

Romeo's room was still, steeped in the quiet of a house at rest. A soft draft stirred the curtains where pale morning light seeped in, brushing across stacks of books, a half-finished sketch on his desk, and a mug gone cold hours ago. The only sound was the steady rhythm of his breathing, deep and even, his face buried half in his pillow. Peace clung to the space, the kind that made the whole world feel paused.

Then the spell snapped.

**♪"And all you gotta do is say my name three times. Three times in a row, it must be spoken unbroken. Ready?"♪**

The Broadway track blasted through a large speaker that now sat in the center of his floor, so sharp it rattled a few knick-knacks off his shelf. Romeo jerked upright, hair sticking up in every direction, the blanket twisted like a noose around his waist. He blinked wildly, half-convinced he was dreaming—until the bed rocked beneath him.

Riley landed in a perfect crouch at the foot of his mattress, already in full Lydia Deetz attire from the play. A spunky gothic black dress with the frilly collar, black bobcut wig, goth lace trights, and combat black boots.

And then—*she sang*.

As though she were fresh off tour, Riley sang with the grace of a swan. Her voice melded with *Sophia Anne Caruso's* on the track, crisp, clear, sharp with attitude, like she was back under Broadway lights.

**♪"You're so smart, a stand-up bro!  
I'll think about your offer, let you know!  
But I prefer my chances down below!"♪**

Romeo's jaw slackened as she hit Lydia's first verse flawlessly, pointing at him like the spotlight had found him instead. She even flung herself into a dramatic spin without missing a note, dress-skirt flying.

"Riley—what are you doing?!" He sputtered, trying to push away from her stomping boots on his mattress.

"Wake-up call, little brother!" She belted between lines, before sliding seamlessly back into character, gesturing grandly like the whole bedroom was a stage.

Romeo couldn't stop staring. The ridiculousness of the outfit, the sheer *commitment* in her voice, the way she filled the tiny room like it was packed with

an audience. Despite the assault on his morning, despite himself, a grin broke across his face.

"You're impossible," he muttered, shoving at her arm even as laughter slipped through.

Riley only grinned wider, tossing his hair with one hand, singing into an imaginary mic with the other. She was Lydia, Broadway star, big sister, and utter chaos incarnate—all rolled into one.

And Romeo, shaking his head, couldn't help but laugh with her.

Romeo finally managed to wrestle his blanket free, still blinking groggily at the spectacle on his bed. "Okay, okay—seriously, Riles, not that I'm not thrilled, but *what are you doing here?*" His voice cracked halfway, still caught between sleep and disbelief.

Since she'd moved back to Skire after her promise at the Canival, these types of mornings weren't as impossible as they once had been. Most were calm and filled with good food and nice morning chatter with her. But others were as crazy as this. Umbra suffered under the same fate. They loved their big sister, but sometimes she could be a bit much.

Riley struck a dramatic pose at the end of Lydia's verse, one hand to her chest, the other extended toward him like she was about to whisk him offstage. Then she grinned—big, unrepentant, mischievous.

"What am I doing here? *Saving your life*, Ro! You've got a *huge* month ahead of you, and we can't have you stumbling into it dressed like some background NPC. No, no. We're finding you the perfect outfit."

Romeo rubbed his eye, narrowing it at her. "For... what exactly?"

"The *Halloween party*," Riley announced, as if it should have been obvious, flicking her bobbed wig with a flourish. "The one *I'm throwing*. Front page of your calendar now, thank you very much. Costumes required. No excuses."

Romeo groaned, flopping back against his pillow. "You woke me up with Broadway—in *costume*—for clothes shopping?"

"Correction," Riley shot back, hands on her hips, gesturing her hand to herself, "I woke you up with *art*. And yes, because this is *important*. Do you really want to be the guy in a hoodie like Umbra while everyone else is slaying the night? I don't think so."

Despite himself, Romeo chuckled, muffled by his pillow. "You're insane."

Riley grinned, victorious. "And you're coming with me. So get up, Stargazer—we've got some haunting to do."

Riley bounced off the bed with theatrical flair, her Lydia dress flaring as she hit the floor. With a press of her fingers, the music cut off, leaving behind the soft hum of morning silence. Romeo blinked, still tangled in his sheets, watching as his sister beelined for his closet like a predator catching the scent of prey.

"Riles—no. C'mon," he whined, ears twitching as she flung the doors wide.

"Oh-ho, what do we have here?" She sang, rifling through the racks. "Stars, stars, *more* stars..." She tugged out a dark jacket embroidered with constellations, then a shimmering shirt spattered with tiny silver dots. "Romeo, darling, is this a wardrobe or a planetarium gift shop?"

"It's called a theme," he said defensively, pushing his blond locks out from his face as he sat up. "You've got costumes and stage wear, Umbra's got hoodies, and I've got... *the stars*. Balance, Riles. Balance."

She turned, arms already loaded with glittery, cosmic-patterned clothes, and gave him an unimpressed stare. "Balance? Sweetheart, you look like you mugged the night sky."

Romeo laughed despite himself, flopping back against his pillow. "That's the point!"

"Not for *Halloween*, it's not," Riley countered, tossing the stack onto his bed with a dramatic huff. "This is my party. And you, my dear Stargazer, are going to turn heads. We are not recycling the Milky Way again."

Romeo groaned, dragging a pillow over his face. "You're crazy."

"Nope," she said brightly, plucking the pillow away and tossing it across the room. Something clattered—*oops*. "I'm *your big sister*. Which means step one: Coffee. Step two: We hit every shop in Skire until we find you the perfect look. Something new. Something bold. Something that doesn't make you look like Orion's closet threw up on you. And I don't care if it takes *days*, Ro, we'll get you that damn costume and you're gonna fuckin' love it."

He tilted his head up at her, smiling through his protests. "You mean you're gonna make me try on a million things until I break down and agree to one of *your* ideas."

Riley smirked, finger-gunning at him before diving back into the closet. "Exactly. Now, let's get you dressed—we've got a mission, starlight."

And as though he knew he wasn't getting out of this, Romeo slid out of bed at last, rubbing the sleep from his eye as Riley continued to dig gleefully through his closet. Shirts were already sliding off their hangers, jackets strewn across the floor in constellations of fabrics and sunset to twilight colors.

"Riles," he said, voice dry, "you *are* going to change before we go out, right?"

She froze for half a second, still holding one of his sequined star-print blazers. Then she turned slowly, a grin spreading across her face like a cat caught in the cream. "Why? Don't you think Skire is ready for *Lydia Deetz* at ten in the morning?"

Romeo snorted, dragging a hand through his messy hair. "Ready? No. Traumatized? Definitely."

Riley just winked, swishing the skirt as she spun dramatically back to the closet. "Good. That's the point."

*To Be Continued...*