

The landscape surrounding Umbra and Romeo was alien in every sense. The ground beneath their boots was rough, jagged, and uneven, dotted with crystalline formations that jutted out like the teeth of some monstrous creature. The sky above was a vast expanse of deep purples and blues, a backdrop to the strange, alien flora that grew here. Vines wrapped around rocks and twisted trees, some of which dripped with thick, gooey liquid, while others seemed to hum with an eerie, unnatural vibrancy. The air smelled faintly of sulfur, mixed with the pungent tang of something floral yet off-putting.

Romeo, however, was in his element. He was grinning like a kid in a candy store, his eye wide with excitement as he darted from one bizarre plant to the next, crouching to get a closer look at the purple flowers that oozed glistening goo from their petals. His fingers twitched with the urge to touch, as always, to poke and prod at anything and everything.

"Don't touch that one, Ro!" Umbra's voice cut through the quiet of the alien landscape, low and firm, as he stepped forward to catch up to his brother. He gave Romeo a pointed look. "That one's definitely poisonous. Remember what happened last time you tried that with those glowing mushrooms?"

Romeo paused, his fingers just inches away from the sticky flower, but he only grinned wider. "Come on, Bagel! You can't just say 'don't touch it.' I need to see if it's safe! Look at it! It's practically begging me to poke it."

"I don't care what it looks like," Umbra muttered, his eye narrowing as he scanned the strange surroundings. He was tense, still not quite comfortable in this unfamiliar, unsettling terrain. "Not everything that looks cool is safe, Ro. Some things are better left alone."

But of course, that wasn't going to stop Romeo. With a shrug, he crouched lower and gingerly touched the flower's goo-covered petals. The moment he made contact, the flower seemed to recoil slightly, but nothing dangerous happened. He chuckled, raising his hands in a mock surrender. "See? Nothing happened."

Umbra exhaled sharply, relieved, though he still felt the knot in his stomach tighten. His brother's unrelenting curiosity always kept him on edge. "You're lucky," he muttered under his breath, turning his gaze back to the horizon, where the jagged cliffs met the shimmering sea below.

Romeo bounced back up to his feet, grinning ear-to-ear. "You worry too much, Umbra. This is amazing! It's like being in the middle of an alien world. Look at this!" He waved his arms at the bizarre landscape, his excitement radiating. "The plants, the colors, the sky... it's all so different. Can you imagine what we could discover if we actually explored this place? It could be the next big thing!"

Umbra was having none of it. He crossed his arms over his chest, eye still scanning the strange terrain. His thoughts were elsewhere. "We should be doing something productive," he muttered, more to himself than Romeo. "You know, like actually investigating the—"

"Come on, bro," Romeo interrupted, stepping closer and slinging an arm around his older brother's shoulders. "We're here, together, right? You can't spend the whole time thinking about work. It'll still be there when we get back." He paused, looking over at the alien landscape again, his expression determined. "You need to let go sometimes, Umbra."

Umbra's face softened slightly, but the weight on his shoulders didn't shift. "I don't have the luxury to let go, Ro." His voice was quieter now, less annoyed, more resigned. "We've been through too much. I can't afford to waste time on things that don't matter. There's too much left undone. Too many loose ends."

Romeo frowned but didn't argue. Instead, he let the silence sit between them for a moment, watching the weird world around them as the wind rustled through the alien foliage. After a while, he nudged his brother. "I get it," he said, his voice quiet but sincere. "But you're here now. Let's just be here, okay? For now, at least."

Umbra looked down at his brother's hand on his shoulder, then over at the bizarre world stretching out in front of them. He wasn't sure why he had agreed to come. Maybe it was the guilt of not being there for Romeo. Maybe it was because, deep down, he wanted to be there for his brother, even if he didn't know how to fully let go. But for now, he stood there, feeling the weight of the quiet around him, the tension in the air slowly easing, just for a moment.

"Alright," Umbra said, the word feeling heavier than it should. "But we're leaving after this. No more detours."

Romeo grinned and let out a laugh. "Fine, fine. But we're gonna have so many stories to tell when we get back, you'll never know what hit you. Wait til the station hears that I even got you to the core in the first place! They'll love that! Imagine Riley's face—!"

With that, the two of them set off again, stepping further into the unknown, their bond stronger than the strange world around them. Even as Umbra still couldn't fully shake the weight of his responsibilities, he couldn't deny that, for once, being there with his brother felt like the right thing to do.