator you know, and I'd be happy to scare the absolute shit out of some nosy neighbor or schoolyard bully for you."

"I--that's not,"

"Really, it's flattering! I'm totally not mad about that being the reason I finally got invited back. Buuuut," Beetlejuice pushed his glasses up the bridge of his nose, a pen appearing in a poof of smoke as it twirled between his fingers.

"After that rather brilliant doublecross-slash-murder, it took me a few weeks to actually get all my credentials back in order. I technically died again, so..."

There was that tension again.

"Oh, but, don't worry about it!" Beetlejuice added hastily. "It's just a bunch of sitting around, for the most part. And that snake from earlier's adequate compensation, so, we're totally square."

Lydia rubbed her temples, a desperate tinge slipping into her voice. "Beetlejuice,"

"Ooh, full name?" His hands shoved everything off the table, Lydia's mug included. He at least had the sense to make it shatter silently across the ground. "This is serious. Who's got you in such knots, Lyds?" Something dark briefly crossed his face, strands of hair beginning to dye red. "Seriously. If someone's been giving you grief,"

"No one's been--I didn't call you here to scare someone." Lydia inhaled sharply, suddenly aware her hands had been shaking this entire time. She bit her lip, glancing up at Beetlejuice and surprised to see his expression hadn't shifted.

He was actually listening, now.

"I just..." Her hands folded in her lap tightly. "I wanted to ask you about a dream I had. Been having, I mean. It's been the same forever, but, tonight..."

How the hell did she actually wanna say this?

"Beetlejuice, do you have power over dreams?"

Beetlejuice tapped a finger against his chin thoughtfully. "To an...extent? That's the easiest way to scare a breather out of their house."

Lydia nodded, skin absolutely electric with nerves. "So, I've been dreaming about the funeral. My Mom's funeral. And, I was just wondering,"

Beetlejuice's hair suddenly bleached to a stark yellow. "That wasn't me, Lyds. I've got some standards, and Dead Mom stuff isn't a line I'd ever cross. That," he added hastily. "And underaged seduction. But, you know that part."

The 'I hope' screamed loudly across his face.

Lydia exhaled, somewhat relieved to see him so nervous. "Yeah, no--I mean, I know that. Both parts, I mean; it was just for a green card."

"Y-Yeah. Greencard."

Lydia watched the demon fidget with the cuff of his suit, nearly tearing a piece off altogether. "Did...you wanna talk about it, or,"

"So what about this dream's got you on edge?"

God, but if his voice could crack any further, Beetlejuice might've broken a window. But, Lydia chose to ignore it, hands folding loosely across the tabletop. "Tonight's was just...different? Usually, it's just the funeral as usual, but this time..."

She hesitated, but, most of it was already out on the table.

"Well, you were there, Beetlejuice."

The revelation seemed to take the demon a moment to process. "Lyds," Beetlejuice held one hand upright, the other covering his chest. "I swear, on my non-existent heart, that I haven't been taking joyrides in your dreams."

"No, I know," Lydia sighed, frustration creeping into her voice. "Beej, is it possible we've met before?"

"I think I'd remember one of the only breathers who can see me without saying my name." Beetlejuice kicked his feet up onto the table, hands folded behind his back. His hair was a mixture of colors--his usual green, a touch of white, some bits of red, a hint of purple--as he mulled the possibility. "No...I'm positive I'd remember. You sure you weren't just, subconsciously missing me?"

"But, it was so accurate," Lydia insisted. "Every bit was just how it happened, right down to the place I stood that day. Right up to the point I saw you. Isn't that a bit weird?"

Beetlejuice rolled his head, neck cracking loudly and causing Lydia to wince. "Dreams are weird, kid. Memories are even weirder. Everyone remembers stuff differently, yah know?"

Lydia's chest deflated. Was he really not taking her seriously about this?

"I mean, there's one surefire way to settle this." The demon sat upright, a smirk cutting itself across his lips "It requires a bit of skullduggery on your part, but I doubt the Lydia Deetz would be scared of a lil' bit of sticky-fingerin."

Now he had her attention. Lydia leaned across the table, hands folded delicately under her chin. What did you have in mind, Beej~?"

# Chapter 3

## Chapter Summary

It's been almost two months after the event of the musical. Even with her new family of four, Lydia still finds herself dreaming of Dead Mom. But when a certain rat-bastard makes a guest appearance, the teen's not sure if this is just a result of tricky demon magic or something more.

## Chapter Notes

In which Lydia does some burgling and shares a tender moment with her living parents.

Lydia couldn't believe this is what he had in mind. Was it exactly hard to sneak into her parents' room?

No.

Would the moral implications haunt her for the rest of her life?

Of course not.

Was she entirely okay with stealing her stepmother's jewelry?

That...was pending under the review of her conscious.

"Look, we're not stealing anything," Beetlejuice reassured. "We're just borrowing it. Unless you butterfinger it and it's lost forever in the Realm of Subconsciousness."

"That name sucks," Lydia said.

"Take it up with HR."

She huffed loudly, peeking into her parents' room as nerves skittered across her skin. Again. "Why do we need this stuff, anyway? Can't you just draw a door to the Netherworld?"

"I'm not exactly at full power, yet," Beetlejuice explained. "Parlor tricks are easy enough, but interdimensional doors would knock my ass out for a week. Besides," he added. "We're not entirely going to the Netherworld."

Lydia's brow furrowed. "You said the two worlds were one and the same. 'Death is final sleep' and all that."

"Okay, first off, I do not sound that pretentious. And secondly," Beetlejuice waved his hands in the air, one lighting up with a bloody red while the other turned a soft blue. "I said they exist in the same plane, so some rules still apply. Look; let's say the red hand's the Neverworld and blue's your world."

He pushed his palms close together, the colors twisting into a purple hue hovering between them.

"Smack dab between the two is the Realm of Subconsciousness, that place your soul goes while you're asleep."

Lydia frowned, glancing back into her parents' room while she spoke. "Okay, so, why can't I just go back to sleep?"

"Because the best we can hope for is you lucid dreaming," Beetlejuice replied. "And that's like grabbing the string of a kite and hoping to God it doesn't break. But, like, the kite is your immortal soul, and the string is literally the only way back to your body."

Lydia's head swiveled, staring at Beetlejuice incredulously.

"Hey, what did you think a coma was?" Beetlejuice shook his hands, returning them to their proper, pale color. "Those souls get too far along on their string and forget it takes just as long to get back. Or some demon comes along and cuts it," he added with a snicker. "Hilarious."

Panic strewed across Lydia's face.

"But I'll be with you every step of the way, Lyds!" Beetlejuice waved his hand, as if brushing away any imminent danger she'd be put in. "We'll be in and out before anything notices. And your crazy stepmom's tumbled-rock crockery isn't entirely a crock; some natural stuff makes for great energy conduits between this world and others."

"Like using chalk to draw door portals?" Lydia asked.

Beetlejuice's hand ruffled the teen's hair, only adding to the existing tangles. "Look at that horse, finally crossing the finish line~!"

She shoved his arm away, feeling somewhat better than before. "Okay, so, we'll just borrow one of Delia's crystals for my safety."

"Right!" Beetlejuice agreed. "You know, just in case."

It was that 'just in case' that caused Lydia to sweat.

With a deep breath, she finally crossed the threshold into her parents' room, the dim glow of her phone screen acting as her only source of light. As expected, it was entirely bland and devoid of anything fun; framed family photos, non-decorated vanities, a pair of nightstands with only a headlamp and whatever book the pair happened to be reading.

Except, something caught Lydia's light on Delia's desk. A myriad of glittering stones was arranged in some unseen pattern only known to her stepmother, ranging from chunky emeralds to uncut bloodstones.

"Okay, so, what am I looking for?" Lydia hissed, creeping at an agonizingly slow pace.

"Like, opals," Beetlejuice whispered from the doorframe. "Or an amethyst."

"Why can't you get it?" Lydia asked.

Beetlejuice shook his head furiously. "Like hell I'm gonna risk getting caught by the parentals. I just got back here!"

"Oh, so it's better if I get ground for stealing?!"

"We are borrowing, Lyds!"

Delia let out a grumbling snort, rolling over in bed as her arm gripped the blankets. The pair froze, Lydia halfway across as Beetlejuice practically ducked behind the door.

"You're the worst you know that?" Lydia carefully took another step; the vanity was practically within arm's reach. "'Oooh, I'm Beetlejuice, I'm not scared of any breather'."

"You said they'd kick me out!"

"Since when have you respected other people's wishes, you absolute--!" Lydia gasped, shin smacking painfully against the corner of the king-size bedframe. "F-Fuck!"

Charles' disproving mumble sent chills down Lydia's spine. She froze, partially hunched in pain, as her father rose up to a partial slump. "Wait, Lydia?" He rubbed his eyes gingerly, sleep still holding fast as he spoke. "That is you, isn't it?" The disbelief in his tone sparked some hope; if she was lucky she could play this off as a very realistic dream.

Suddenly, as if possessed, Delia's hand shot to the lamp, yanking the chain as she immediately sat up, gasping something about misaligned chakras.

"It's alright, dear." Charles rested a heavy hand on Delia's shoulder, blinking sleep away in its entirety. "It's just Lydia."

Son of a bitch.

"Oh." Delia let out a large yawn, doing her best to cover it with a hand. She glanced over the bed's edge, brow furrowing as Lydia clung to her ankle. "You alright, sweetheart?"

"Y-yeah, I just," She stood upright, a forced smile plastered across her face. "Just, um, smacked my shin. I'm good, now." She turned to leave, glaring daggers at the door where she could feel Beetlejuice cowering.

"Wait, honey?" Lydia heard the heavy comforter shift behind her, turning to see her Dad begin leaving bed. "What's wrong? You came in for a reason, didn't you?"

"I...um..." Lydia glanced towards the door, giving a subtle jerk of her head towards the vanity. "I'm, I'm sorry." She stepped in front of the door, doing her best to cover it from sight. "It's no

big deal, really."

"It's a big deal for us!" Delia offered an arm, causing Lydia to glance back towards the door. Part of the wall suddenly looked...stripier...slinking slowly towards the vanity as she let out a sigh of relief. She then hopped onto her parents' bed, forcing herself between the two as her stepmom continued. "What's got you up at this hour?"

Lydia watched the stripes shift across, staring at Delia as if willing to keep hold of her gaze. "It's just...dreams."

"Nightmares?" Charles offered.

"You could say that," Lydia said.

Both Delia and Charles exchanged that look between themselves. "Perhaps about a certain, green-haired ingrate?" God but his tone was so dark, now. "I wouldn't blame you--with all the nonsense he put you through, I'm surprised we haven't had a serious conversation about therapy visits."

The stripes on the wall froze as a pair of yellowish eyes blinked open.

"Not that therapy should be something held against you," Delia added hastily.

"N-no, of course not! Only if you wanted it, Lydia." Charles' expression hadn't lightened in the slightest, taking and squeezing his daughter's hand reassuringly. "Whatever you need to get past him, I'll stand by it. Even if it's just these late-night visits."

Lydia felt her smile twinge painfully. "O-Oh. Yeah, um...thanks." She glanced back at the wall, eyes widening as she mouthed something to the effect of, 'keep-going-you-idiot-it's-fine'. But the striped wall stayed in place, seemingly paralyzed by Charles' proclamations.

"But, that's a topic for another time." Delia rested her head against her Dad's shoulders, gathering his and Lydia's hands into her own while seemingly squeezing the negativity out of Charles. "What was this dream about, hon?"

Lydia gave one more desperate glance the demon's way; he barely moved an inch. God, she was really going to have to do this, wasn't she?

"It was the funeral," her voice barely came out above a whisper. "I...um...yeah, it's just been Mom's...it's no big deal, really,"

Immediately, Lydia found herself gathered up into a tight hug. It took her by surprise, tears threatening the corners of her eyes.

"Oh, sweetheart," Charles began.

"Lydia, dear," Delia said.

A hiccuping sob escaped as she squeezed her parents back. Over Delia's shoulder, she watched as--finally--Beetlejuice made it to the vanity. His hand pulled from the wallpaper, hovering over the various gems and crystals before tapping about blindly. Before her stepmom could turn to the sound of tinkling stones, Lydia buried her head into her

chest.

"I'm sorry," she managed to get out. "It's stupid, I know."

Delia pushed her gently free, staring at her with a stern, loving demeanor. "Honey, it's not stupid. We told you to tell us anytime you were feeling upset about it."

Charles nodded, setting a firm against his daughter's back. "We're not gonna ignore it anymore, okay?"

Lydia nodded, wiping her eyes with the back of her hand. "Okay. But, I wish the Universe wasn't such a bitch."

"Language," Charles scowled.

Delia, meanwhile, only chuckled in reply. "That's tough love sometimes, baby girl. Sometimes, she's gotta remind you where you've been so you can see how far you've come."

"I mean, you're here, aren't you?" Charles added hopefully. "Telling us about your feelings? And we--ah, I--am listening, right?" He paused, glancing towards Delia with a moment's hesitation.

"N-no, you are," Lydia reassured, giving her Dad a quick kiss on the cheek. "You're listening." She turned to give Delia a similar gesture, having completely forgotten about Beetlejuice. His fingers pinched the chain of an amethyst necklace, giving her a thumbs-up before slowly sliding his hands back into the wallpaper.

"You know, if you're having trouble with nightmares," Delia suddenly turned, the demon's hands hastily slapping into the vanity's surface. "I've got just the gemstone for that!"

"Oh, no, that's really,"

"Nonsense!" Delia's hand scrambled around the top of the desk, searching for something Lydia was certain wasn't there anymore. "Let me see if I can find my amethyst--where did it get to, now?"

Lydia held her breath as her stepmom's fingers brushed across the pinstripe patterning.

"Eugh," Delia's nose crinkled, staring at the patterning with disgust. "What on earth is that? It's not mold, is it?"

Her vanity began to visibly sweat.

"It's probably wet paint," Charles pointed out. "You did finish that recent commission, remember?"

It took a moment, but, Delia eventually nodded. "Oh, you're probably right. I really should leave those projects in my art room."

Lydia breathed a sigh of relief. "Really, though, I'll be okay."

"Well, wait," Charles gestured towards a ring set firm on Delia's finger. "Didn't you say something about that stone I bought you being good for sleep?"

Delia clapped her hands excitedly, ignoring her vanity completely now as the stripes slunk down and across the carpeting. "Oh, Charles, you are absolutely right! Though I'd prefer my uncut gems to this, it'll still be just as effective."

