

HARBOR

Episode 7 - "Split"

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TITLE SEQUENCE**SCENE 1 - EXT. HARBOR STREETSIDE - AFTERNOON**

The door to Slate closes with a tinkle, but not before Valen can call back.

VALENTINA:

Thanks again, see ya! Don't work too hard! Enjoy your day, ah, another day in paradise-!!

SAM:

Bye, guys! See you later!

The door shuts. Valentina, Al, Crux and Sam all are walking back, along the road to the Station.

AL:

You're gonna make the barista's choke on all those good vibes you two shove down their throats.

VALENTINA:

Grumps all around me. Nothin' but grumpy fuckin' grumps. Bit of advice, when the world is gone to shit, it never hurts to push a little kindness back into it. Sam, you got those drinks-

SAM:

Yes ma'am. Here, Crux, your Red-Eye-

CRUX:

Thank you.

SAM:

A bit intense, isn't it?

CRUX:

I'm an intense person, I suppose.

SAM:

Hah, sure, uhmm... Al, extra caramel, extra whip iced latte.

AL:

Yesss, thanks, bro.

SAM:

And to our gracious Ground Crew Director, your soy latte?

VALENTINA:

Hang onto it, if you could, Sam, I got all the other drinks to carry..

SAM:

Oh, no, let me grab those for you!

NARRATOR:

Sam swooped in and wrangled the tray away from her as they past back into the upper neighborhoods- kudzu and ivy strangling the charmingly.. *dirty* brick houses.

VALENTINA:

Oh, well, uh... Thanks, Sam. I'll hang onto William's and mine, then.

SAM:

No, Thank *you!* For treating us all... It's a great start to the week.

VALENTINA:

Not a thing, don't mention it, ever again, might've stolen the department credit card- So, is everyone drinking? I have some... less than stellar news... Eh, come on, drink, before I get into it, I'm givin' you every chance to not shoot the messenger.

CRUX:

I'm sure it's not as bad as all that.

VALENTINA:

(Stifling a nervous laugh)

Liar... Becker's staying another week.

CRUX:

Mmm... right, ok...

VALENTINA:

I know it's not doin' wonders for, uh, *tension*.

CRUX:

(Pained)

It's fine,

NARRATOR:

Crux turned about-face, lifted up his surgical mask, and took an enormous swig (*A horrible, weird slurping gulp*), before letting the mask snap back into place and spinning around to join the group again, hair ruffled.

CRUX:

It's fine...

VALENTINA:

Al, you're quiet for someone who can't help but openly deride our darlin' boss.

AL:

He hasn't had a chance to *really* sink his teeth into us yet... you think he'd let that slip by?

SAM:

(Low)

That and you eavesdropped...

AL:

(Low)

Hush up.

SAM:

What is he doing here so long anyway? Doesn't he have responsibilities at the State Capitol?

VALENTINA:

Well, in places like Raleigh they don't have a ton of Cryptid interaction, the culture of the city revolves around humans to such a large degree that there's not a lot to do, aside from exceptional instances. My guess is he's mid life crisis-ing and jumped at the chance to... Aaah, get away from the hustle and bustle of city life. *(Drinks)*

SAM:

So we're not going to go over the, uh, "thing" between him and-

VALENTINA:

(Swallows)

-NOPE, we aren't, *Sam*. I take my fellow Director's wishes quite seriously, and I'm gonna stick to that habit, thank-you-very-much. Cause I'm a good friend.

CRUX:

You are.

VALENTINA:

(Touched)

Oh! You bright star. Speaking of, *Crux*, do you want to trade desks with *Al* for the rest of the week, cut down on some of that turmoil exposure?

AL:

I'm fine with that, whatever you need.

CRUX:

(Laughs sheepishly)

William depends on me...

VALENTINA:

Poor guy... so goddamn bad at answering phones... He'll get better... *(Slight smile)* He's got enough energy to make it happen. He's gotta.

SAM:

Dealing with people remotely is an art.

AL:

That and ya can't get into fist fights over the phone.

CRUX:

I've gotten into some tiffs over email before.

AL:

Cause you're so vicious. *(Snickers)*

CRUX:

(Giggles)

Watch, one day the fangs *will* come out, then you'll be sorry you doubted.

SAM:

(Jumping in)

Oh, no, I'm terrified!

They stop laughing.

CRUX:

I'm sorry, Sam, I didn't mean to make you uncomfortable. I don't actually have fangs-

SAM:

No, no, you-you didn't... I was... making a joke.

CRUX:

Oh. Yes. No, I understand now. I don't know you very well, and am not familiar with your... humor. I should make more of an effort to acquaint myself with you.

SAM:

If you want.

CRUX:

It's only right. We're working together.

VALENTINA:

(Fit to burst over the formal awkwardness)

Wow, alright, look at that camaraderie, I'm so proud of all
ya'll... smooth like butter...

SCENE 2 - INT. DOCA - AFTERNOON

The front door to the DOCA shuts, Al and Sam bringing up the rear of the party.

AL:

Thanks for holdin' the door, bro. ... And ya got them drinks for the other Directors?

SAM:

Yep.

AL:

Heh... got somethin to prove there, bud?

SAM:

Just let me be helpful.

AL:

Ok, ok! OH, and make sure Sedum gets the credit card- right there with his tea. He's a mess when it goes missing. Ok, bye!

SAM:

Ok! Ok... Which to go in first... The one who openly hates me or the... weird room... Eeeeh, hate.

He knocks on Roose's door. A moment, she opens it.

ROOSE:

You bear my boiled milk?

SAM:

... Director Roose, I know I have no place to comment but-

ROOSE:

My ways are not your ways.

SAM:

Ok, please take it.

She sips carefully at her drink.

(Cont.)