She quickly slipped the ring off, holding it under the lamp so Lydia could see it clearer. It was a simple, rose-gold band, interwoven by an ovular-cut stone colored a foggy, light pink.

"It's called a Pink Calcite," Delia explained. "Here, lay down right here, in between us."

She really didn't have to be here anymore, though. All she could think about was finally getting into the Realm and getting to the bottom of this. Still, it would look more suspicious if she simply left, so Lydia begrudgingly obliged.

She stretched herself out between Dad and Delia, hands folded neatly across her stomach as her legs crisscrossed underneath her nightgown.

"Now, take a few, deep breaths," Delia said, placing her ring on Lydia's forehead. "Focus on your intent for this night; visualize your Third Eye glowing and pulsating with your inner light."

Lydia fought not to snicker between breaths. Delia was great, but Delia was still a total loon. The ring felt weird on her forehead, perhaps in due part to it being on someone's sweaty-sleep hand.

Still, there could've been some method to this madness of hers. The weight brought an odd comfort with it, like someone had just draped a big, fuzzy blanket over her body.

Lydia really could've fallen asleep there and then.

"And...done!"

Lydia was quickly sat up, somewhat disoriented as she found herself face-to-face with a grinning Delia. "O-Oh." She nodded, still somewhat dazed. "Yeah, that was...nice. Thanks, Delia."

"Of course." Delia leaned forward, hesitating. before planting a hasty kiss on Lydia's forehead. "Um, goodnight, sweetie."

Lydia smiled, returning the gesture as her stepmom's face lit up. "Night, Delia."

# Chapter 4

## Chapter Summary

It's been almost two months after the event of the musical. Even with her new family of four, Lydia still finds herself dreaming of Dead Mom. But when a certain rat-bastard makes a guest appearance, the teen's not sure if this is just a result of tricky demon magic or something more.

## Chapter Notes

In which we share another tender moment with parents...but, the dead ones.

Lydia barely got the bedroom door closed before being set upon by Beetlejuice. He jabbed at her shoulder, snickering between sharpened teeth as he hung in the air. "Aww, Wydia! I wuv you, too!"

His lips puckered loudly, still cackling as Lydia pushed his face away. "Holy crap, what was all that? Like, props to the dedication, but you didn't have to lean that hard into the role."

"There's nothing wrong with reminding your parents that you love them," Lydia flushed.

"Oh my God, you have gone native on me." Beetlejuice sighed dramatically, delicately floating down to Lydia's outstretched arms. "It's gonna take sooo many misdemeanors to right your karma. I'm thinking a joyride in Daddy's car after this. Maybe get a good police chase going?"

"Focus, Beetlejuice," Lydia pulled her arms away, watching the demon topple comically to the ground. "We gotta do this before someone wakes up for real. Besides," she added with a slight smirk. "It's not really a 'misdemeanor' to drive with a permit."

"You have a permit?!"

Beetlejuice peeled himself off the ground, a delighted squeal slipping out as Lydia's hand covered his mouth. She immediately pulled it away with a squeak of her own, shaking slobbering spit free as the demon's tongue darted about. "Oh my God, I so call dibs on being your designated driver! I'm gonna teach you how to donut like a pro, kid!"

God, he was so easily amused.

She led him back through the kitchen and into the living room, the staircase just barely visible through nighttime gloom. He did not shut up the entire way, rambling on and on about

how much fun they were gonna have.

"And I'm showing you how to parallel park correctly," Beetlejuice added. "None of this, 'gently ease it' crap; you gotta be assertive, an absolute boss babe, and if some clown tries standing in a spot to call dibs, you have the absolute right to hit the gas and,"

A sickening crack dropped him to the floor like a bag of bricks, spinning Lydia around on her heels. She didn't even manage a gasp as a pair of hands clapped over her mouth, dragging her to the far end of the living room. Her legs thrashed out, followed soon after by a fist cracking into her assailant's face.

"O-Ow!"

Glass crunched as the pained yelp of Adam followed suit. His arms immediately flew up to his nose, glasses askew (and broken) on his face while Lydia dropped limply onto the nearby couch.

"Oh, Adam!" Barbara's panic call rang out from the kitchen, appearing in a streak of azure light before solidifying and attending to her husband. "Wow, she really got you good, didn't she? Here, let me see."

"Am I bleeding?" Adam hesitantly lifted his hands away from his face. "Do ghosts bleed?"

"I...I don't think so, love. Ooh, but those glasses are totaled." Barbara slipped the spectacles into her dress pocket, gently kissing her husband on the nose. "We can fix them, though. It'll be fine."

Lydia watched them silently, gaze flickering towards the kitchen as Beetlejuice sprawled out across the tile, a broom laid flat out across from him.

"Did you kill him?" she asked hoarsely.

The Maitlands suddenly appeared on either arm of the couch, eyeing the unconscious demon with protective fervor.

"I don't think so," Barbara started quietly. "But I sure as heck gave it all I had."

"Yeah, hon," Adam marveled. "That was a really good shot."

"How'd you even hit him?" Lydia asked.

Barbara just pointed to her husband, a small, leather-bound book appearing in the palm of his hand.

"I've been trying to read the handbook from cover to back," Adam began. "But new pages seem to be added every day. It recently had a chapter on carving 'runes' in everyday objects, just in case other otherworldly spirits tried attacking us."

His gaze flickered back to Beetlejuice, a scowl crossing his face. "Glad to see those woodworking classes weren't a waste after all."

"Are you alright, Lydia?" Barbara placed her hands against Lydia's cheeks, thoroughly inspecting for anything out-of-the-ordinary. "I didn't want to believe he was back, but I'm so

glad we came down when we did."

"Did he hurt you?" Adam took Lydia's face next, tilting her chin up and down. "Harass you? God, he for sure did something to your hair, but we can fix that with a bit of conditioner,"

"I'm fine, I'm fine!" Lydia pushed free from the smothering, forcing herself towards the kitchen. Her legs caught against the leg rest, but instead of wiping out against the wood paneling, she found herself hovering inches from the floor.

"Nice catch, hon," Adam said.

"Aw, thanks!" Barbara beamed, her hands extended in a spectral haze as they flickered around Lydia's waist. "You know, it was tricky to get them to go where I wanted, but after that whole raccoon debacle,"

Lydia squirmed, trying to pry Barbara's ethereal fingers off. "Barbara put me down! You probably gave BJ a concussion--my health teacher says you're not supposed to sleep if you have those!"

The Maitlands gave her that look.

"Wh-what?" Lydia tried to look as innocent as possible, hands wringing behind her as she rocked on her heels. "It probably applies to otherworldly demons, too."

Adam's hands settled on his hip, his wife reeling the teen forcibly back. "Lydia, I know you've been missing Beetlejuice,"

"God knows why," Barbara added, setting the teen back on the ground as her own hands reappeared, crossing over her chest in a disapproving, motherly manner.

"Even so," Adam cut back in. "I know you wouldn't purposefully summon him without letting anyone know, right?"

Lydia crossed her arms as well, scoffing and gasping at the entirely-accurate insinuation.

"Adam Maitland, I'm surprised! Do I look like the sort of person who,"

Her voice caught as she got the double-disproving look.

"Okay, but I wouldn't go directly behind my authority figures,"

The look intensified.

"Okay, fine!" Lydia threw her hands up, flopping back against the couch in defeat. "Maybe I would, but, I didn't technically do it on purpose! It just, kinda happened?"

There was no way she was getting away with this.

"Lydia, I get that--in some very convoluted way--he's your friend," Barbara began.

"But he's literally the worst person we've ever met." Adam finished.

"Yeah, but, how many people did you actually know while you were alive?" A bit of a low blow, but Lydia knew it'd be effective in keeping them quiet long enough to argue her point.

"Like, he did save us when Juno came stomping in--doesn't that count for something?"

"One right doesn't negate a wrong, Lydia," Adam said.

"And even if it did," Barbara scowled. "That's hardly enough to erase his incredibly long list of misdeeds."

Lydia opened her mouth to argue back, but stopped. This wasn't tonight's purpose; this could be a fight for another day. "Look. As much as you guys don't like him, I need him. And not just in a, 'he's my stupid uncle-brother and I miss him a ton' sort of way," she added on a sour note. "I need answers to something, and he can help me get them."

"What could he possibly do," Adam started.

"There's just nothing he could promise," Barbara picked up.

"I think he met my Mom after she died."

Barbara's mouth opened, then closed, one finger raised as she tried to make a point she didn't have. Adam was quiet, eyes squinting in the dark as he mulled the point over.

They looked between each other, then at Lydia, hands settling into hers with a gentle, cold squeeze.

"Oh." They managed to get out at last.

"Yeah." Lydia exhaled, trying to get herself back on track. "He was in one of my dreams--I think--and if he takes me to the RoS, I can confirm it."

"RoS?" Barbara asked.

"Realm of Subconsciousness, dear." Adam flipped through the handbook, pointing to a particular page as his wife leaned across to see. "That in-between of sorts; ghosts go there sometimes to resolve issues. But couldn't he just tell you if he was there or not?"

"He says he doesn't remember."

Barbara scoffed. "That's convenient."

It...really was, but Lydia didn't want to consider it any further. "Please let us do this? I know it seems stupid, but if he was there, it's--I'd feel better knowing."

"But why?" Adam asked. "It doesn't change what happened that day, sweetheart."

"No, but..." Lydia found herself unable to come up with a clear answer. "I just...think it'll help."

The Maitlands sighed, heads gently resting against the side of Lydia's shoulders. "Alright, fine," Adam sighed. "I don't think you'll actually stop if we tell you to, anyway. But Barbara and I insist we be part of this."

"We'll stay with you in this world," Barbara added. "And I will wake you up if I feel like something's wrong."

"That's fair." Lydia's gaze flipped back to Beetlejuice, body occasionally twitching on the ground. "So, about him...?"

Adam grimaced, shooting a desperate glance toward his wife.

"Fine. I'll get him." Barbara hopped off the couch's arm, drifting towards the demon with a scoff. "But if he tries anything, I'm crucifying him on the broom."

"Th-that's hot." Beetlejuice's voice rasped out.

Another loud groan came from both Maitlands. "And it begins again." Adam sighed.

----

Once ice pack later and the four were back in Lydia's room. The Maitlands had taken to either side of Lydia's bed, the teen back under her covers as Beetlejuice paced behind the footboard, one hand holding the pack in place.

"Just so we're clear," Barbara huffed a strand of golden, semi-translucent hair out of her face. "I'm not sorry I hit you, Beetlejuice."

"I know!" Beetlejuice replied chipperly. "Next time, use something with more surface area. Flatter, maybe? I'm not against spikes, either."

Adam's face turned a bright shade of crimson, hands covering Lydia's ears as he scowled.

"Oh, she's heard worse. Oh, and by the way," A worm-like tongue snaked out of Beetlejuice's mouth, only causing Adam's face to flush harder. "It is illegal to look that good without those honkin' frames, my man."

"Beej, stop goofing around." Lydia gingerly removed Adam's hands, shooting the demon a playful scowl. "Daylight's not gonna wait around while you three wind the sexual tension tighter."

The sputtering response from the Matilands was, admittedly, pretty funny.

"A-At any rate," Adam cleared his throat loudly. "How exactly are we going to do this? I don't think it's very safe for Lydia to just, go back to sleep."

As if to answer, Beetlejuice waved his hand across the air, the amethyst necklace dangling between his thumb and forefinger. He gave a slight flourish before dropping it in Lydia's hands, who worked to unclasp the lock before looping it around her neck.

"Wait, isn't that," Adam began.

"Lydia! You shouldn't steal from Delia like that." Barbara scolded.

"We're only borrowing it," Beetlejuice insisted. "Holy shit, does no one know what that means anymore?"

"And it's for safety purposes!" Lydia added. "You two are all about safety, right?"

The Maitlands obviously didn't like it, but in the name of safety, they didn't push it further.

"Okay, so, what can we do to help?" Adam asked.

"You mean, aside from standing there and looking like a fine piece of ass?" Beetlejuice winced as an ethereal hand slapped him upside the head. "Hey, you was thinking it, too, Barbara!"

"I just had the sense to keep it to myself," Barbara hissed. She inhaled sharply, wrangling emotions together before exhaling into a reassuring smile Lydia's way. "We'll make sure your Dad and Delia don't come in and wake you too soon. Or, mention that Beetlejuice is here," she added sourly. "Much as I would like to."

"What if you two get in trouble, though?" Adam asked, handbook back in palm as the pages flipped open. "I mean, I'm pretty sure we get into the RoS, but I don't know if our form remains the same, or if our ghostly abilities stick around?"

"Oh, puh-lease!" Beetlejuice was suddenly beside Barbara, elbow propped on her head as he examined his black nails matter-of-factly. "No demon in their right mind would try and mess with me. Lydia is as safe as a fly in a spider's web."

Barbara shoved him to the ground, both hands taking Lydia's as her eyes were wide with worry. "You still have time to change your mind, sweetheart. I'm sure the Handbook for the Recently Deceased has something we can use."

There was something squirming in the back of Lydia's mind. Beetlejuice had gone down so easily when Barbara had attacked him. Seeing him on the ground like that wasn't a sight that filled her with the utmost confidence. And he might've swept the event by, but the hair didn't lie; that confidence of his was waffling as much as the green was too yellow. He was just rusty, she reassured herself. Still getting a handle on his powers after he died.

After she killed him.

Lydia shook her head, hands outward to call attention. "Let's do this, people. It's going on four--there's not a lot of time left."

"Finally!" Beetlejuice rubbed his hands together, a childish excitement filling his voice. "I'll meet you at the front door, Lyds. Maitlands," He pulled his head off his neck, tipping it like a hat before vanishing in a puff of smoke.

Adam's face scrunched, hand waving away the plumes. "My confidence in this going well is an all time low."

Barbara reached for her broom, setting it beside Lydia with a nervous smile. "I don't really know if this will go with you, but, it's better than nothing."

"I'll make sure to hit BJ if he wanders off," Lydia said, trying to hold back a yawn.

The Maitlands pulled on either side of Lydia's covers, helping the teen settle in. She yawned again, rolling to her back as her eyes drifted between the two sleepily. "Hey. Got a request for the jukebox."

"What do you wanna hear?" Adam asked, a smile as soft as his voice.

God, when did her pillows get so soft? "Do your take on, 'The Banana Boat Song'. You got great harmony."

Barbara giggled, hand resting on Lydia's forehead. "Really?"

"Really."