... Aren't you going to... get back to whatever it was you were-?

ROOSE:

No.

SAM:

Right.

NARRATOR:

He turned to knock on Management's door, Roose continuing to peer at him, a few moths wriggling to freedom from her skin.

He sighs and knocks. Someone comes from behind.

AL:

Get ready, Sam, we have a call.

SAM:

Already?

AL:

Don't worry, you'll like it- about books and stuff. Hey Roose, enjoying your *milk*?

ROOSE:

I'd enjoy it better out of your mug.

AL:

Fuck off- AH, moths!!

NARRATOR:

Al stumbled back, swatting at the assaulting insects fluttering around her face, freed from birth.

Al struggles against the insects, Roose laughs and drinks. The door opens.

SEDUM:

(Startled but not energized enough to care) Ah... Why are you all around my door... ?

SAM:

I have your tea, sir.

SEDUM:

I didn't request-

AL:

Valen made the decision for you.

SEDUM:

(Sighs, relenting)
Alright... Oh, *there's* the credit card...-

BECKER:

-Sam, the collegiate! On the ball; you have my coffee?

SAM:

Yes, right here.

BECKER:

Can always count on you.

NARRATOR:

Becker tipped the cup but missed his mouth, sending a dribble down the front of his shirt.

BECKER:

Dammit, augh, hot- Lucky I wear coats with how often I spill here...

SEDUM:

It's the altitude. It takes adjusting to being up this high...

BECKER:

(Chuckles, though a bit wryly)

Yeah, of course, 2,000 feet above sea level being so high. What do you call it after a week, "Altitude Sickness 2: the Revenge"?

AL:

Hey, Becker-

BECKER:

Hold everything. Is it my birthday- you're willingly talking to me, Al, it must be!

AL:

Wonders never cease. Crux, Sam and I are going out for a call. Ya wanna join in- it'll be a helluvah lot more interesting than hanging out here.

SEDUM:

(Inhaled sharply)

No, absolutely not-

ROOSE:

(Overpowering)

-What call.

AL:

There was a break-in at the library last night.

SAM:

What? Why would anyone do that in Harbor?

AL:

Dunno, but it's weird enough to investigate.

SAM:

We might run into mom...

AL:

I got us covered.

NARRATOR:

Al pulled the bill of her baseball cap lower over her eyes.

SAM:

So... Very incognito of you.

AL:

Yeah, well you never wear hats, so-

ROOSE:

The small Greer will not be going with you.

SAM:

What??

AL:

Why?

ROOSE:

A break-in carries residual violence. We wouldn't want him to get spooked.

AL:

Roose, that's ridiculous. It'll be fine.

ROOSE:

He is a walking liability. No.

SEDUM:

(Low, aside)

Becker, if I may, y-you wouldn't find it interesting- best to stay here, all around-

BECKER:

(Low)

Oh, you're telling me what to think? You know me better than anyone, don't you? *(Raising his voice)* Anything get stolen, Al?

AL:

Books. It's a library.

BECKER:

Isn't that their business model, anyway? Count me in. It's been a while since I've been able to go out with the Rangers.

SEDUM:

(Last attempt)

Al? Can I talk to you? For a *tic*?

NARRATOR:

Al cut through the swath of bodies, before Sedum closed the door behind them.

The door closes. A moment.

(Cont.)

Becker suddenly snapped his fingers and pointed at Roose.

BECKER:

Elder Seraphic, right?

SAM:

What?

BECKER:

Her class- there's so few of you, but I still got it. Right? Tell me I'm right.

ROOSE:

If you wish to keep functioning with the portions of your brain you rely on, you'll settle for wondering.

BECKER:

I'll take that as a yes.

SAM:

Neat.

SCENE 3 - INT. SEDUM'S OFFICE - AFTERNOON

The entire conversation is whispered.

SEDUM:

What're you doing?

AL:

I saw an opportunity- You need a break. I'll take him out on the town- Show him a good time. Eugh, gross-

SEDUM:

Have you cleared this with Crux, perchance?

AL:

He doesn't care.

SEDUM:

You may be underestimating Becker. He's been doing this for a long time, he's experienced... quite a bit! Whatever you're attempting to prove to him-

AL:

I'm trying to give you a little time to yourself today; enjoy an afternoon without him loomin'.

SEDUM:

(Irritated)

I understand that what you're doing... is intended to be gracious. But you're overstepping. I don't need you or anyone else trying to "fix" this. It doesn't need fixing.

AL:

(A little baffled)

You're not yourself, Sedum! I mean, there's you being stressed, but, then there's... this. You're rattlin' outta your bones.

SEDUM:

That's neither here- Look, as long as I can see him, he's distracted-

AL:

From what?

SEDUM:

(Sighs, anxious)

I-I-I-I don't trust him around you, alright? He's better kept preoccupied.

AL:

So he's predatory.

SEDUM:

No. He wouldn't have set *foot* on this- *(Breathes)* No. He's... Al, please believe me when I say this- We simply have to wait him out. This is too much for you and Crux to handle- we have to convince him to stay-

AL:

If you're talking about his ominous mutterings about you, don't worry. I don't listen. Are you going to drink your tea or not- it's getting cold-

SEDUM:

(Sickened)

Oh God, the muttering, I forgot- He's *muttering* now...!

AL:

That doesn't matter, what does is that he's not gonna move without some pushing, at the very least away from you. Let me push!

SEDUM:

No, this is all wrong- (*lower*) you're supposed to stay safe-

AL:

-He has to see how we don't need him.

SEDUM:

(*A quiet prayer*)

Oh, God help me... (*Whispered at Al*) Don't do this to protect me.

And *don't* do anything rash, or-or if he tries to rile you,
don't... *Lord*... As though you can be stopped...