Adam shrugged. "If that's what the customer wants." He began to hum gently, a slow, rhythmic tempo he kept with a tap of his finger. Barbara soon joined in, her voice flute-like in comparison to her husband's brassier tone. They were perfect with each other, a duet made in heaven, and Lydia found her body growing heavier with each passing second.

"We'll be right here when you come back." Adam's voice was distant, fuzzy.

"We love you, Lydia." Barbara's words intermingled with the lyrics of the song, it all churning to a low buzz as, sure enough, Lydia went out for the count.

# Chapter 5

## Chapter Summary

It's been almost two months after the event of the musical. Even with her new family of four, Lydia still finds herself dreaming of Dead Mom. But when a certain rat-bastard makes a guest appearance, the teen's not sure if this is just a result of tricky demon magic or something more.

## Chapter Notes

In which we make it to The Realm of Subconsciousness and Lydia should REALLY consider investing in demonic mace...

She found herself drifting down into an empty, light-lavender room, the walls and floor like a cotton candy machine had thrown up in it. It was soft to the touch, her bare feet practically springing as she skipped to a stop. Lydia lifted her hand, surprised to find her fingers wrapped around the rune-carved broom Barbara had given her.

"Neat."

She gave a few swings, satisfied to watch as the bristles on the bottom kicked up a swirl of purplish fog.

"Oh my God, yes." Beetlejuice appeared beside her, arm resting on her head. "Finally, someone can clean this up." He reached to grab the broom's hilt, hand snapping back as a blue crackle jumped off. "Ooh~! Took on Barbara's feisty nature, huh?"

"Pretty sure it's just the runes." Lydia held the broom outward, said carvings flickering a soft azure before fading away. "Good to know it still works here, though." Her hand moved to the crystal around her neck, thumb rubbing its surface as it, too, flickered to life. "So, how's this rock work, anyway?"

Beetlejuice jabbed a finger towards the stone, careful not to touch it this time. "Hey, show that amethyst some respect. Uncut pieces like that are crazy powerful here; folks would kill to get their hands on it."

Lydia's laugh quickly petered off as Beetlejuice's face turned uncharacteristically somber. "Oh. You're serious?"

A whole half of his head oozed in black pigment. "Serious as death. Don't let anything get their hands on it. And don't take it off," he added. "Kite strings, and all that."

Lydia nodded, stomach starting to churn. Maybe she should've thought this through a bit more. "Seriously, though?"

"Yes, seriously—is there a broken record going off in here?" Beetlejuice made a gesture to an empty space, hand cupping around his in anticipation.

A beat passed.

He quickly smoothed his suit, a nervous chuckle escaping. "But, we'll be fast! Nothing--or no one--will even know we were here. So, probably nothing to worry about."

Lydia eyed him over, her nerves refusing to settle. He was hiding something—that much was obvious—but there was no use dwelling now. They were here, and on a mission, no less.

"Who is, 'no one', by the way? More demons like you? Denizens of the Neverworld?" She started forward, bare feet kicking up plumes of purple fluff. "Adam mentioned something ghosts could come here to try and find peace."

Beetlejuice scuttled after her with a scoff. "God, I hope not. Nothing worse than a bunch of whiners who didn't wanna stick it out a few hundred years or so. But, yeah; some demons call the RoS their home. Mara, Succubi, Kitsune--but I doubt we'll run into them."

"Why's that?"

Beetlejuice pointed again to Lydia's necklace. "They'll just think you're another demon, with that thing on. That we're just riding above the realm proper to get somewhere quickly. This," he waved a hand to the purple scenery. "Is the equivalent of the dream world's fast pass line, and you've got the golden ticket."

Lydia's fingers drummed on her chin, a mischievous grin spreading across her face. "Wait a minute, now. Does that mean I have powers like you do?"

Was that a nervous twinge across Beetlejuice's face? "Uh, yeah. Probably? I mean, not as strong as mine, of course, but,"

"Fascinating! This needs immediate field testing." With a flick of her wrist, plumes of lavender stuck fast to Lydia, shifting and shaping before the fog peeled free. A similarly-colored, gothic-style dress took the place of her pajamas, white stitchwork crisscrossing along the bodice like glittering spiders' webs. A long-legged arachnid made its way up her arm, spinning laced gloves before clambering up her neck and settling onto her head like an oversized hairbow.

Beetlejuice rolled his eyes with a scoff. "I say you have demon-like powers, and the first thing you do is play dress-up?"

"Hey, I should look the part, right?" Lydia did a quick turn, absolutely delighted as the hem billowed around her ankles. She gasped, eyeing the broom as a literal light bulb went off beside her head. "Bet you I can ride this thing like a witch!"

The broom was ceremoniously tossed forward, Lydia taking a running leap as she landed gracefully along the side. It hovered in place, tendrils of purple clouds pushing up against it every so often to keep it as such.

"Yup, very witchy, Lyds." Beetlejuice glanced around, nervously pulling at his shirt collar. "Okay, now, let's get back on the dream train tracks, yeah?"

Lydia maneuvered the broom next to Beetlejuice, gloved finger pinching his cheek with a snicker. "What's the rush? I'm having a blast! You got ants in your pants or something, Beej?"

He let out a yelp, shaking his legs as a shower of ants sprayed everywhere. They dissipated into puffs of purple smoke, an irritated snarl slipping out as he smoothed his trousers out. "You're the one who wanted us to, 'stay focused'."

"Sure, but when am I ever gonna get a chance to have fun like this?" Lydia asked. "And when would you ever miss out on having a proper, chaotic hullabaloo alongside me?"

A twinge of red caught Beetlejuice's hair, tinges of brown mixing to create some more akin to clay.

"Unless..." Lydia sat upright, gripping the broom with both hands as her eyes narrowed. "There's something that's got you worried?"

He scoffed a little too loudly, arms crossing tightly against his chest. "There's not a thing in the world--Breather or Nether--that could worry me."

"But, we're not in either world." Lydia pointed out.

Beetlejuice simply offered a shrug.

A twinge of irritation caught in Lydia's chest; she was getting really sick of his attitude. "Fine. Then, maybe you're just jealous that someone else can throw the world out of whack?" She sneered, laying across the broom as her hands tucked delicately under her chin. "Don't like when someone dishes your own crap back at you?"

Beetlejuice opened his mouth, only to find it suddenly full of plates. Sharp canines bit down hard, sending shards of porcelain tumbling to the ground as he spat out the rest. "Cut it out, Lydia."

"What's the magic wo~ord?" Lydia crooned, curling a strand of flashing red-and-white hair around her finger.

"How about, 'fuck off before you lose that finger'?"

She pulled back immediately, both hands squeezing the hilt of the broom. That tension rolled in, a thundering storm waiting to pour down on the pair.

But Beetlejuice quickly back-peddled, cackling weakly as he slicked his hair back. "J-Koking! I'm joking--we can fuck around later, though, you know? Morning's gonna be here, soon..." He trailed off, not looking specifically anywhere, but for sure avoiding Lydia's gaze.

Lydia hopped off her broom, it drifting close by as her brow furrowed. "Beej, what aren't you telling me?"

He fiddled awkwardly with a strand of his hair. "Look, it's just--you're drawing attention, and not in a way you're gonna like."

"What's that supposed to--?"

Smoke began to pool all around the two, slowly twisting into a small-scale tornado. Beetlejuice's hand went to Lydia's, protectively pulling her into his chest as the sudden storm's force threatened to suck her in. With each passing second, the once lavender-cloud world began to turn sharp, color melting from the clouds as jagged pieces of clockwork materialized from within. A number of cartoonish, yellow stars painted the now-black sky, while the walls turned a faded beige, cutting out the silhouette of a window. And there, sitting at a nonconscious cafe table, was a young man who couldn't be any older than Lydia herself. He was dressed in Victorian garb, pallet a combination of various yellows and richly tailored browns. Head tilted their way, he greeted the pair with a pointed smile, black eyes scrutinizing their every detail while slightly lifting a top hat off a head of slicked, golden hair.

"Fucking," Beetlejuice waved an exasperated hand toward the newcomer. "That, kid. That's what I meant by 'attention you won't like.'"

"I think we can let the lady decide on that." The thick, British accent sent chills down Lydia's spine. She watched the obvious demon set a teacup gently onto its plate, a shimmer of starlight cusping the rim. He stood and moved with one, sweeping motion towards the pair, hand extended for a friendly greeting. "I apologize for such a dramatic entrance, but I thought it best to start with a shining introduction, don't you think?"

Beetlejuice stepped in front, hair like embers on a coal-lite fireplace. "You don't wanna mess with me, bud."

"With you? Certainly not." The dream demon moved with astounding speed, pulling on Beetlejuice's sleeves as he stumbled forward. Now, nothing stood between her and this absolutely creep; she couldn't help but swallow loudly.

"I mean, you can see him too, right?" He asked, gesturing Lydia's way with a smirk. "I think he quite literally sewed those stripes on himself."

All she could think to do was nod, hand twitched towards her still-floating broom.

"I'm sure you were just trying to be polite," The demon's cane swept past, sending the broom clattering away as it settled just below the cut-out window frame. "But really, there's no reason to have patience with such a cantankerous individual. He was quite rude, you know; I'm sure everyone in the realm below could hear his bellowing."

Lydia craned her neck, catching the oncoming fist of Beetlejuice aiming to knock the Brit's clock out. Reflexively, the cane snapped back and jabbed him square in the chest, extending to impossible lengths before his back hit the end of the wall with a loud crack. A panicked gasp escaped before she could stop it. What the hell was he doing? She wanted to hit the guy, too, but now might've been the time he pulled out all the stops.

The dream demon glanced her way curiously.

"Ah," She straightened herself as much as she could, forcing out a haughty laugh. "He really was quite loud, wasn't he? I'm so glad you came by for some...passable conversation." She made a sideways glance at Beetlejuice, now angrily chewing away at the end of the cane. "But, he's really not worth the effort, is he?" Lydia added hopefully.

The dream demon sighed, pulling his cane back as Beetlejuice awkwardly flopped to the ground. "Any demon worth my time wouldn't have been so easily manipulated by some breather. But to be killed by one?" He shifted his cane beneath his arm, shaking his head disappointedly.

"Right..." Lydia eyed Beetlejuice intently, gaze flickering between him and the cast-aside broom. He gave her an incredulous look, only for her to reply with a panicked scowl of her own. "So! Um, now that we've established he's absolutely not worth anyone's time," She offered her gloved hand forward, holding back a grimace as the dream took it. "Why not introduce me, so we can spend that time doing something more productive?"

Oh, she about slapped him silly once his lips touched her fingers. Gloves or not, she was going to need a shower after this. And the gloves burned, real or not. "One of the denizens here in The Realm of Subconsciousness; a Baku, by all accounts, but you may call me Len."

She nodded a bit too furiously, eyes following Beetlejuice as he slunk his way toward her broom. "Ah, yes! I--should have guessed! By this..." she waved towards the scenery, finding it incredibly hard to keep her tone pleasant. "Classic aesthetic."

The empty void in Len's eyes briefly flashed with color. "I'm glad you like it! Far easier to lure breathers here if the space is appealing. In fact--you're in luck, actually. My most recent mark has gone back to sleep; you can watch me in action." He gestured towards the cafe table, only for Lydia to pull him back and away from Beetlejuice's creeping.

"I-I'm good to stand!" Lydia squeaked, finding him entirely too close for her liking. "Better to, um, appreciate it all. The, aesthetics."

Oh, God, she could smell his breath, now. Lydia wasn't sure what to expect--maybe something herbaceous from the tea, or coppery from whatever creature this demon murdered last. She was not expecting so...fresh. Alive. She dared a glance towards Beetlejuice. He was inches away at this point; she just has to stall. Again.

"Tell me a bit about your mark, first," she asked with a childish giggle. "I bet it's a really stupid breather."

Len chuckled, hand squeezing Lydia's to an uncomfortable degree. "It's really quite humorous, actually. That demon you had in your thrall--it's actually his murderer."

That froze Beetlejuice, concern immediately rising on his face.

"O-Oh!" Lydia's eyes fluttered, pulling Len to a nearby cafe table. She made sure his back was turned, herself practically fainting into her own chair. "Forgive my...uh...weak constitution." Her hand waved furiously, prompting Beetlejuice to seriously hurry up and get the broom her way. "I heard she's...quite the specimen."

Len rubbed his chin thoughtfully, a tea set brought through the air by a collection of cartoonishly-giggling star freaks. "I suppose she is, isn't she? Breathers aren't exactly supposed to leave the Netherworld once they enter. But I'm not overly concerned; she's not getting away from me."

"Oh?" Lydia sat upright, watching black ichor pour from the tea kettle's spout. "And...why's that?"

The Baku gestured towards the cut-out window frame. "I've had her stewing in a particularly bad nightmare the past few weeks. She'll do anything to get them to stop, and I'll have my contract waiting for her."

Fucking. Creep.

"It's really quite a simple operation. A classic ruse only a Baku could create. No room for human deception, unlike someone,"

Lydia couldn't stop him fast enough. Len's head swiveled where Beetlejuice had once been, a startling gasp escaping his throat as he went to stand. It was all autopilot now; her fingers dug under the table, flipping it with whatever strength she had as porcelain went smashing to the ground. Using momentum, the teen pulled herself up and over the table, kicking off the side as Len hissed and snapped under its weight. "Beetlejuice, seriously!"

"Aw, but this is gonna hurt, though." He bit back a squeal, snagging the broom as electricity crackled in the air. He tossed it forward, Lydia catch it mid-fall before swinging her legs over. A large, jagged crack suddenly split across the floor, pulling a panicked squeal from Beetlejuice as his hand flew out.

"Got it!" Lydia's hand clapped his, somehow managing to pull him up as the cafe table completely dissolved into black goop. Len looked...less than enthused, ichor dripping from his mouth as he spat a wad out on the ground.

"Do you two have any idea who I am?!" He hissed between clenched teeth.

"Yeah," Lydia replied coolly. "You said your name was Len. Three of the most annoying letters of the alphabet compacted together for the sake of one, major dipweed." She held her hand out, Beetlejuice meeting it with a satisfying clap.

"I could make your life a living nightmare if I wanted!" Len stomped forward, the floor melting with each step he took. "I-I'm part of the elite! A high-class dream demon! I--you're just some low-class slag looking to encroach on my kill!"

"Hey, that slag has a name," Beetlejuice snapped, accusatory finger pointed the Baku's way. "And you didn't even bother to ask. High-class elite my ass; what gentleman forgets to ask the lady for her name"

"Do I want to know what a 'slag' is?" Lydia asked.

Beetlejuice gingerly patted her head. "I'll tell you when you're older, Lyds."

The gears visibly turned on Len's face, but the realization came far too late. "You're--you're not,"

Lydia simply flashed a salute before diving into the cut-out window frame.

# Chapter 6

## Chapter Summary

It's been almost two months after the event of the musical. Even with her new family of four, Lydia still finds herself dreaming of Dead Mom. But when a certain rat-bastard makes a guest appearance, the teen's not sure if this is just a result of tricky demon magic or something more.

TRIGGER WARNING: SUICIDE MENTIONED

## Chapter Notes

In which Lydia's finally over it all.

The world soon returned to some sense of familiarity the farther Lydia fell. Swirling thunderclouds splotched across a dreary skyline, occasionally breaking free to showcase a patchwork landscape below. She eased the broom to a comfortable descent, slowly dipping back into the nightmare crafted by some absolute tool.

But, at least he was gone, now. At least she could hear her own thoughts.

"Oh my God, that was hilarious!" Beetlejuice cackled loudly from behind, pulling a worn grimace from Lydia's lips. "Oooh, such classic aesthetics you have, Len. Let me just fall under the weight of that incredibly fake accent--you really had him going, Lyds." He sniffled loudly, wiping the corner of his eye with his finger. "I'm so proud of the little, manipulative shit you've become."

Lydia's knuckles turned white as she tightened her fist. "Yeah, well, tonight's given me a lot of practice."

"Oh, don't sound so dour," Beetlejuice said. "You make for an excellent distraction, Lydia Deetz."

"Not like I had a say in it."

The demon's head stretched past her shoulder, trying to catch Lydia's gaze. "Hey, come on. It's not my fault you got caught by your parents. But, if it makes you feel better," he added with a dramatic sigh. "I'll make sure to throw myself into the limelight next time. Then you can have all the fun, sneakin' about and doing crimes."

The pair suddenly burst through a haze of clouds, a familiar graveyard finally pulling into view. Headstones dotted the landscape like ants, adding very little color to the overall monochromatic scene.

"Uh, Lyds," Beetlejuice chuckled nervously. "You're, uh, pickin' up a bit of speed, here."

Her grip on the broom only tightened further.

"Okay, seriously," Beetlejuice's arms snaked around Lydia's waist, grabbing the broom's handle as he yanked it upward. "I like a flashy landing as much as the next guy, but I prefer digging graves than piledriving into one."

The broom jerked furiously as Lydia suddenly straightened out, knocking Beetlejuice completely off-kilter. Both hands flailed wildly in the air, only for a third to burst through his chest and snag the back of the broom. "H-hey! What the hell gives?!"

"Oh, so you can use your powers, huh?" Lydia snapped. "Or that as much as you can muster in this stupid place?"

Beetlejuice began kicking his feet, using the previous momentum to start swinging back and forth. "Okay, you're obviously mad about what Lennard said up there, but I told you we'd get bad attention if you kept showing off."

The broom suddenly whipped about, a panicked squeal slipping out of the demon's mouth. "Okay, what? What am I supposed to say that won't piss you off?"

Lydia swung her legs around, face-to-face with the demon as it all came tumbling out. "Supposed to say? Supposed to say?! You could have told me your powers don't work in the RoS!"

"They do too!" Beetlejuice managed to grab the broom with another hand, waving the third from his chest furiously.

"Oh, thank God! He can grow an extra appendage!" Lydia's laughter was hoarse, heavy with whatever had been building all night between the two. "Do you seriously have that fragile of an ego that admitting you weren't this big, all-powerful, ghost-with-the-most? Beej, I could've died up there! I could've been those strings that snapped, and you're complete lack of concern over that is really making me regret inviting you in the first place!"

"I wouldn't let that happen." Beetlejuice grumbled.

Tears pricked her eyes as she quickly wiped her face; she could feel the heat emanating from her face, now. With a jerky dive, Lydia let the broom freefall the rest of the way, stopping just high enough so Beetlejuice went tumbling painfully to the ground. "I trusted you to keep me safe, and you're still lying! If something happened to me, Daddy would have an absolute cow!"

"And there it is, isn't it?" Beetlejuice managed to roll back to his feet, suit smeared with mud all across his side from the impact. "Care more about your precious Paw-Paw throwing a fit

than anything else, right?" He hopped onto the back of a broken grave, legs crossing as he turned away. "God, it'd be a regular quartet, once you got all four of 'em going."

"Are you actually," Lydia rounded the tombstone, never quite catching Beetlejuice's face. "Would you just--Beej, stop it!"

"No, you stop!" Beetlejuice immediately spun back, hair completely ablaze. "Jesus, Lydia, when did you become okay with that infestation in our house?!"

"It's not—I don't want it to be just 'our house anymore." Lydia bit her lip, keeping whatever tears she had back. No way was she crying in front of this asshole.

"When did you become 'okay' without me?"

The first few drops of rain started to pour, sending shuddering jolts throughout Lydia's body. An electric tang was tangible on her tongue, mixed with a sour bubbling that had started in her stomach. "I never said I was okay with you. I told you I wanted to see you again."

Beetlejuice gestured around him with a bitter laugh. "Well, you knew how to call me up. You're the one who waited this long."

The first crack of lightning flashed across the sky. The rain fell harder. "B-Beej, that's not fair,"

"You were the first person to see me, Lyds!" Rain was streaming down Beetlejuice at this point, once stuck-up hair flat and ranging from a myriad of colors. "I'd completely given up on being seen by anyone, and there you were. Those two days were the best of my life, and you--" he shook his head, turning his back once more. "I never thought you'd choose them over me."

The bubbling in her stomach clawed its way out as a scream. "Why do I have to choose?! Why can't I just care about all of you?!"

Beetlejuice waved a hand, refusing to turn back.

"Beej, don't just ignore me," Whatever fury she felt was starting to subside. Now, Lydia just felt sick; she wanted this fight to be done and over with. "We--we have to talk about this."

"I liked you better when you were on that rooftop."

It'd barely been audible over the rumbling of thunder, but it struck Lydia cold. She stared at Beetlejuice's back, completely numb, hands trembling at her side. "Beetlejuice."

Silence.

"Beetlejuice," Lydia snarled, straightening as she watched his head twist around in panic.

"W-wait, don't--!"

"Beetlejuice."

She'd only guessed it would work. It was what she wished for with all her heart, and damn it, Dream Lydia got everything she wanted. So whether it was actually part of his curse, or Lydia's dream state was just that powerful, Beetlejuice vanished. There wasn't any drama, any flair; he was just there one minute and then wasn't.

Lydia stood in the pouring rain, fists clenched by her side and shaking. What an absolute--

Fine.

It was fine.

She was still here, and she still had control.

Lydia bent over and picked up her broom, shaking it of mud before tossing it into the air. It drifted lazily for a moment before sitting upright, and with a gentle push off the ground, she set off with an easy pace. Rainfall persisted, smacking against her body as she flew across the grave. With a wave of her hand, a translucent umbrella formed from joined water droplets, and she let it drift alongside her, catching against whatever bits of the storm it could. Then, she heard it; the mumblings of the preacher. Craning her head, she finally spotted the robes just a broom-scoot away. Him, the sea of black, and,

"Little Lydia."

She set off into the crowd, briefly wondering if anyone in the dream could see her. A quick, accidental pass through Aunt Agnes confirmed it wasn't the case, and she instinctively slid between Dream Charles and Little Lydia. It was all here, right as it always was. An overcast sky, as depressing as the people veiled in black.

The stoic face of Charles, staring off into thought.

The casket, dangling over a pit in the ground, ready and eager to swallow Emily whole.

And then Emily herself.

Lydia forgot how to breathe. It was like looking into a mirror; soft, tumbling hair, petite frame, a look that was somehow both loving and sharp with unspoken wit. She held a gentle, pink glow around her, watching the events unfold from a nearby cypress. Then, the cassette tape began to freak out.

Skip--Emily watched her coffin begin its jittery descent into the ground.

Skip--Emily wove herself between people desperately, their cars vanishing as quickly as their engines roared to life.

Skip--Emily tried to fit underneath the umbrella with her husband, tears forming in her eyes as she couldn't wipe her little girl's away.

Skip--Emily's hand pressed against the back window of the family's car, Charles in mid-turn as the car readied to pull away.

Lydia rubbed her arms with her hands, unable to stop herself from shaking. She was still standing over her mother's grave, finding herself rooted. Her mother was there--right there--and she was completely frozen in place, back turned. "Move."  
Her legs refused to listen.

"Come on, damn it, move!"

Her body's weight shifted, causing her to collapse to her knees as mud splashed up her dress. Whatever magic kept her dry had flickered away, raindrops pelted against her head as she stared into the pit some stranger dug for her Mama. The sleek, wooden surface of the coffin hung above it, almost mocking her, while the collective essence of Emily stared at a version of Lydia that wasn't even real.

"She was there," Lydia managed to choke. "She was there the whole time, and I didn't see her?"

"It's tragic, really."

Lydia could barely manage to turn her head to the voice; her hand caught against the ground, breathing heavily as the world threatened to pull the rug out from underneath her. All she was met with was more of the gloomy landscape.

"It's different when you actually step into the dream," the familiar, British canter continued softly. "I didn't get a chance to warn you."

"Where are you?" Lydia gritted her teeth, managing to push herself back onto her feet. Hand outstretched, her broom flew as fingers clutched it tightly. "I'm not scared of you."  
The Baku's visage shimmered between raindrops, a solid hand extending through. She knocked his hand away with the hilt of the broom. It let out a dazzling-blue spark, crackling and arching across raindrops as Len fully appeared with a pained hiss.

"Good," Lydia snapped. "I'm glad that hurt."

Len tugged at the hem of his glove, wrist still smoldering as a frown crossed his face. "You're upset."

Lydia's expression deadpanned, the bristles of the broom aimed at the Baku's face. "You called me stupid."

"I...did, yes."

Did he actually look remorseful? Lydia's grip tightened, rain beading down her face as she struggled to keep eye contact.

"It's unfortunate, how cruel demons must appear to their kin in order to survive." He pinched the rim of his top hat, removing it as a pair of pointed ears poked out from beneath. "I'm sure you've seen it first-hand, haven't you? Your argument wasn't exactly..." he paused, setting his hat against his chest. "Quiet."

"Why would you care?" Lydia swiped the broom across, knocking the Baku's tophat to the ground. It stuck into the mud with a squelch, semi-permanently embedded in the earth. "You're the one who made this shitty nightmare in the first place. Why the hell would I ever trust anything you say?"

The dream demon rose his hands gingerly, a somber tone enveloping his voice as he spoke. "I crafted this place to showcase your truth, Lydia Deetz."

"Shut up!" Before Lydia could swing again, a loud snap echoed between her ears. Something chipped and fluttered the ground, and her hand brushed against her face. Between the bottom of her eye and the top of her lip, a crack had appeared.

"You're still broken. Anyone can see that." Len's cane appeared in the flat of his palm, a stardust fog hissing out from the top molding. "That jaunt you took through the Netherworld didn't amount to anything, and you know it. Whatever sense of, 'closure' you think you got was nothing more than smoke on the wind."

Lydia grabbed her arm, fingers growing numb as the crack spidered down to the palm of her hand.

"You humans circle between semi-completion and completely in pieces constantly." Len rolled his wrist in the air, the stardust shaping into a miasma around the pair. "Round, and round, and round,"

Another sharp crack caused Lydia to hiss.

"And then you die."

The sun suddenly felt warm against Lydia's face. She spun on her heel, greeted by the sight of a rolling field full of dazzling flowers. No more graveyards, no more rain; even her dress had changed, now clean, white, and lacy; just like the woman who stood before her, arms outstretched and smiling as if nothing had happened.

"M-Mama?" she managed to whimper out.

She felt herself stumble forward, prodded on by a gentle nudge from Len's cane. "But you possess incredible spirit, Lydia Deetz. Every soul in the Netherworld saw that."

Lydia stepped back, trying to turn her face away from her mother's embrace. It was like glass shoved through her ribcage, a white-hot intensity that sent her body into a spasm.

"But it's so fragile. It needs protecting, and though it pains me to show this awful truth, it's all for the sake of this moment."

The feeling soon passed, melting into something warm, something safe. Lydia blinked furiously; this was a trick. He was goading her and it wasn't going to work. She already made her peace, she was well passed this.

But, then, why was she hugging this thing back?

"You never wanted answers, Lydia Deetz," Len crooned. "You only wanted to see her again."

A weight lifted from Lydia's chest, one she hadn't even realized had been there until today. He was right; her journey here had just been to see Mama again. Nothing had changed until this moment. She hadn't changed until this moment.

"This can be every day, from now until the end. All you have to do,"  
Len's arm appeared around her shoulder, pinky extended outward as he beamed.  
"Is to enjoy it for me."

Her trembling hand reached forward, pinky extending to make such a promise. She could stay here; that was easy enough. It was a small price to pay, just to see Mama happy and alive again. The weight against her chest rose higher and higher, reaching its break as their fingers met.

Or, it was more a weight around her neck--

--Lydia choked back air, a shock of cold rainwater suddenly bringing her back to the graveyard. Len staggered back, her fist having at some point curled and slugged him square across the jaw, and he tumbled headfirst into Emily's funeral pit.

Lydia's head swiveled, catching a brief glimpse of Mama once last time as a wethered gravestone took her place, stardust melting away in the rainstorm. She wiped her face with her muddied dress sleeve, staring down into an empty grave as Len squirmed in the forming puddle.

There it was; balled up in his hand was the amethyst necklace, easily removed from her dream-drunk stupor.

"Shit." Her hand flew up, every fiber of her being willing the broom to come her way. It remained face-down on the ground, slowly sinking into the bubbling mire behind her.

"Shit!"

Lydia took off in a sprint, slipping along the grass as the pit behind him erupted in a shower of stars. Len tore through the air like a starved cat, snagging the hem of Lydia's dress with jagged nails. She let out a shriek, instinctively kicking out as her flat shoe smacked the Baku in the face. The fabric ripped terribly, releasing its hold as Lydia scrambled across, just barely managing to wrap her hand around the broom and swing it upright as Len came crashing down on top of her.

"You had to make this difficult, didn't you?!" His eyes had gone completely feral, pitch-black as multicolored sparks flew from beneath his fingertips. "You could've been a happy songbird in your little, gilded cage, but now?"

He wrapped his fists together, slamming hard upon the broom's surface. A flash of pink intermingled with azure sparks, bubbling briefly around Lydia with each strike.