AL:

You can't ask me to stand by while you take his harassment. I'm
not doing this to hurt you. I'm *helping* you.

SEDUM:

(*Frustrated, but giving up*)

Maybe!

A moment, this is something that has been eating away at Al.

AL:

... Just so you know, I didn't say those things Glenda had on that
recording. Last week. I mean, I did say them, but she chopped
them up to fit her prerogative. I was defending you.

SEDUM:

... I know. Of course I know. It wasn't terribly convincing.
(*Sighs*) *Please* be careful today.

AL:

I need you to know that I have your back.

NARRATOR:

Al pushed down the tiny squirm of regret in her esophagus. He
pressed his long fingers over his four eyes, nodding. She
grabbed his forearm above her head, awkwardly squeezing around
the duster sleeve, a graceless gesture of affection. He spread
his fingers, a twinge of softness creasing his free eyes.

AL:

I do, I always have your back.

SCENE 4 - INT. GLENDA'S OFFICE - AFTERNOON

Glenda is working, a slow tick of a clock in the stuffy room.

GLENDA:

... But if we arrange a tourin' show for the Midsummer Craft Fair, then, that'll increase us... hell, how much can musicians legitimately ask for tootin' up on a stage...?

Her phone buzzes in, and her secretary's voice comes in over the line.

KEVIN VO:

Ah, Mayor Dickson?

She clacks the button back.

GLENDA:

What, Kevin? Mayor's busy.

KEVIN VO:

Ma'am, you have a 3 o'clock with the, the, uh, *that* Department?

GLENDA:

Oh, is the Frankenstein skulking out there?

KEVIN VO:

No, ma'am, that's the problem, there's... there's no one here, and that's making me nervous-

A scratching at the window.

GLENDA:

What in the- Oh, God *damn* it.

NARRATOR:

A spindly shadow had squeezed itself onto the tiny, third floor balcony, overlooking the last and wealthiest portion of Main Street.

Glenda clacks the button again.

GLEENDA:

One of 'em's here, Kevin. Don't disturb us.

Kevin lets loose a little shriek. Glenda gets up and unlatches the window.

(Cont.)

Get in here, before you "accidentally" fall and pull me into some sort of sneaky litigation or someone sees you, God forbid!

Roose calmbors in.

ROOSE:

You would do well to show gratitude for my precise arrival.

NARRATOR:

For once, Roose wasn't bent double, free to stand at her full height in the vaulted ceilings. The sleek decor bled mahogany and navy blues, with a single pop of crisp white flowers on the desk.

GLEENDA:

Let's get this over with-

ROOSE:

Your cleanliness is satisfying. Rare is it, for such a dusty creature to have such immaculate standards. I do not laud you, however I shall resist damning you.

GLEENDA:

Enough pleasantries. Why are you here instead of Nuller?

ROOSE:

He has his talon's full, accommodating your smug man-boy from Raleigh. I am the only competent cog left in that smoking machine.

GLENDA:

... Good to know. Alright, sit or... hang upside down, however you're comfortable...

ROOSE:

Sitting.

GLENDA:

Fine. What's my weekly update?

ROOSE:

Your Eaton Factory remains a blight upon the landscape, attracting two incidents of occult summoning, but otherwise, accepting of it's sudden death. It sleeps.

GLENDA:

That doesn't matter anymore- what's the progress in finding the *The Pyre*?

ROOSE:

... With no further incidents, we cannot determine the identity.

GLENDA:

I saw claw marks, scorchin' and sabotage at my construction site. Now I don't know whose more likely to have an arsonist with claws and dirty little ideas more than a certain subgroup.

ROOSE:

How dare you- Of *COURSE* it's Cryptid involvement.

GLENDA:

Then tell me *who*.

ROOSE:

I cannot pull a name out of nothing, no matter how loud you howl. You waste my time- release me from this "update".

GLENDA:

No! Let's figure this out, if you can't do your *job* yourself. Who can make little fires, hmm? Let's start there. Look at us, coupla detectives.

ROOSE:

If we are to think, then any resident here, considering that most beings with thumbs and sapience can accomplish the task. All with thumbs are now on trial.

GLENDA:

You wonder why I called that Mr. Becker down on ya'll's heads? Cause he'll get *something* done without protecting criminals for God knows whatever reason.

ROOSE:

The work he has done thus far has been mind-rending- It's evident how devoted he is to capturing your Pyre.

GLENDA:

If this investigation continues to stall then I can always defund the shit outta your operation. Get the police to do a sweep of every Aberration household here, it wouldn't take but a minute. See which nasty trailer goes up in flames first.

ROOSE:

I was here, doing what I do before this Department sprung up, I will be here after it decays. You remember the shrieks in the forest... you remember the Bone Snake of Harbor. You remember my obligations before I was *chained* in contracts.

GLENDA:

You remember my .45?

ROOSE:

(*Low*)

Release me, then. Your bullets against my unbridled jaws.

GLEND A:

(Also hissed)

... Oh *darling*, I would but I have a craft faire to prep for in July.

ROOSE:

Oh. My clients like the craft faire... AFTER, THEN.

GLEND A:

Yes, I'll tear you down in Sept- Oh wait. Damn, then it's the Harvest fest and Halloween week to prep for...

ROOSE:

What about in November...

GLEND A:

Then that's the holidays, no... No, no... earliest I can really *focus* on torching ya'll is... *(She's flipping through her calendar)* January. If I'm supposed to lobby shutting you down by myself, which, let's be honest, if you want it done right...

ROOSE:

Do it yourself.

GLEND A:

Exactly.

ROOSE:

THEN I SHALL WAIT FOR JANUARY TO WREAK MY FURY ON YOU.

GLEND A:

(A growl)

It'll get pencilled in.

SCENE 5 - INT. LIBRARY - AFTERNOON

Crux wrenches open the library door with a soft tinkle of bells. It's very quiet in the library, only hushed flipping of pages and intermittent whispering.

CRUX:

Here is how we proceed- Al, photograph the entry-point, and see what samples we can take back, if any... I'll speak to a librarian about what precisely was stolen, and then we leave. This most likely isn't anything more than a run of the mill break-in, so we shouldn't waste time. And Mr. Becker. Not many of the staff members are fully aware of DoCA operations, we must be delicate in our investigation.

BECKER:

Not my first rodeo, Cruz.

They all make their way across the space.

(Cont.)

This is bigger than I expected. Huh. You have computers here. That's somethin' for a redneck town.

AL:

Our Head Librarian is very good.

CRUX:

Ah- damn.

NARRATOR:

At the very back, along the row of old windows, one of which was half cracked with a neat hole the size of a baseball, a team of police milled about.

CRUX:

We'll wait.

BECKER:

Don't tell me they don't *know* about us-

AL:

They do. They're just fuckers. (*Hisses, suddenly*) *Shit...*

NARRATOR:

Al ducked into a nearby row, pushing her hat lower.

BECKER:

Language, Al.

CRUX:

(*Alert*)

Your mother's here... It's alright, I got it covered-

BECKER:

(*Stifles a laugh*)

That's right. You're all so cozy- it's cute.

AL:

(*Suddenly intense*)

Becker, listen,

NARRATOR:

She pressed herself inches away from his face, the brim of her hat almost colliding with his forehead. He blinked serenely at her as the fluorescent lights above them buzzed.

AL:

My mother doesn't need to know a thing about the DoCA and me.
She will *not* get involved in *any* way; we clear?

BECKER:

(*Surprisingly gentle*)

... I get it- Family first. You have to have your boundaries in this work.

AL:

... Yeah.

BECKER:

Where's she at, kiddo?

AL:

... Front desk, short hair, glasses.

NARRATOR:

Becker peered through a gap in the books- Behind the front desk Leah spun around, pushing her reading glasses higher on her freckled nose. A smile crept over his lips.

CRUX:

... What is that, what am I feeling you feeling right now-

BECKER:

I'll gather intel. Hang back, Crux.

AL:

(Desperate) No- no-

BECKER:

Wish me luck- you just might get yourself a new step-dad, kiddo.

AL:

(Hissed viciously)

GET BACK HERE.

CRUX:

He's actually doing it.

AL:

I'm gonna kill him. I've done it before, I'll do it again.

CRUX:

I've never seen anyone attempt to flirt with Leah before.
Astounding..

AL:

(Strained, manic)

Crux! That's my mom.

CRUX:

I drove him here. Let me see him burn.

SCENE 6 - INT. LIBRARY - AFTERNOON

Leah is working on the computer. Becker strolls up to the desk.

LEAH:

Mmm, yes? Oh.

BECKER:

Afternoon, Ms.

LEAH:

Good afternoon. Who... are you? I don't believe we've met.

BECKER:

Brick Becker. Pleasure to meet you.

LEAH:

Leah Greer. We don't get many first-time visitors, so forgive me if I'm a bit rusty on the basics- Can I help you find anything?

BECKER:

No, I've been staying here a while... Thought I might look into the softer sides of Harbor. These socialist hold-overs... Something so intriguing about government facilities like this, isn't there? Pliant and... vulnerable.

LEAH:

... I suppose books are known for their flexible spines, aren't they. Anything else?

BECKER:

I couldn't help but notice your predicament, over there... What's that story?

LEAH:

Are you a law-man, Brick? With a suit like that, I can't help but assume.

BECKER:

That's quite perceptive of you.

LEAH:

Mmm, let's see some ID.

BECKER:

By all means.

NARRATOR:

Becker flipped open his wallet with a twirl, and jerked back suddenly, dropping it on the counter, and clutched his finger.

LEAH:

You alright?

BECKER:

Ah... *(Laughing)* Somehow managed a papercut on my bills...! I have quite of few of them, you see... Mmm- *(Sucks on his finger)*

NARRATOR:

Leah raised her eyebrows as he smiled tensely from behind his bleeding finger. His ID card sat in full display on the counter.

BECKER:

(Mangled by his mouth being full)

Satisfying? Leah?

LEAH:

What's Homeland Security doin' up here?

BECKER:

It isn't as scary as it sounds. I lead a subset Department within DHS. In the area for general maintenance, is all, nothing too urgent... Just some minor upsets worth a bit of my time. You

know how it goes. Anything is worth looking into if it gets you out of the city.

LEAH:

I wouldn't know.

BECKER:

Of course not. Who'd want to leave here? So what happened last night? Were you here? Were you out? Were... you on a date?

LEAH:

What happened was a theft. And I was at home with my son.

BECKER:

Hmm... family-oriented... Do you know how they got in? That cracked window is enough for a cat at most.

LEAH:

The backdoor. Lock-picked. And whoever it was knew how to duck our security cameras, if you were going to ask.

BECKER:

You're doing wonderfully, Leah. Outstanding. What'd they take? Computers look all accounted for.

LEAH:

Encyclopedias, some classics and children's books, from our records. Left a wad of money, too. But it's been taken in as "evidence". I'd appreciate that \$17 back.

BECKER:

... You know, Leah... I do happen to be a very powerful man.

LEAH:

I'm sure you are, Brick. But powerful enough to scrounge up some loose change?

BECKER:

(Flirty) Well, we'll find out, won't we? See if my face ends up red by the end.

LEAH:

It already is.

BECKER:

Oh? You got me there, Le-

LEAH:

You got blood on your lip.