"Oh, I'm done waiting."

Her arms were gonna give out soon; Lydia could feel it.

"Who needs to fatten up the most desirable soul in the Neverworld, anyway?!"

Lydia grimaced, shifting whatever will she had left towards her legs. "N-no need to be a glutton, Lenny-dear! You and I both know those buttons on your money suit's pop if you eat past your limit~!"

"I'm going to rip that pretty little tongue out, Lydia Deetz!"

There; as he leaned forward to rip her face clean off, Lydia dug her feet into his chest, throwing him forward with everything she had. His body smacked a nearby gravestone, splitting it in two as she rolled across the ground. Her body screamed in protest, but she somehow managed to get back onto her feet. She could do this.

Lydia held up her broom in defiance, the air rushing out of her lungs as it split in two.

"What's the matter, Lydia Deetz?" Len spat a mouthful of black blood, each individual bone in his vertebrate made a sickening pop as he straightened upright. "Running out of options?"

Lydia frantically hunched over, scooping the split halves as she tried desperately to shove the broom back together. The runes offered a weak flicker of light before vanishing completely, whatever hope she had going with it.

"I have your way out of this place riiight here." Len staggered forward, tongue darting across his lips. "And it'll be a far more pleasant experience if you don't struggle on the way down."

"Fuck you," Lydia hissed, tossing the broom pieces to the side. "I'm giving you the worst indigestion, your tea-slurping fuckwit."

The world went pitch black as Len lunged forward, mouth tearing open into an impossible size. The rain and tombstones serrated into teeth within the morphing jaw, grass and stonework paths twisting into an inexplicably, incandescent tongue.

In that moment, that few seconds before the metaphorical gates closed behind her, any sense of bravado had drained away from Lydia Deetz.

It certainly wasn't peace; there were so many regrets that oozed to the surface of her mind.

Charles and Delia would hopelessly care for a body that was never going to wake up.

Adam and Barbara would blame themselves for not doing more, just like they always would.

And Beetlejuice?

He suddenly slammed into Lydia's side. Hard.

And the jaw snapped shut.

# Chapter 7

## Chapter Summary

It's been almost two months after the event of the musical. Even with her new family of four, Lydia still finds herself dreaming of Dead Mom. But when a certain rat-bastard makes a guest appearance, the teen's not sure if this is just a result of tricky demon magic or something more.

## Chapter Notes

In which Lydia learns it's okay to have big feelings.

A burst of stars scattered across her vision as Lydia hit the ground. For a moment, she was back in her room, suddenly full of the adults she so desperately loved. Maitlands on either side of her bed, Deetz's sprawled out on the couch; she could wake up from the nightmare, put this whole, hair-brained scheme behind her. Suck it up and take whatever punishment was coming.

Go back to how it was before he showed up.

Lydia blinked, back in the graveyard once more. She managed to push up onto her knees, vision still trying to refocus. Where was he? She tried to speak, only managing a raspy croak. Her eyes stung, mud seeping in between, and Lydia did her best to wipe her face clean. Where was he?

"Lydia--!"

She was suddenly pulled up off the ground, feet just barely touching as a pair of strong, protective arms held her close. "Lydia, oh my God."

"A-are you alright?" A gentle hand wiped her eyes, tears overflowing their voice. "Is sh-she alright? Charles, sh-she's alright, right?"

Lydia blinked, finding her living parents' squeezed around her, as if afraid she'd float away. Every part of her went limp, her head sinking into Charles' chest.

"Daddy?"

"I'm here," The couple sank to their knees, Charles cradling his daughter's head while Delia did her best to cover the teen's back with her night shawl. "We're all here; you're safe."

Lydia's head swiveled, finding Adam standing under a nearby cypress as his hand tried protecting the pages of the 'Handbook for the Recently Deceased'. It was strange to see him so...opaque. Not, floating a good inch or two off the ground. "Barbara, honey, you got a handle on him?"

"Oh, I got a 'handle' alright." Barbara held a shovel arm's length from Len, currently on his hands and knees. "You just stay right there, buddy. I got a lot of practice inflicting blunt-force trauma."

Len responded by retching violently onto the ground.

Barbara stumbled back, the head of the shovel still pointed forward. "Uh, Lydia? What did you and Beetlejuice do to him?"

"I didn't do anything." Her voice felt rubbed raw, but the sentence flooded her with dread.

"What?" Delia's face was filled with worry. She rested a hand on Lydia's shoulder, but the teen jerked away. "Sweetheart, it's okay,"

"I didn't do anything." Lydia managed to stand on her own, pushing past her parents and hobbling towards Len before losing all feeling in her legs.

"I gotcha," Adam's hands caught her as her living parents quickly flocked to her side. "Take it easy, Lydia." He helped her upright, eyeing her neck with a grimace. "Yeah, she doesn't have the necklace anymore, Barbara! Her string's completely frayed!"

As if cued, an ethereal band wound it'd way around Adam's fingers, tumbling in the air before settling into Lydia's chest. Stands of fibers stuck out in every direction, and she couldn't help but stare as azure light flowed from Adam's fingertips; some desperate patch job to keep her soul from floating away completely.

"Well, follow the Deetz' strings back!" Barbara shouted back. "I'll tail behind you guys and keep an eye on this clown."

Lydia felt electric now, every nerve completely on overdrive. A burst of adrenaline pulled her beneath Adam's arms, quickly striding across the muddied graveyard as her gaze remain set on the dream demon.

"Lydia--?"

Barbara held out her hand, but Lydia pushed it away. Pools of sludge continued to stream out from Len's mouth, diluting in swirling rivulets of rain that all dumped down Emily's grave. Lydia's sock was immediately soaked, the heel of her flat sinking into the wet earth. "Where is he?"

Len's head twisted upward, pale and beaded with sweat as he smiled innocently. "Where's who~?"

Lydia grabbed the Baku by his shirt collar, hauling him up to a kneeling slump. "Where. Is. Beetlejuice?"

Len let out a sputtering laugh, black ichor spraying across Lydia's face. "A happy little accident, wouldn't you say? Absolutely revolting taste, though; I'm not surprised he was well past expiration."

All she could see was red. At some point, Len crumpled back to the ground, and at some point, Lydia had gotten on top of him. Her fists flailed about, striking against his face, his neck, his chest--any part of the body that would hurt if she hit it hard enough.

"Lydia--!!!"

A pair of hands tore her off, arms pinned as Charles held her tightly against his chest. She let out a shriek, nails digging into her father's arm to try and get free. She was gonna kill him. She was going to kill him.

Even if there was literally no way to do so, this fucking demon was going to live in agony for every second she lived, and when she died, Lydia was going to find him and do it all over again.

He had to suffer; this couldn't stand.

The Universe couldn't let this stand.

That bitch owed her,

this couldn't be

happening.

"Lydia, honey, baby girl..." Delia's voice was soft, soothing; she eased the teen from Charles's vice-like grip, gathering her under her shawl, hand stroking her hair gently.

And she broke.

Lydia let out a howling wail, burying herself into the closest thing she had to a mother at the moment. She clung to Delia's back, afraid that if she let go, the ground would simply vanish. Her arms shook, each breath a painful stab through her chest.

"Uh, Deetz family?" Adam's voice hesitantly cut in, standing behind his wife as she flipped her shovel back towards the Baku. Len's human visage was quickly eroding, melting into a puddle of bubbling, black liquid. "There's a lot going on here, and Lydia, I'm so sorry, but,"

"Duck!" Barbara whipped the handle of the shovel at Adam's legs as the Matilands dropped to the ground. Something in the shape of a hand smashed across the cypress, ripping its roots from the ground as it went flying through the air. The dream demon was quickly becoming nothing more than an amalgamation of the dream itself, pulling from the very seams of the contained reality. Tombstones, asphalt from the street, even the memories of people, were being sucked into the swirling mass.

"We need to leave." Adam pushed himself off the ground, flipping frantically through the handbook. "We need to leave now."

"There's no way the Deetz' are getting back to their bodies fast enough!" Barbara shouted, hair whipping in highspeed winds as a gasp tumbled. "And--and I don't think we want them to go back; look!"

The amalgamation's claws tore through the sky, a violet haze tumbling through the gashes as it pulled itself out of the ground. As it climbed through the very air itself.

"He's--!" Adam's face paled. "He can get out of the RoS, now."

"Like hell he is," Barbara snapped, shovel spun and at the ready.

"Barbara, I don't know how a shovel is going to stand up to that!" Charles snapped. "We have to focus on getting Lydia out of here!"

"And where are we supposed to take her?" Barbara argued back. "Back home? Where that thing's headed?!"

Charles' expression hardened, a protective hand covering Lydia's back as she continued to tremble beneath Delia's shawl.

"Barbara," Delia began softly.

"It's gonna go after everyone, don't you get it? Breathers, ghosts, Netherworld denizens," Barbara threw her free hand upward, face wrought with panic. "Beetlejuice just gave it a revolving door of souls to devour!"

"We can't stop it!"

"We have to try!"

Lydia couldn't hear any more of the argument after that; everything blended together into a cacophonous scream, the monstrous shrieks chorusing with the absolute obliteration of the RoS. Everything ran blank in her mind; buried beneath that shall, there wasn't even a world outside to worry about.

It just kept repeating. Again, and again.

This was all her fault.

She'd brought Beetlejuice back from the Neverworld. She'd lied and stolen from her living parents, pulled her dead parents into this insanely dangerous plan. She'd egged on the demon who was about to crash into her reality, she'd gotten into a hopeless situation, and because of that, her best friend had to--

--She couldn't even complete the thought without her chest seizing up. Everyone was going to die, and it was all her fault.

Lydia was going

to lose

everything.

"Lydia?"

Lydia glanced upward, eyes filled with tears as she found herself staring into her mother's. Emily's voice was a gentle lull, radiating with a faint, pinkish glow.

"Don't be a trick." Lydia sobbed. "Please, I can't. I can't take any more of this."

Emily's thumb gently wiped the tears from Lydia's cheek. She pressed her forehead against her daughter's, a soft smile spreading across her lips.

"I'm sorry." Lydia whimpered. "I'm so sorry. You were there, and I didn't see you."

Emily pulled away slightly, hands cradling Lydia's face.

"Please say something?"

Her smile turned somewhat mischievous. "'Something'," she replied with a chuckle.

A giggling sob escaped Lydia, arms wrapping tight around her Mama's waist. They sat there for what felt like forever, head pressed against Emily's chest. God, she could stay like this forever.

But she knew it wasn't meant to be.

"I'm sorry," she sobbed. "I'm sorry I'm not over your death."

Emily hugged her tighter.

"Was he there, Mama?" Lydia asked softly. "Did you actually meet him?"

Emily's hand gently stroked her daughter's head. "Why does it matter so much to you, baby girl?"

"Because..." Lydia sniffed, her own hands grabbing Emily's. It'd never really been about her; not really. Nothing changed if she'd met the demon earlier in life. But if she knew him...?

"They have to care, Mama. And, if you'd met him, and cared about him," Lydia's voice trailed off, glancing up at her mother with tear-stained eyes.

Emily was quiet for a moment. Then,  
"Don't you care, though?"

Lydia blinked, somewhat taken aback by the question. "Of c-course I do."

"No matter what he says?" Emily asked.

"Th-that doesn't matter!" Lydia shook her head, pulling away from her Mama as she stumbled to her feet. "None of that mattered! I mean, he was hurting, too. He was an ass about it, and if I could tell him, I would,"

A new wave of tears struck her hard.

"But, I don't want him gone forever."

Emily stood as well, a hand extended towards Lydia. She held it tight.

"You're always allowed to be sad about me, baby girl," Emily began. "And you can still be happy with your father, and Delia, and the Maitlands. You're allowed to be angry at Lawrence, and you're still allowed to be his friend."

"But, all those things conflict!" Lydia sobbed.

That mischievous smirk reappeared on her Mama's face. "And isn't that the fun of it? Shoving all these, mismatched pieces together, to get the picture you want in the end." She gently tapped a finger against Lydia's nose, chuckling. "I seem to remember a certain someone insisting that's how puzzles worked when she was little."

Lydia let out a hiccuping sob, pulling Emily in for what she knew was the last hug. "You keep talking like he's okay. Is he okay?"

Emily chuckled again, smoothing Lydia's hair as she did so. "Even if he wasn't, you won't let anything stop you from getting him back. Right?"

"Right."

# Chapter 8

## Chapter Summary

It's been almost two months after the event of the musical. Even with her new family of four, Lydia still finds herself dreaming of Dead Mom. But when a certain rat-bastard makes a guest appearance, the teen's not sure if this is just a result of tricky demon magic or something more.

## Chapter Notes

In which we absolutely SLAM HANDS with some freaky dream demon.

"Right?" Delia pulled away from Lydia, visibly confused. "Honey, right about what?"

Lydia immediately stood, handing Delia's shawl back. "Barbara's absolutely right. There's no way that demon's leaving here intact."

"Yes!" Barbara's arms pumped in the air, shovel nearly smacking Adam in the face. "Oh, sorry, love--but, I'm with Lydia on this one."

"But, honey," Adam just weakly gestured to the growing mass before them.

"Come on, Adam! The Maitlands 2.0 never say die. And not just because we're already dead," Barbara added matter-of-factly. "There's gotta be something in that book of ours that can help."

Adam pulled back the cover, expression thoughtful as he tumbled through the pages. "I mean, there's plenty of sigils that prevent realm-crossing, but they apply to single-realm demons. Since Beetlejuice," he hesitated, glancing towards Lydia. "Since something else has a hold off his powers, I don't know if it'll still work."

"Well, 'close enough' is just gonna have to be good enough." Barbara propped her shovel onto her shoulder, giving Lydia a thumbs up. "Adam and I are gonna start digging one heck of a sigil. Lydia,"

"Is going to find somewhere safe to hide," Charles' hands rested firmly on his daughter's shoulder. "While Delia and I keep that thing distracted."

"But, Dad—!"

Charles got down on his knee, turning his daughter so they were face-to-face. "Lydia, this is the second time in my life I almost lost you to some otherworldly nutcase. I'm not about to make a habit out of this."

"But this is my mess!" Lydia insisted. "I know you're not seriously condoning I just leave something half-finished."

Charles let out an exasperated sigh in reply.

"Charles," Delia knelt down as well, a reassuring hand on her husband's shoulder. "She's going to involve herself no matter what, and--and I'd want her here. With all of us. Doing, admittedly,"

She let out a nervous laugh as the world groaned beneath them.