BECKER:

Ah... *(Becoming bespotted)* I'll... see what I can do about your \$17.
Ms. Greer.

SCENE 7 - INT. DOCA - AFTERNOON

A knock on the door.

SAM:

Sedum...? I finished that binder you gave me-

NARRATOR:

Management's office door was ajar, with Sedum's chair facing away, as Sam hesitantly stepped into the dark room. The chair remained still. Sedum's hands were up, over his face.

Sedum is muttering, trying to work through his next move.

SAM:

(Quieter)

... Sir?

SEDUM:

(Muttering)

... No, it's *not* the same- it's been too long. I missed my chance... Not now, not in the middle of it; after he leaves, when I have time, when I can *focus*, then I'll ask for- no, I'll *beg*- It's all I can do for her-

SAM:

(Mouth dry, quiet)

... Sir?

NARRATOR:

Sam crept up to the desk, strewn with papers, the usual photo frames removed. Sedum's wings were wrapped around himself, closed from the rest of the world. Sam raised his fist over the tabletop, his throat dry.

He knocks, sharp.

SEDUM:

(A jolt)

Sorry! I'm sorry! ... Samson.

SAM:

Just me. *(Clears his throat)* Can I cut in?

SEDUM:

Oh... Uh... H-how can I help you?

SAM:

Just returning the second Cryptid wiki.

SEDUM:

The what?

SAM:

The reading you wanted me to do last week? On the local Cryptid population. Here, I finished.

SEDUM:

Oh. Yes, thank you. Ah... let's, let's get you started on your insurance paperwork, I can't believe I haven't done that- Very stupid, oh, so late- apologies, I'm so sorry- *(Rifling through a cabinet)* And I need your D13 forms- are you and Fergum going out soon?

SAM:

Already did. We switched up the schedule last week.

SEDUM:

Right, right, right. Then... read through the procedures on interviewing civilians, next, if you would-

A bunch of papers slip out of his hands, and scatter on the floor.

(Cont., sighs)

... Dammit.

NARRATOR:

They both ducked down and began to pick up the files scattered across the wood floor.

SEDUM:

Thank you...

SAM:

Hey, uh... can I ask a question?

SEDUM:

Mm? Yes, of course.

SAM:

... do you need a break? For a few days? I'm sure we could get on alright-

SEDUM:

I'm fine, perfectly fine. Samson, don't I look fine?

SAM:

... How much do you really prize honesty?

SEDUM:

I don't need a break. Thank you.

NARRATOR:

They stood back up, Sam slowly straightening out his pile, before hesitantly holding them out. Sedum grabbed ahold of the folders, but Sam's grasp remained firm; something overwhelming him to the point of bursting out without his will; Sam's eyes burning fierce, locking onto Sedum's-

SAM:

(Intense)

So self-sabotage is a hobby for you, then?

STRONG silence.

SEDUM:

(Aghast, shocked)

Excuse me, I must have misheard... would you care to repeat that?

SAM:

(Highly nervous)

... I-said-I'm-sorry-leaving-now-goodbye!

SCENE 8 - INT. DOCA - AFTERNOON

The door shuts behind Sam.

SAM:

I am so *fucking stupid*-

WILLIAM:

Sammy-boy!

NARRATOR:

William held himself up on a crutch in the kitchen, grinning enthusiastically.

WILLIAM:

Got a sec, ol' Sam-a-Lamb?

SAM:

(Loud)

Yeah. (*Meeting him in the kitchen, quieter*) What's up?

WILLIAM:

Just checkin'... Just checkin' up. How's your second week?

SAM:

... Fine, if that word means anything anymore... I can't even go out to the library, though. So that's demeaning. But I think there's some *bigger* prob-

WILLIAM:

THAT'S the kind of attitude I wanted to hear! (*Low*) It ain't a pretty thing to be stuck as the lowest man, and I gotta say, Sammy, I am right sorry for ya.

SAM:

Thanks.

WILLIAM:

But it's alright, ok, pal-

NARRATOR:

William grabbed him in an affectionate stranglehold.

WILLIAM:

I got a plan. You wanna know what it is? It's a bit risky, takin' me away from my receptionist duties- so I gotta know if you're in or out before I divulge, ya understand?

SAM:

You know, I don't have anything else going on and I don't think I can screw myself harder than I already have. What the hell.

WILLIAM:

GREAT. Ok, so, what if, you know, cause you're not doin' good, what if... I give you some... personality pointers? A leg up on how people operate around here, how to go with the flow, and when you need to break outta-

SAM:

Hey, I know people pretty ok, William.

WILLIAM:

(Stifles a giggle)

You just went for the throat on one of the most *STRESSED* people I know, with the door open. You're honest to God not doin' fantastic right now, Sam.

SAM:

Mmm, fair point, but it's just so frustrating- Ah, nevermind.. So why you? Not that I don't appreciate it-

WILLIAM:

I see you struggling, and I'm a giving fella. Do I need a better reason?

SAM:

But, I should be pacing myself. Focus on getting to know folks organically. That seems... right... Right?

WILLIAM:

Yeah, maybe if you wanna have to wait 4 years to actually get out there, like Crux! I mean I'd be lost without him, but, it is tellin'.

SAM:

I always got the feeling he chose reception?

WILLIAM:

Listen, when I first started here 6 years ago, h00000 boy, you would not believe how often I had to go out there and get my hands dirty on my own, asking for forgiveness later, ya know what I mean? It was hard work- but I got respect, I was out in the thick of it by my 3rd week, cause they *knew* me. Jived with me. And dunno if you know this, but, I was *pretty* good at it all, too. Caught the Director's eyes, which is saying somethin', cause they're all hard as heck to impress.

SAM:

Aw... *man*, I'm so sorry, William.

WILLIAM:

... Huh?