"The weirdest act of family bonding I've ever been a part of."

The over-gorged monstrosity let out a rumbling roar, sending cracks spidering throughout what was once the graveyard. Charles grabbed hold of both girls and took a stumbling leap, the spot they once stood swallowed up by black nothingness.

"Not to put a timer on this moment," Adam called worriedly.

"We're gonna get digging, then!" Barbara shouted as she followed after Adam. "Go get 'em, Deetz family!"

As the Maitlands half ran, half flew over the jagged terrain, Lydia faced down against her living parents. They both stared at her for a moment, Charles struggling to find words to say.

"Okay!" Delia clapped her hands excitedly, causing her husband to jump. "Let's get this crazy train rolling, then! Ah, so,"

She glanced back at the creature, shuttering as it let out another ear-splitting scream.

"What exactly is the plan, Lydia dear?"

Without skipping a beat, Lydia ran towards the hole she'd originally pushed Len down. It had been filled with inches of rain at this point, but she could still see it; glinting, half-stuck in the mud, was the amethyst necklace.

"Daddy and I are gonna fly up to the top and give that jerk a piece of our mind." She said, hopping into the pit with a splash. "But, until we can get up there, you're on distraction duty."

"Okay, but, how are you planning to get up--?"

Delia let out a surprised squeak as two broken halves of a broom came zooming underneath her feet, diving into the hole before lifting Lydia back up with it in one piece. "Oh!"

"Oh," Charles' face paled slightly.

Another panicked shriek pulled everyone's attention to the Maitlands, darting around the muddy landscape as a dozen or so dripping hands came pouring off the monster's base.

Delia's face mimicked her husband's, looking to Lydia with slight concern. "Honey, I'm glad you have such faith in me, but I really don't think I can,"

Lydia slid off her broom, grabbed it by the hilt, and swiped it toward her stepmother's face.

"Lydia--!" Charles leaned forward, only to stop as a burst of pink energy crackled around Delia.

"Wh-what was that?!" Delia shrieked.

"The power of pink calcite." Lydia spun the broom back under her feet and hopped onto the handle. "Delia's crystals actually have some weight in this world!"

"That's right! Crystals aren't a complete," Delia's face scrunched up as she shot a look at the teen. "I--well, that's good for me, anyway. I'll do my best, then!"

Lydia flashed a thumbs up before shifting the broom back into a rideable position.

Charles grimaced, slowly working one foot over the handle. "A-Are you sure there's no other way up there?"

"Nope!" The minute she felt her father's weight on her back, Lydia kicked off the ground, furiously waving to Delia as they climbed into the air.

----

There was oh-so-much that could go wrong with this plan.

Lydia could've overestimated the power of Delia's ring and gotten her to run straight into a minefield. She didn't know if the Maitlands could be harmed here, if their sigil plan would even do anything against this colossal nightmare, or if it would've been better to just get everyone to safety and fly up herself. Even that plan had one obvious, glaring hole in it; the last time she'd gone toe-to-toe with Len, she'd gotten completely thrashed. She'd nearly been devoured.

She lost her best friend.

"Temporary misplaced." Lydia gritted her teeth, hands tightening around the broom's hilt.

"Wh-what was that, sweetie?"

The teen glanced behind her shoulder, her father's face stark white and clinging to the broom for dear life. Charles looked absolutely terrified, but it was still reassuring to have him there. Lydia pressed her back against his chest, briefly set at ease.

"Nothing. I--I'm glad you're here."

Charles offered a smile, only to choke back a gasp. He suddenly lunged forward, hands overlapping Lydia's on the broom as he yanked it to the side, just barely avoiding a black Hurst rocketing across the air.

Lydia lurched, losing her balance completely and nearly sliding off the broom before her father's arm wrapped around her waist. She'd gotten a good five-second viewing of the ground, determining that, yes, dropping from this high up would do more than just hurt. "Guess driving a stick shift isn't totally obsolete!" She manage to crack out.

Charles just laughed nervously, a face that clearly read, 'Oh-God-I-just-barely-caught-my-daughter-mid-air'. He re-adjusted her on the broom, attention back on the monstrous behemoth. Its shoulder was arched, arm currently in mid-overhand with a stretch limo in hand.

Lydia's hands tightened around the broom, trying to predict the best direction to take.

"Hellooooo! Yes, you, up there!"

Delia was nothing more than a technicolored pinprick to Lydia, but boy, could that voice travel. She was waving her hands frantically, a dozen or so pink bubbles drifting all around her. "Come on, then! I-I've seen wack-a-moles with faster reaction time than you!"

"Delia, you're the one who's the mole in this scenario!" Charles cried out.

The creature turned, opting to smash the limousine over Delia. Bits of shrapnel and tires bounced every which direction as a much larger bubble bloomed overtop her, causing the creature visible irritation. It tried slamming its palm down next, only to let out a shriek as the ooze bubbled and hissed, evaporating on contact.

"That's my fiancée!" Charles hollered, throwing a triumphant hand in the air before quickly grabbing the broom.

The broom soon crested over top of the monster's head, getting a full aerial view of the dream's state. So much had been pulled apart and piled on top of the shifting mass, leaving empty patches all across the landscape. It was a struggle to keep speed with the creature's pace as every second, a new, clawed hand would tear into the sky and pull it closer to the top. They'd already broken through the first, hazy layer of familiar, purple clouds; not that Lydia was an expert, but it sure felt like time was running out.

She positioned the broom just right, hands working to take off the amethyst necklace. "Here, Dad, you take this."

Charles' hand covered the crystal, subtly trying to keep it around Lydia's neck. "Lydia,"

"Some of Delia's calcite mojo rubbed off on me back in the real world," Lydia insisted. "I'll be fine!"

Charles' brow furrowed, trying to think of another excuse.

"I'm not really safe if you can't do anything to Len,"

"Okay, okay!" Charles snapped nervously. "Just, give it to me when you land, then. I may have a natural talent for flying, but landing is in the next chapter."

"Oh, no," Lydia shook her head, peering over as she positioned herself just above what looked like the top of a tophat. "I'm just gonna jump."

"Wha--you are absolutely not!" Charles voice jumped a pitch, arms now securely wrapped around his daughter's waist.

"We gotta catch him off-guard for this to work!" Lydia insisted. "I'll tuck and roll, like you showed me!"

Charles blinked, looking somewhat taken aback. "That...sounds like something Emily would,"

"Mama made you teach me. She said I'd find a way up the roof eventually,"

"So I might as well teach you how to get safely down." Charles' smile was reminiscent, somber; even admit the chaos, Lydia could still hear his chuckle. "You are your mother's child."

"Biologically half of yours, too."

Lydia leaned forward to give her father a kiss on the cheek, subtly slipping the amethyst over his neck. The broom wobbled slightly as the crystal flashed, getting used to the skin of its new owner. Charles let out a yelp, quickly steadying it as Lydia used the sudden momentum to swing down and drop. She was quickly approaching the top hat, shaping into the top of Len's head. And he was none the wiser.

"That's right, ants!" She heard him cackle, hands marionetting what looked like thick, black strands of goop as the hands on the monster continued swatting at Delia and the Maitlands. "Swarm all you like; there's literally nothing the likes of you could possibly do to me!"

His body went rigid as one-hundred-and-twelve pounds of sheer force slammed into him.

Lydia lost her footing completely, tumbling across the flat of the creature's head as she fought for balance. She dug her nails into the surface, already kicking herself for not changing out of her muddied and torn dress. Literally, the one-time playing dress-up was actually life-and-death. But, she managed to catch herself with plenty of space to spare; she stood, facing her nightmare with whatever gusto she had left to offer.

"And there she is." Pillars of black ooze pulled Len back to his feet, stretching him out as strands pierced back through his fingers. His head twisted around completely, bones cracking in his neck as a leaking smile cut across his face. "Lydia Deetz, the absolute stain on the universe."

"Lenny-dear!" Lydia let out a quick curtsy, her own, coy smile resting along her face. "I just came by to see if you needed some ipecac. After all,"

The playfulness in her voice dropped as quickly as her expression.

"You ate something you really shouldn't have."

The baku jabbed forward a bubbling jet of ichor wrapping around his arm before striking outward. Lydia scoffed, marching straight into the onslaught as a flash of pink enveloped her.

The ooze arched around her, hissing and spitting against the transparent, tinged surface. A frustrated snarl escaped Len as a half-dozen more struck out, only to dissipate against the rosy-tinged shield.

"This is your only chance at diplomacy," Lydia called out. "And my demands are simple!" She threw her hand out, the bubble shattering like glass that scattered every which direction. "Spit. Him. Out."

Len responded with a flick of his wrist. Thick strands of goop pulled tautly, the surface around his bubbling as a collection of star-faced monstrosities burst through. "I don't take orders from a child, unfortunately."

"How about an adult, then?"

Charles came down from the sky like a horribly inebriated duck, wrestling between the broom's handle and the amethyst in hand. It looked like something was trying to form beside him, but he kept changing his mind, creating what looked like a misshapen silver ball. Even Len couldn't hold back a grimace.

"Oh, Daddy," Lydia took a few steps forward, catching the broom's hilt as Charles managed to land without too much consequence. Now it was two against two-dozen, the small, jittery star monsters swarming around Len.

"I'm happy to entertain your little, 'coupe d'etat', Lydia Deetz. "At least, until I reach my final destination." Hollowed eyes stared the pair down, tongue darting across his lips as laughter echoed across the shattering sky. "It was oh-so considerate of you to bring more than just a snack; I never thought myself deserving of such a kindness."

Charles leaned in close to Lydia, visibly disturbed by the demon's implication. "Can we stop him with just this?" He gestured to the broom and still-shifting ball above his shoulder.

"I'm sort of hoping to get Beetlejuice back in the driver's seat," Lydia whispered back.

"And if you can't?"

Lydia shook her head, holding the broom like one would with a sword. "Positive thinking, Dad. Positive thinking!"

The star creatures made the first move, four flying across in a frenzy of claws and tentacles. Lydia swung with a huff, catching three by their tiny stomachs before launching them off to the side. A crackling, blue arch followed after, sending a jolt of electricity through the monsters as they scattered as sludge across the sky. Using the momentum, she twisted the broom above her head, squashing the fourth like a particularly juicy bug.

"Come on, Dad!" Picking up her broom, Lydia broke into a jog, glancing behind her shoulder as Charles followed suit, still carrying the misshapen, iron ball. "Turn it into something!"

"Like what?!" Charles shouted, barely stumbling out of the way as a starry face burst through the surface.

Lydia skidded to a stop, golf-clubbing another monster and stomping in the face of another. "Dad, it just has to do damage! Like, a sword, or an angry raccoon, or," she let out a gasp, one of the star monsters inches away from her face. There was no way she could get her broom up fast enough.

Lucky for her, a baseball happened to smash its teeth to pieces.

The monster flew back, skidding to the ground with the ball officially part of its face. Lydia stood over it for a second, watching as the baseball dissipated into a purple mist.

"You said anything!" Charles snapped as he conjured a file organizer above a group before dropping it down on their unsuspecting heads. "I'm not exactly as creative as you or Beetlejuice, you know!"

"N-no no, it's good!" Lydia skipped out of the way of an entire mob's worth of monsters, suddenly enticed by the flashing purple crystal around Charles' neck. "They're all headed towards you--keep their attention and I'll take on Len!"

"Okay!" Charles' voice cracked slightly, rapid-fire summoning a number of office supplies to combat the creatures. God, but if things weren't so dire, this might've been hilarious.

"Le~en!" Hope you've been enjoying this little power trip of yours!" Lydia steadied her broom as she dashed forward, the path completely cleared of any obstacles. She took a running leap, broom held over her head as she aimed to slam it down on Len's head. "Cause I heard withdrawal's absolutely killer."

His cane appeared in the palm of his hand, deflecting a majority of the blow as the broom clashed against his. Sparks flew between the two as they squared off, Lydia on the offensive as she aimed to take Len's head off his shoulders.

With one hand behind his back, he managed to parry Lydia's onslaught, smirking the entire time. "Your technique is absolutely appalling."

Lydia's broom caught the hook of Len's can as she jerked down, sending Len's chin directly into her thrusting knee.

The baku spat on the ground, a mixture of black blood and a few chipped teeth pieces. "Petty victories, Lydia Deetz! It's all pointless in the end!"

Massive claws pierced through the cloud lining, managing to pull apart the uppermost part of the dream. Lydia could just barely make out the image of her room, a brief squig of panic overtaking her. As Len reached up, so too did the monster, the tips of its fingers just barely able to brush against the portal.

"Strike me if you'd like, but I'm still going to get to the waking world, you absolute--!"

His agonized shriek chorused with his monstrous form, shaking the very dream itself as the tips of his fingers severed.

# Chapter 9

## Chapter Summary

It's been almost two months after the event of the musical. Even with her new family of four, Lydia still finds herself dreaming of Dead Mom. But when a certain rat-bastard makes a guest appearance, the teen's not sure if this is just a result of tricky demon magic or something more.

## Chapter Notes

In which the final fight is upon us, but who's gonna walk out in one piece?

Lydia watched as the stumps plummeted back to the ground, glancing back up in time to see a set of luminescent threads stitch across the tear. "Yeah, about that," Lydia grinned as something flashed on the ground. A circle had suddenly lit up around the monster, more of the strings piercing the monster's flesh as it started to pull it back to the ground. Those beautiful, beautiful ghost-parents of hers managed to pull it off.

She suddenly let out a choked gasp, black tendrils crushing her chest. Lydia flew across the surface, pulled uncomfortably close to Len's face as the demon let out a snarl.

"You must think your so very clever," He hissed. "But it's all temporary measures, Lydia Deetz."

"Lydia!" Charles' voice was full of parental fury. He charged forward over a mound of star-faced monsters, only to be swatted aside by a wave of Len's hand. Lydia let out a shriek, trying desperately to turn her head towards her father before Len's fingers grabbed her chin.

"This could've been so much easier for you," Len grinned, finger caressing underneath her chin. "But, in the end, the bird found her way back into her cage."

He quickly recoiled as Lydia spat in his face, eyes filled with an uncontrollable rage. Then, much to Lydia's surprise, he started to laugh.

"What's so funny?" She wasn't sure if she wanted to know; something about Len's laugh was off. Unnerving.

Len wiped the spit from his eye, still chuckling. "Are you kidding, kid? That was a great shot! I would've never let you live it down if you missed from that range, though."

Dead silence hung between the two, only interrupted by Charles' pained coughing. Len's eyes were as wide as Lydia's, the grip around her weakened considerably. She couldn't help herself from grinning; thank you, tiny spark of hope. "What a weird thing to say!" she pointed out innocently. "So un-Len-like! Why, if I were to hazard a guess,"

"Shut up!" Len's fist tightened, causing something to break inside Lydia. "Can you even comprehend how utterly powerless you are right now?! Or are all breather's completely blind to Death when it stares them down?"

"Get your hands off my daughter!" An iron poker swung across Len's face, causing him to stagger back and release his hold. Charles was quick to gather Lydia up in his arms, the corner of his eyes already wet with tears. "Lydia, are you alright?"

Lydia gritted her teeth, refusing to cry because of this creep. She nodded, using Charles as support while she stood to face the demon.

An eruption of black goop shot around Len as he jabbed a finger at the Deetz, eyes oozing. "I'm going to make your last moments absolute torture!"<  
In response, Lydia let out a chuckling snort. "Nice stripes, slick."

The demon's attention snapped to his sleeves, slowly turning monochrome as that heartwarming pattern began infecting the fabric. He let out a choking shriek, throwing his hand around as if to try and shake off the print.

"Is it working?" Charles asked. "I mean, is Beetlejuice...?"

Lydia stumbled forward, abandoning her broom on the ground. "Come on, Beej! This guy's a total chump!"

"Shut up," Len hissed, cradling his hand as the stripes slipped further up his sleeve.

"You're seriously gonna let this tea-drinking biscuit have his way?" Lydia shouted. "You don't even like tea!"

The stripes jumped past Len's shoulder, his hair beginning to twist out in every direction. "Shut up!"

Lydia stepped right up to the dream demon's face, smiling from ear to ear. "Let's go home, BJ. No more sneaking around; I'll personally hand you our front-door key."

Len froze, head craning to look up at Lydia. Briefly--so very, very briefly--those black eyes of his flickered back to slitted green. Her heart jumped up into her throat, a hand reaching out to take the demon's. This was it. He was coming back. He reached out, trembling. Then, the demon snatched Lydia's hand, nearly breaking her wrist.

"You are not in control, Lydia Deetz."

She let out a shriek as Len threw her over the edge, nothing but empty air to catch her as she began to drop. Something instinctual managed to reach out and snag the rim of a broken water pipe, nearly yanking her shoulder from its socket. Lydia grunted, trying to swing her

other hand to grab it as she heard Charles yelling above. “Daddy!” There was a moment of clashing, a flash of purple and stars. It was all Lydia could do just holding on, feet kicking against nothing. Her stomach was in absolute uproar, head spinning.

Then, silence.

“Daddy?” Whatever hopeful tone she had was quickly swallowed back up as Len appeared over the edge. He held out his once-infected arm, the stripes peeling from the fabric and tumbling lifelessly through the air.

“You can’t pull out something that’s not there, Lydia Deetz.” Len said.

Lydia gritting her teeth, watching as the black-and-white stripes dissipated into a cloud of dust. “Don’t underestimate him.” she hissed.

“Ooh, did I strike a nerve?” Len laughed, hopping down onto the pipe. His toe drove into Lydia’s fingers, pulling out a pained yelp as she briefly lost grip. The other hand finally swung up, catching the pipe’s inside while her fingers began throbbing at her side. “Let me ask you something, Lydia Deetz,” the demon continued in a nonchalant tone. “Have you ever died in a dream?”

Lydia’s blood ran cold.

“I’ve never seen it happen myself,” Len went on, slowly pulling off one of his gloves as he looked skyward. The stitchwork was starting to break, its light fading with each passing second. “But I’ve heard if a breather perishes in the Realm of Subconsciousness, their physical body remains in the world of the living.” He reached his bare fingers down, gingerly brushed across Lydia’s. “I’d like to see that for myself, and thanks to you, I can.”

“Get your hand off me,” Lydia spat.

Len grinned, tongue darting between his lips. “This will be the only place you can say 'no' to me, Lydia Deetz.”

He barely managed to finish the sentence before punching himself square in the face.

If Lydia wasn’t dangling for her life, she would’ve done it herself. Her skin was still crawling from his veiled implication, but that was quickly pushed aside as Len kept punching himself. She watched his arm completely revolt, going from throwing slugs to choking him out. Len let out a gasp, stumbling back onto the top of the amalgamation’s head, but not before a third arm burst from his stomach and wrapped around Lydia.

And just as her fingers were ready to quit.

Both were flung over the edge, Lydia noticeably put down far more delicately as Len continued floundering on his back. The third hand patted her promptly on top of her head before snapping backward, knocking the wind completely out of the demon’s chest. He let out an agonizing cry, the only arm he had in control grabbing for something--anything--before managing to wrap around what was once a car’s rebar. That too promptly began beating him senseless.

Lydia only watched for a few seconds before her attention was pulled to someone’s muffled screams. “Daddy!” She spun around, finding Charles wrapped up in the black ichor. She slid to her knees, nails easily tearing pieces off as her father managed to shake off the rest. “Hang

on, I'll just--" She let out a gasp as Charles pulled her into a tight hug, his arms completely wrapped around her body.

"I thought I'd lost you." His voice was a trembling whisper, tears flowing down his face and soaking Lydia's shoulder completely.

That did it. Now Lydia was in tears, smiling like an idiot while she threw her arms around Charles' neck. "S-Sorry. But, you're stuck with me until I get accepted into Julliard."

Charles broke into wobbly laughter. He picked himself and his daughter up off the ground, pulling just enough away that she could stand on her own. His hand was still on her shoulder, a protective weight as the two watched Len get pummeled on the ground.

"What did you do?!" Len shrieked, managing to fight off his arms long enough to turn and face the Deetz'.

Lydia gave him an innocent grin. "What, moi? You expect too much from me." With her father by her side, she sauntered over to the dream demon, bending over as she pinched her fingers together. "You were this close, though! Almost had it all, kid. And then you crossed one of BJ's lines."

"Beetlejuice has boundaries?" Charles asked incredulously.

Lydia nodded, watching as all three arms snapped around Len's body. "He doesn't have many, so, it's impressive that Lenny-boy here managed to find one." She then put her hands around Len's face, lifting it gently so they were eye-to-eye. "You were right before; you shouldn't have gotten greedy."

A soft, pink glow began to radiate off her hands as she dug her fingers into his skin, yanking back with every bit she had left in her. An ethereal ripple ran across Len's visage, the demon letting out a pained yelp. "Dad, help me out!"

Charles' arms overlapped Lydia's, the color intensifying as he helped to pull. It was like watching a sticker peel from a hot surface; Len's body seemingly separated into a second entity, coated in a shimmering pink aura as it slowly exposed Beetlejuice's underneath. With one more heave, the tension snapped, sending the Deetz stumbling back. Lydia ended up falling over completely, leaving Charles to hold the dream demon by the scruff of his shirt.

"So," Lydia pushed back to her feet, patting her dress down with a sneer on her face. "You wanna do the honors, Daddy?"

Len's face paled as Charles' face mimicked that of his daughter's. "I've been waiting to take out this trash since I first laid eyes on him."

"W-wait--!" Len's voice jumped an octave, his body swaying uselessly in the air as Charles started towards the edge of the amalgamation. "Let's talk about this!"

"Ooh, sorry," Lydia crooned as she skipped alongside her father. "But that answer is incorrect! Lucky for you, we've got a fabulous consolation prize for our dear runner up." She

gestured to the multi-story drop below her. "Tell him what he's won, Daddy!"

Charles held the dream demon out, laughing. "Well, daughter dearest, he's gotten himself an all-expense, one-way trip to the ground!"

The baku's face blanched completely. "You want something! Every breather does! You've seen my power here--I-I could bring your mother back! No strings attached!"

Lydia grabbed the collar of Len's vest, any trace of playfulness gone from her voice.

The demon audibly gulped.

"Thanks," Lydia began coldly. "But I've got two others waiting for me down below."

Charles looked between her and Len, shrugging. "Couldn't have said it better myself." He slowly began to open up his fist, finger by finger. The dream demon's begging became more and more profuse the more he slid free until finally, Charles let go completely.

# Chapter 10

## Chapter Summary

It's been almost two months after the event of the musical. Even with her new family of four, Lydia still finds herself dreaming of Dead Mom. But when a certain rat-bastard makes a guest appearance, the teen's not sure if this is just a result of tricky demon magic or something more.

## Chapter Notes

In which Lydia's dream finally comes to a close; but will it in the way she wants to?

God, but it was just the most satisfying sight in the world. Lydia was grinning from ear to ear as she watched Len plummet to the ground. Oh, he tried to fight back, tried grabbing hold of something or use whatever little power he had left. But, that pink sparkle around him kept his arms tight at his side. She only wished she had her phone to document this precious, precious memory.

"Goodbye, now! See you next fall!" Charles called down, only to wince as a fist punched him in the arm. "What? Lydia, that was a perfectly appropriate quip."

"Daddy, I didn't...?" Lydia let out a delighted shriek as she watched a striped arm painfully wind back to the body of her favorite demon uncle-brother. It gave up about halfway, flopping against the ground like a dried-out hose; Lydia nearly tripped over it as she made a mad-dash across.

Beetlejuice was still sprawled out on the ground, very much looking like he'd been chewed up and spat back out. His suit was more of a wreck than usual, covered in still-dripping stains and torn around the edges. Somehow, he looked sicklier than usual, hair matted down and half-opened eyes holding the darkest bags Lydia had ever seen. But, he was smirking. He was okay; that much was certain.

At least, Lydia was certain, until he nearly hacked up a lung.

Beetlejuice jerked to his side, body spastic as black ooze spattered across the surface. The teen was quick to sit him up, patting his back while he got it all out. "You okay?"

Was she crying? Her face felt wet, hands trembling as she fought to hold the demon upright.

Beetlejuice snickered weakly, his unwound hand wiggled towards Lydia's face. He managed to get it up and around her shoulders like a feathered boa, finger poked lightly at her cheek.

“Aww...was widdle Wydia w-worried over the swupid wat-bastward~?”

His voice was hoarse, heavy with fatigue Lydia couldn't even begin to imagine. She let out a giggling sob, tears streaming in buckets down her face. It quickly devolved into sob, the teen throwing herself around the demon as she wrapped him up in a trembling embrace. He was back. He was back. The world could spin out completely, for all she cared; she had her best friend back and wasn't going to let go for anything. Even if Beetlejuice clearly looked uncomfortable during the entire, one-sided exchange.

O-Okay, I wasn't,” He looked completely beside himself, experimentally wiggling every few seconds to try and shake her off. “Holy crap; are you, uh, going for a world record, here?”

Lydia only hugged him tighter, head tilting up so she could scowl at him properly. “You are going to bask in this affection and like it, mister.”

The demon's face flushed, hair turning a similar orangey-pink. “Seriously, it--it wasn't that big of a deal.” He managed to stammer out.

“That's a bit of an understatement, Mr. Juice.”

Beetlejuice's hair briefly flipped to white as Lydia spun her head around. Charles had snuck up behind her and taken a knee (even now holding a good foot or two over the demon). He looked contemplative for a few moments, only to suddenly raise his hand. The demon visibly flinched, then, looked utterly befuddled as a cup of water appeared in Charles's grip.

Lydia held her breath.

The two just stared at each other, the tension thick enough to cut with a butter knife. Eventually, Beetlejuice made a move towards the cup, inspecting the water thoroughly before taking a sip. “Huh.” He almost looked disappointed. “You missed a golden opportunity to poison me, pops.”

Charles' expression was carefully neutral; Lydia wasn't sure if that scared her less or more. When he spoke, he chose each word precisely, like he was speaking to a new business partner. “Mr. Juice, I don't think I have to explain the numerous problems I have with you, especially when it comes to your influence regarding my daughter.”

All Lydia could do was grimace. Oh, God, it was like watching the Hindenburg go down.

“From our past interaction,” Charles continued. “You've shown yourself to be a reckless, selfish individual, who'd happily jump to murder if the opportunity presents itself.

“Yeah, that's not exactly,” Beetlejuice began.

“I'm not finished.”

The demon quickly tipped the rim of the cup to his lips, noisily--nervously--slurping the liquid down. He waved a hand as if gesturing for Charles to continue, though, it was likely to try and cover up his discomfort.

Lydia watched, somewhat stunned, as her father's expression softened. "I still trust you about as far as I can throw you, but I also just watched you fight tooth-and-nail to protect my Lydia from, and I say this with absolute sincerity," his expression flattened. "Someone who was more of a sexual deviant than you."

Beeltejuice nearly choked on his water. "W-wait, is that a compliment?" He asked.

"Beej," Lydia squeezed his shoulder, face strained. "Shut up. Daddy's trying to be," she paused, her heart skipping a beat. "Wait, are you trying to be...?"

Charles extended his hand toward the demon, nodding slowly.

Lydia forgot how breathing worked. Head spinning, she looked between her father and Beetlejuice, fists balled up and pressed against her chest to stop them from shaking. Holy crap, this was really happen. It happened plenty of times in her dreams, sure, but now she was dreaming and it was actually transpiring. Her father had some tiny, tiny respect for Beetlejuice--she would take it and run full-speed with it. After they were all safely awake, of course.

Beetlejuice, meanwhile, just stared at Charles' hand, face screwed up in confusion. "Gee, uh," He rubbed the back of his neck, hair flashing an even brighter orange. "I'd love to s-spot you, but, you know, my wallet disintegrated in that there demonic stomach acid, so,"

"Oh my God," Lydia grabbed his hand and forced it into her father's. Beetlejuice visibly prickled at the contact, flashes of yellow and white ran through his hair as the two shook hands. After a moment, the demon put some effort in on his hand, shaking Charles' back with a hesitant smile.

Only to suddenly lurch forward as the ground beneath them began to shake.

Charles' arms instinctively reached for Lydia, keeping her securely in place as a low moan rumbled throughout the monster. "What was that?"

Lydia held herself steady in her father's arms, glancing around at the quickly-crumbling surface. "Beetlejuice?"

Beetlejuice shook as violently as the next tremor. The poor demon looked completely disheveled, barely keeping himself together. "J-Just curious," he groaned, doubling-over on his hands and knees. "Was this eyesore held together by a certain British fuckwit?"

A sharp crack reverberated across the sky in response.

Lydia scrambled out from underneath Charles, going for her broom abandoned by the wayside. "Daddy--Beetlejuice--the amethyst!" There were too many immediate thoughts to process into a coherent sentence. Thank God her father was fluent in teenage panic-speak.