SAM:

You must miss it. I'm sorry you have to take a backseat for a while, but it can't last forever- You'll get better before you-

WILLIAM:

Oh. Um... Um, heh, yeah, thanks, Sam, that's... that wasn't my point but uh, that's... swell of ya... to bring up all those feelings...

SAM:

I'm sorry, I shouldn't have said anything- What's the matter with me- It's like word vomit-

WILLIAM:

Got-DAMN, I got so many complex EMOTIONS, I MISS IT SO MUCH. I'm scared shitless of it! (*Weakly*) Sorry for cussin'...

SAM:

Aw, it's ok.

WILLIAM:

I got nightmares- Everything kickin' my butt, tearing me apart- what the HECK is that about?! I was strong! I was strong... not strong enough to help Enfys- No, no, forget that, the point is I was top of my game- I was out there- tacklin' the problems with Valen- w-with Al, too. God there's nothing like it... I SHOULD'N'T BE ON THESE CRUTCHES! (*Softer*) I'm just a flaccid eel and they're all patronizin' me... Stickin' me behind that desk- or *worried*, I can't stand to see the frettin'.

SAM:

Oh, William...

WILLIAM:

It's been a helluva coupla weeks... Everything's changed... If you can let me do this- let me coach you- maybe things'll kinda go back to the way they were? I'd... be useful. I'd be me again. Sammy, you're so bad at taking charge, ya can read people but not a *room*- I can get ya there. *Please*, Sam. Let me do this?

SAM:

(A moment, low)

Ok. Show me how it's done around here.

NARRATOR:

William practically leapt out of his skin, grabbing Sam by the shoulders in a jerky bear-hug, his crutch almost capsizing.

WILLIAM:

You'll be able to take on the world, Sammy-boy!!

SCENE 9 - INT. LIBRARY- AFTERNOON

A camera snaps. Becker is chatting in the background.

AL:

(Muttering)

That fucking fuck. That fucking fucker fuck.

CRUX:

I notice you're choosing *not* to call Becker a mother fucker?

NARRATOR:

Al glared over her sunglasses at Crux as they bent amongst the shards below the cracked library window.

CRUX:

This escapade seems to have double backed on you.

AL:

Look at him. Smug asshole.

BECKER:

(In the background)

It's too urgent here. It is. We're too close on this Pyre situation... Well, even if it was over a week ago with no solid evidence except a fire-hazard farm incident- it's still more than we were digging up back there, isn't it, Nick...

A patron shushes him. Al walks around and snaps another photo, crunching on some glass.

AL:

I'll send him running with his tail tucked.

CRUX:

If you're looking for some help on Becker's weaknesses... I've felt something of use. Perhaps. (*Conspiratorial*) Something's peeling back the longer he stays. And I think it has to do with you, Al.

AL:

Oh give it to me, whatever it is.

CRUX:

He shifts when you're around. He gets... sad. That's the closest I can title it. It's disconcerting- Sadness and frustration wrapped up in fracturing control. Quite the cocktail.

AL:

What was he like on the ride over?

CRUX:

Just badgering about my mask and the emotional telepathy. Can't believe the idiot went and backed into a dumpster...

AL:

Good ol' asshole curse.

CRUX:

I wouldn't put it past him to have done it on purpose, just for the chauffeuring... (*A little spiteful*) I made him nervous, though. But it isn't the same with you.

AL:

Then I'll take him back. Let him be sad for a while, if that's what I make him... Hey, check this out-

She picks up a piece of glass.

(Cont.)

It's warped... What do you think?

CRUX:

Melted glass, it looks like- the edges are smoothed over.

AL:

Takin' it back to Roose... Maybe she knows...- *Heat*.

CRUX:

She knows heat?

AL:

No I mean, for glass to melt like this, how high would the heat have to be?

CRUX:

High enough to... burn gashes into concrete?

AL:

Probably even enough to light rocks on fire.

CRUX:

We're *definitely* take this back...

AL:

If this is The Pyre thing... why? A library break-in isn't a statement like Eaton was, it's a resource.

CRUX:

Maybe they're itching for light reading.

They place it in a ziplock bag as Crux continues.

(Cont.)

Al, I can't tell you what to do... but (*sighs, it's effort*) I'm not sure about you being alone with Becker. It's as though the giddiness and bitterness he emits around Sedum, it's like all that crashes into this... "mourning" vindictiveness around you- it is highly unstable. Do what you will, but I *am* offering-

AL:

I brought him here in the first place, which I'm... sorry for; You don't need anymore of his pawing.

CRUX:

... We could make him walk.

AL:

Oh no. I need to see him get as far away from my mom as possible.

SCENE 10 - LEAH'S CONDO - EARLY EVENING

The front door opens.

SAM:

Thanks for the ride, Director Ivers Hollow! G'night, William.

The car beeps.

VALENTINA:

See you in the morning, Sam.

WILLIAM:

Have a good 'un!

The door closes. Sam walks in.

SAM:

Mom? ... Mama?

He walks into the kitchen, a picks up a piece of paper.

(Cont.)

"Out until later..." Nice... cover in tact. "Hot date?!?!... JK. Out with the gals." *(Chuckles)* Aw, good for you, mom... *(He yawns)*

He shuffles into the living room and collapses on the couch.

(Cont.)

Just a quick nap, before she comes home... I'll make dinner later. *(Yawns)* Hell... Maybe... Maybe this time... No, just sleep, just be thankful for restful sleep... You don't need to talk to anyone else... As if he would...

SCENE 11 - DREAMSCAPE

In the dreamscape. This time it is completely dark. There's no sparks of light. It is quiet.

SAM:

(Wakes into the space)

Oh... God it's dark- *(Realizes)* Holy shit, J?? No way-

J:

Ah... you... you've arrived. I did call, after all.