In one fluid motion, Charles slipped Beetlejuice's arm over his neck and held the amethyst outward. It shimmered dimly, flickered dangerously, then fell to pieces in the palm of Charles' hand. His head swiveled to the demon, eyes wide.

“Don’t look at me!” Beetlejuice protested. “You’re the one that wore it out.” He pushed himself free, wobbling a bit before managing to stand upright on his own. For approximately three seconds before the ground underneath crumbled away.

Paternal reflexes kicked in; Charles managed to snag the demon around his waistband, pulling him across before gathering him under his arm. “Beetlejuice,” He hissed between his teeth. “Lydia will have an absolute fit if you go and throw your life away now.”

“I don’t like people just unexpectedly touching me!” Beetlejuice shouted back.

“You don’t seem to have a problem grabbing others unexpectedly!” Charles snapped.

Beetlejuice's hair flared up, flashing between a bright red and pale yellow. “Hey, I at least keep my hands supple and warm; would it kill you to rub yours together first?”

"Could we not right now, you two?!" Lydia managed to dig the broom's handle into the creature as she straightened herself. "I don't need to watch your very fragile truce breaker faster than this thing is!" Her scowl quickly turned to panic as she lurched forward, her boom suddenly sinking deep into the creature's skull. "Ah, okay--the portal's still above us, so if you just get me through, I should wake up! And then there's no apocalyptic dream for the rest of you to be in, so you'll just go back to your own heads?"

The lack of response from Beetlejuice wasn't reassuring for more than one reason.

"Beej, please," Emily pleaded. "Daddy?"

Charles did his best to jostle the demon awake, only to yield closed eyes and shallow breaths. "Honey, he's not doing alright."

"I know that!" Lydia's voice jumped an octave, body suddenly heavy and exhausted. "But he knows more about the RoS than any of us, and if I slip up, it's going to get everyone killed!" She was so close; why did the world literally start breaking down when everything was finally going right?

"Lydia," Charles hoisted Beetlejuice up as he made his way to his daughter. "Sweetheart, this isn't all on you. We're going to figure this out together, alright?"

Not wanting to break down again, Lydia opted to nod.

"Good. Now, then, let's just think this out." Charles paused, suddenly snatching his daughter up as a giant fissure threatened to swallow her up. "Not an ideal circumstance, but our family seems to thrive under pressure." He shifted Lydia in his arm, trying to distribute weight between her and the semi-conscious demon. "Ah, okay--well, the Maitlands can fly, right? They can catch us!"

"Maybe? But I've seen first-hand how much ghost powers work here," Lydia began. "That is to say, they tend to not work at all."

Charles nodded, skipping back a bit as spidering cracks followed after him. "W-what about Delia's crystal? It could catch us before we hit the ground!"

"I have no idea if it'll protect us from fall damage!" Lydia said. "I've only seen it activate against demon attacks."

Another sharp crack brought forth a gaping hole, causing Charles to scamper back even more. He hefted his daughter farther up his hip, visibly wearing down from all the weight. "Sweetheart, you're giving me a lot of 'can't' right now. What happened to putting out positive vibes?"

He was right, but God, it was so hard to do right now. Lydia was tired, worn out, completely drained of any reserve hope. She just wanted to be home, in bed, past this awful nightmare. How was a fifteen-year-old supposed to handle all this? She could barely keep it together after that big fight with...

"Beetlejuice." Her head swiveled towards the still out-of-it demon. "Dad, you can wake me up!"

"What?"

The head of the creature began raining down in pieces. There wasn't much time left. "I can send you back with Beetlejuice--you can wake everyone up, and then me! No one gets left in my self-destroying dream, no relying on, a 'maybe' chance. There's no risk!"

"Except to your life!" Charles cried. "Lydia, for God's sake,"

"Kid," Beetlejuice got a hand on Lydia's shoulder and squeezed it weakly. "You can't. I--I'll I-literally kill you if," His voice caught, unable to look at her anymore.

"You two trusted me to get this far," Lydia rested her hand on both men's faces, trying to exude a reassuring aura. "I got this. Just, you know...don't be afraid to bust out an air horn or two."

One final, sharp crack echoed outward. The last of the creature's infrastructure had broken; they were starting to fall. Lydia gently pushed free of her father's embrace, giving a wave as both he and Beetlejuice reached out. "Beetlejuice, Beetlejuice, Beetlejuice!" They vanished with a snap, leaving Lydia to free-fall on her own.

It was almost surreal; she was literally watching the worst day of her life crumple to the ground. Ignoring the fact that becoming a comatose patient was a very real concern, Lydia couldn't help but get stuck in the moment. The Universe wasn't being very subtle about it, sure, but it felt like she was actually moving past this. It felt like...real progress. For what felt like the hundredth time that day, tears welled up in the corner of her eyes. God, she couldn't even imagine her past self imagining this as a possibility.

Just like that, her tears turned cold, heavy, full of regret and shame from past mistakes. She almost let herself fall like this.

She was almost okay with this.

A whimpering sob slipped out from the teen as the thought rolled around her mind. Even now, at the apex of her triumph over this day, something still pulled at her. Something still lurked at the darkest corners of her mind. Something still called her weak, told her she was

broken, said this was a hurdle she could never climb over. There was always going to be something; she was always going to be falling.

"But you've got a lot of someones to catch you this time, baby girl."

Lydia closed her eyes, the warm, heavy sensation all around her now. The words enveloped her like a blanket, just like she knew it always had.

She took a deep breath, ignoring the sensation of falling altogether. Counted down from three, slowly, squeezing the hand of someone she knew would always be there for her.

And, slowly.

Lydia Deetz woke up.

# Chapter 11

## Chapter Summary

It's been almost two months after the event of the musical. Even with her new family of four, Lydia still finds herself dreaming of Dead Mom. But when a certain rat-bastard makes a guest appearance, the teen's not sure if this is just a result of tricky demon magic or something more.

## Chapter Notes

In which Lydia awakes to a whole new world.

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

But she didn't wake up gracefully. Lydia was nearly pushed off the bed by the sheer number of hands trying to shake her awake. Her eyes shot open, greeted by four *very* concerned parental figures and one half-asleep brother-uncle.

"Lydia--!"

A collection of relieved sighs swept through her room. Everyone tried hugging at once, resulting in some weird, mishappen cluster of various arms and bodies squeezing up against her. Like a collection of puzzle pieces that didn't quite fit. "Okay, can't breathe," Lydia wince, her sides aching.

"S-sorry," Adam started out. "We didn't see you when that giant, Jenga monstrosity was coming down so fast,"

"And I couldn't do my ghost-hands, and I just kept picturing you and Charles," Barbara picked up.

"And Charles!" Delia swung her arms around her fiancé's neck, noisily kissing him against the cheek. "How did you ever manage to get *back* here?"

Charles simply turned to Beetlejuice, half slumped against the edge of the bed. The rest of the eyes followed suit as the demon lifted his head.

"Wh-what?" He asked with a nervous laugh. "I got somethin on my face?"

Lydia didn't even have the heart to jump on a prime, teasing opportunity. She was too busy watching her father; Charles had noticeably stiffened, expression completely unreadable.

How much did he actually mean back in the RoS? Was it just nerves--adrenaline--that made him show a brief squick of respect to the demon? "Daddy?" He was quiet for a moment, then tension tangible in the air. The Maitlands, Delia; everyone was looking at him now, a mixture of anticipation and exhaustion plain on their faces.

Then, Charles Deetz, a stiff man of business, with the paternal instinct and build of a God-damn gorilla, extended a hand forward. "I meant what I said," he began softly. "As far as I'm concerned, you're welcome in this house, Beetlejuice."

Lydia's heart felt like it could just explode. She gently pulled Beetlejuice's hand out of his back pocket, pushing the top of his wallet back within. "You mean it?"

"Within reason," Charles quickly added. "I'd like to know whenever he's coming. In advance."

The Maitlands exchanged looks, acutely aware that this was going to be a thing and they should really have some input to it. "Uh, and he can't stay late on weeknights!" Adam piped in.

Barbara nodded curtly, "Y-Yes! You can't just let school fall to the wayside, Lydia."

"I'd just like to know so I know to fix another plate," Delia added.

"And your door stays open if you two are in your room!" Charles' voice jumped slightly as he spoke. "And-and no interdimensional travel without asking one of us first. And--"

"Dad." Lydia gestured to Beetlejuice; his head had slumped over against the mattress, audible Z's fluttering out of his mouth as he snored. "You guys literally put him to sleep with all these rules and regulations. Can't we work out the details after breakfast? Or, brunch," she added, catching a glimpse at her clock. "Given how we seemed to have slept the morning-time away."

"Oh, Charles," Delia put a hand to her mouth. "The office--they're going to wonder why you didn't come in today."

A brief flicker of panic crossed Charles' face before he yawned loudly. "You know what? I'm taking a me-day today."

There was a collective gasp around the bedroom. "Wow, Charles," Barbara said. "I don't know if I've ever heard you say those words before."

"Hey, I think I deserve it." Charles' grin was tired, another yawn managing to slip out. "I doubt anyone at HQ ever had to duke it out with a demon, and with nothing but a stapler to boot."

"That's a sentence I'm disturbed to say feels commonplace, now." Adam slipped off Lydia's bed with a stretch of his arms, hand extended for Barbara to take. "Hey, why don't you and Delia go back to bed for a bit, Charles? Barbara and I can cook something up, and we can watch Beetlejuice and Lydia in the living room."

"Ooh, yeah!" Barbara drifted across Lydia's bed, clearly ecstatic to have her ghostly abilities back as she let herself be pulled into her husband's embrace. "Adam makes killer *crêpes au beurre noisette*."

"And with the *proper* amount of sage to boot." Adam added. "You guys are gonna freak. Promise."

Charles rose heavily, Delia following suit. He (attempted) to put a hand on Adam's shoulder, eyes shining. "Adam, I'd kiss you if I could."

"N'one's stoppin yah..." Beetlejuice mumbled in his sleep. He nearly rolled off the bed, caught by the scruff of the collar by Lydia.

"Before you head off to bed, Daddy...?" She made sure to put on her brightest smile, eyelashes fluttering.

Charles let out a sleepy groan. "If he bites me, I'm taking back every word I said."

---

After a few minutes of wrestling, Lydia had finally managed to get comfortable on the couch. Beetlejuice refused to lay out on one of the pull-out chairs, so here she was, slouched over on the end with her legs propped up on one the footrests. The demon's legs were across her lap, his entire body covered by one of the Maitland's old, heavy, Mexican blankets from the attic. She watched the couple cook up a storm in the kitchen, unable to stop grinning at their cutesy antics. "When do you think they got this thing, Beej?"

Beetlejuice's bones audibly popped as he stretched outward, like a cat trying to get comfortable. "It's probably their, 'first shag' blanket." He reasoned. "It's a very important keepsake, you know."

"And you know this from experience?" Lydia asked innocently.

That got a chortle out of the demon--a weak, wheezing one, but one nevertheless. "Haha. Nice."

Lydia shifted slightly, elbow propped against the couch's armrest as she rested her chin under her hand. She stared at Beetlejuice quietly, still processing that, yes, he was really here on her couch and not completely banned from her household. Or swimming in some other demon's stomach.

"Somethin on your mind, Lyds?"

The teen nodded slowly. "When isn't there, though?"

Beetlejuice's hand rested against this forehead, a loud groan escaping from his chest. "You're not still thinking about our fight, are you?" She didn't even get a chance to respond; pinching his fingers together, the demon started pulling what looked like an absurdly long list from his head. The paper bounced against the ground, rolling along the living room floor as he just kept pulling more and more out. "Cause, let me tell you, I had a lot of thinking time during my stay in Chateau-de-Fuckwit."

"Beej,"

"No, seriously," Beetlejuice tried sitting up, managing a half-slouch against the armrest. His hair was a myriad of faded purples and yellows; he really felt bad about this, Lydia realized with a start. "This is a pretty comprehensive list--I think you'll find I've included everything you were going to say, and maybe some things you didn't even think up yet. I'm pretty experienced in the field of disappointing people," he added nonchalantly. "So I'm expectin an A for this. Maybe throw a few pluses behind it."

Lydia managed to bend out enough to swipe the bottom have of the list. She held in her lap, watching the demon visibly recoil into himself, only to watch his eyes widen as she started crumpling up. "I'm not totally innocent," she said. "It takes two to tango, after all." Lydia tossed the list behind the couch without a second thought. "I wanted to prove you deserved to be here, but I ended up almost getting you killed, and for real this time." Her body flopped over, head gently settling against Beetlejuice's stomach. "Nothing and no one else shouldn't have mattered; I care about you, and everyone else can suck it."

Beetlejuice's hands move to push Lydia off, but, seemed to reconsider. They settled against her back, the demon's head resting against the armrest as he let out a sigh. "Okay, w-well," He maneuvered the blanket so it covered them both up. "I still think I should apologize."

Lydia lifted her head, waiting.

Beetlejuice made a face. "What? I said I *think* I should."

The teen snickered, arms wrapping around his waist. "For someone I consider to be a professional wordsmith, you *suck* at making people feel better."

"Hey, actions speak louder anyway." Beetlejuice let out another yawn, hair faded to a neutral green. "And making people feel better is what crêpes are for--jab me in the ribcage when they're done, yeah, Lyds?"

Lydia nodded, her own head settling back onto the demon. It took a few minutes for his breathing to slow, a gentle in-and-out that suggested complete and utter peace. Her eyelids grew heavier with each passing second; she curled her legs in, nuzzling into the blanket's exterior.

Lydia had a feeling that, even with everything she'd seen and all she could imagine, there wasn't a single thing she could dream up that could top this moment.

## Chapter End Notes

Oh my God, it's finished! This is one of the first fics I've written in a number of years and I'm just thrilled at the response it's gotten. I'd like to thank MY bffff for life, AmberAstra, for throwing me into the wild world of Beetlejuice the Musical. This has seriously helped loosen up my writing muscles and given me a whole new drive to write for myself.

Time to get sappy; I recently lost my job in a field I thought I was supposed to do. I didn't know really what else to do--I'd gone to four years of college for this--so I started taking writing commissions for whoever could pay. It was hard to find the time and drive to write my own story ideas, especially when it seemed like the Universe didn't care about my own stuff. But finishing this massive, 20K+ story is proof that a passion project can get finished.

So thank you, everyone! This is a subject I've still got tons of ideas for, so stick around for the next installment~!

Or I'll kill yah myself~

Please [drop by the Archive and comment](#) to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!