SAM:

Where have you been? What-what happened? You do this like clockwork, then just up and leave for over a week? Did... did I do something wrong... ?

J:

No! Why would you think that?

SAM:

How could I not? I was... I was worried about you. I couldn't stop thinking- I could hardly sleep-

J:

(Melting immediately)

Oh... Samson... I'm so sorry.

SAM:

(A chill)
You know.

J:

Samson, I was away, because... (*Choosing*) I was and *am*
guilt-ridden.

SAM:

How do you know my name?

J:

I cheated. I didn't know I was at the precipice of your
identity, though in retrospect, that was... foolish. I would have
ran if I'd have known, truly. I know it is much to ask, but I
hope, I pray you may be able to forgive me?

SAM:

I should congratulate you, you got what you wanted.

J:

(*Revulsion*)

Ah, don't phrase it as such... This wasn't how I wanted it.

SAM:

How did you... cheat? I haven't seen you, out there. I feel like
I'd know if I did.

J:

You're right, I haven't seen you either, yet. I was reminded, by
someone. Talking with her. Smelling her. (*Chuckles*) I knew that
I knew you. But I was hoping we'd be able to meet, face-to-face
in the waking world... My sacrifice for you...

SAM:

Her... Who was it? My mom? My sister?

J:

The latter. You two are remarkably similar... The tie of genetic code is fascinating. I am sorry, Samson. I have been wracking myself, trying to find a way to repay you this insult.

SAM:

It's nothing, J.

J:

But you fear me, again. Obviously, your being is trembling, I bear it here as you bear it... Let me repay you.

SAM:

... What do you have in mind?

J:

Ah... well... I cannot "eye for an eye" this.

SAM:

So no full name for you?

J:

Not yet.

SAM:

Of course, I'm the fragile hummingbird, can't be trusted...

J:

With this opportunity, I want you to *fully* know my heart before taking that leap.

SAM:

I just want to be on equal footing.

J:

Does that lack in your present?

SAM:

I'm the little brother again. I knew this would happen with the others, but with, with you, J? You met up with Al, found out about me through her... I'm "Sammy" again.

J:

You hate that?

SAM:

God, no... I just... I don't know...

J:

Your relationships cannot help but inform you. Organic beings are a web, so tightly bound, seeping into each other's lives...

SAM:

And you're immune to that- nothing influences you?

J:

Not true. I have beautiful relationships with many creatures.

SAM:

Tell me what you are if you want to clear our score.

J:

(Laughs lightly)

You are eager and curious. It's a charming mix, one I must preserve.

SAM:

Just tell me no- I can take a no.

J:

I could... but it is harsh outside, in the waking world. I prefer gentleness. I ask that you let me.

SAM:

(Softening)

... Alright. I'm sorry.

J:

Will you indulge my own curiosity, Sam? As I think of a way to repay you?

SAM:

Sure.

J:

How do you find your new diversions? At the Department of Cryptid Affairs. Or have they reverted to the original now, that "Aberrational Affairs" title?

SAM:

Uh, no, it's still the first... most of the time... You know, I didn't imagine I'd find myself in something this interesting being *this* bored, with these... interludes of "AHHH". Everything's a test. Or busy work. Or confusing...

J:

I wonder why they would squander your mind.

SAM:

Especially if they thought I was going to solve all their problems... Al says it's not like that.

J:

And what's her reasoning?

SAM:

That it all takes time and to not rush it. My mom said the same thing- that I should take it slow and take care of myself.

J:

Hm. And you're unwilling to believe them.

SAM:

It all kind of tends to sound like they're telling me what to do, rather than listening.

J:

May I offer you some advice?

SAM:

(Sighs)

Go ahead, everyone else is.

J:

It will save you pain if you take to heart the wisdom of your family, specifically those who've made grand mistakes and pulled themselves from the wreckage. Unless you'd like to make some easily avoidable missteps of your own? Both Leah and Al nurture a deep love for you, and it would hurt them to see you ignore their efforts to help you. Would you want to cause that rift due to pride?

SAM:

(Relenting)

... No.

J:

Good. Then don't. That being said it is frustrating to stand by and watch these Cryptids take advantage of your need for work, if they will not utilize you. Duality exists, you can be in need of patience and they are can also be foolish... Simply *wasteful*.

SAM:

It feels like it... But that's probably not true... No, it's *not* true, I mean, think about it, it's been less than two weeks, this is just part of getting used to it... And they have stuff they're dealing with- *(Sighs, laughs)* We shouldn't assume people's motives.

J:

I do not think I am wrong.

SAM:

That's not the- I mean, well, ok, we barely know each other. I haven't even seen your face- That's not a two-way kind of

friendship. That's not knowing someone, how much less can you really do that with them- Then assume for-

J:

(Touched)

Sam... You... want us to be "friends"?

SAM:

Wha... yeah, I mean, yeah, but what the point is-

J:

(To himself)

... Hmmm. Most don't... ask to be close. I was right, to give him the opportunity...

SAM:

(Laughs)

J, listen. I like talking to you. You're interesting. And you have good intentions. You're also super cagey, but I'm sure you have your reasons... But, that's the start of a nice friendship, there... Maybe work on letting people surprise you?

J:

I... can attempt? But tell me again, truly, you want to be friends?

SAM:

(Laughing)

Yeah! I truly do.

J:

You brilliant light... I have found a way to repay you.

SAM:

Oh? What is it?

J:

A way to call upon me, outside. Do you like singing?

SAM:

Heh, I like hearing *other* people sing?

J:

Song isn't intended for perfection, but rather *expression*. I'll teach you one of my favorites. When you sing it aloud, I'll hear, no matter where, and I'll come to you.

SAM:

I... sing a song and you show up? That's that only way?

J:

I will also respond if you rattle a hollow log filled with seashells and cry into the night, but so will everyone else in the vicinity. This is more direct.

SAM:

Right, ok, I can sing, then. Promise not to judge too harsh?

J:

(Hesitant, taken aback)

Ah... Of course, yes. Follow along when you feel prepared, I'll repeat the first verse until you join in. "I left my baby lying here, lying here, lying here, I left my baby lying here, To go and gather blueberries... I left my baby lying here, Lying here"

SAM:

... Lying here, I left my baby lying here, To go and gather blueberries...

J chuckles, encouraging, bolstering Sam, who gets a little more confidence with their tandem singing as they repeat the verse.

SCENE 12 - INT. AL'S CAR - EARLY EVENING

Al is driving Becker back to his B&B, the car is quiet and the radio is low.

BECKER:

You know, I've never seen a town like this. Honestly. Don't get me wrong, I don't get out much now, but, wow... Aberrations having their own houses, they can drive.. It's unbelievable. And you grew up here, Al!-

AL:

Car rule, you use that word again, you're out.

BECKER:

Hm?

AL:

Use "Cryptid".

BECKER:

Oh. I hate to say, but it is their official title.

AL:

No Cryptid I've talked to likes it. Not mine to argue. Just use what they want, it's not hard.

BECKER:

Not until you're in charge of filing.

AL:

It means deviation from some supposed moral "standard". Implies mistake. *(Softer)* Cryptid's aren't flaws.

BECKER:

... I got into this around the same age you did, Al. I wanted to help, too. You don't mind if I reminisce a little?

AL:

(Muttered)

Oh, are we "connecting" now?

BECKER:

It won't take long. Five years in, with a wife and kid, Raleigh was in a bit of a crisis. I was Crew-Head, had my own squad of Rangers. I was ambitious.

AL:

You don't say, State Director.

BECKER:

(Half a laugh)

Not even close to what I became. 25 years ago, when I first started, you know how they trained us? They showed us photos of the aftermath of Humans getting in the way of... Aberrations. Usually bloody, sometimes worse. Or even just the interactions between- No anger, just... Humans inexplicably broken by the end.

Well, five years later, we got reports of something unprecedented- a *something* dissecting people's emotions, their relationships, their secrets- Something that was tangibly *there*, we saw the effects, but couldn't see *it*, and it picked apart our community, Al. We were unprepared. It was too sophisticated, considering the knowledge we had at that time- it wasn't physically violent, but mentally. We were more than lost.

AL:

Riveting, we're getting close to your B&B.

BECKER:

I interviewed the 4 victims. Community leaders, once well-respected. These men's worlds had collapsed over their heads. All their worst qualities on display. That thing ruined careers, families- *potential*. What kind of "person" digs into that? Someone intimately disgusting... a mistake don't you think? *(A pause)* My crew thought it was invisible, ah hah, one of them even suggested a kind of virus- Silly... But, let me tell you, I only knew better cause I got the inside *scoop*, lucky me.

AL:

That's enough, I'm done with your nostalgia.

BECKER:

-Two weeks into the investigation, I went to my regular breakfast joint. He's always been one for theatrics, you know, but anyway-

AL:

I don't wanna hear any more Becker, stop-

BECKER:

(Loud behind a bright smile)

-And lo and behold, I caught sight of myself in the window. He was sitting in my regular booth. Just imagine the shock, Al, when he, this other me, looked me right in the eye... and smiled. With my own face! *(Laughs)* You know what Sedum did for the next 6 months? That *fucker* dismembered my life, bit by bit, all with that heinous smile. You know why? Because he's a psychotic attention-whore- he'll cripple you just to have you lean on him.

Al pulls her car into park.

AL:

We're here. Get out.

BECKER:

Don't you want to know the rest?

AL:

Out.

BECKER:

Al, you need to know what he's capable of-

AL:

(Low)

You wanna know I'm capable of?

BECKER:

(An almost manic smile)

Evidently threatening a superior!

AL:

You don't get to come here and slander the people I- He can't defend himself, and you don't get to have this "thing" with me, I don't care who you are, I am *not* doing this with you-

BECKER:

YOU don't get to stay ignorant of that walking *flaw's* crimes! (*Deadly in his grin*) Sedum was a monster in a way I've never known monsters to be, something real special. You should be thankful we took the opportunity to kennel him. He violated my life. He violated so many people's lives, and you can't even acknowledge that that revolts you?

NARRATOR:

Becker inclined his head close to her, his usual grin softening into a demure crinkle. The crisp night breeze slid through the open windows, chilling a clammy sweat on the inside of Al's palms.

BECKER:

(*Very quiet*)

I am so sorry, Al, I know this must be hard. But he doesn't get to have *you*, when *my daughter* won't- (*Too personal*) Mm... No. Nevermind... See, this is what he does- He puts on masks, he's done it all of his miserable life- a pathetic trick to get people to put up with him. And he's gotten everything he's ever wanted from you, the admiration, the loyalty- led you around by the nose... Admit that makes you sick, Al. Admit it for me.

AL:

(*A moment*)

Get out of my fucking car.

NARRATOR:

His frozen eyes searched her's. Her knuckles tingled white on the steering wheel.

BECKER:

(*Exhaling, laughing a little*)

Well... Guess that's good enough for tonight. Thanks for the ride.
Did I tell you I'm getting my new car in a few days?

He pops open the door and gets out.

(Cont.)

Whooo... Be seeing you in the morning? *(Pause)* ... Kiddo? Come on, I
spilled my *guts* to you. Give me something.

AL:

(Tightly)

See you tomorrow.

BECKER:

(A smile)

Thanks again, Al.

He shuts the door.

END