

HARBOR

Episode 5 - "Down Swings the Hammer"

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SCENE 1 - EXT. FOREST - EARLY, DARK MORNING

Light bird chatter in the trees, the feeling of dew permeating all as Valen tromps through the wilds of the woods.

VALENTINA:

Three stones... It is three stones inn't it..?

The rocks click in her hands. She stops.

NARRATOR:

The mouth of the cave peeled the air from Valen's bare arms as she lingered before it. A deluge of blue sunk her into the hour-
6 am. Even the birds whispered.

VALENTINA:

Right, here goes.

She throws one stone, a moment... then the second, then the third. She inhales deeply.

(Cont.)

ROOSE! GET OUT HERE.

A moment passes, before a hiss of sliding rocks, then something whizzes out.

NARRATOR:

One of the pebbles struck Valen in the shoulder.

VALENTINA:

Ah!- what's that for?

ROOSE:

Don't throw them *in*- on the stoop is sufficient.

NARRATOR:

Valen squinted at the broad cave mouth, at the inky blackness of the interior and Roose loitering in the shadows.

VALENTINA:

Oh, is that bed of old pine needles your porch, then?

ROOSE:

Why do you disturb me, Hollow? How did you find this place?

VALENTINA:

You put "old cave" under your address, so I've been hiking around the last coupla weeks. I have your W2's, you keep leaving them at the office.

ROOSE:

I possess enough paper.

VALENTINA:

At least take them so the rest of us don't get hit with tax fraud or some-

ROOSE:

Taxes?

NARRATOR:

A whip of an arm sliced out of the darkness and stabbed the stack of papers in Valen's hands with a single, wicked claw, it retreated as quickly as it had emerged, into the blackness behind Roose.

ROOSE:

I choose to acquiesce to those terms.

VALENTINA:

I shouldn't even point it out, but you don't use money.. But that's me looking a gift-horse in the-

ROOSE:

Leave, retreat to that squalor of a house-office monstrosity.

VALENTINA:

You live in a cave.

ROOSE:

Yes, a breathing, *clean* cave.

VALENTINA:

You know, listen, while I'm here- I keep getting your folks stopping me, calling me out to fix their problems- you have to pick up the slack on your social worker duties.

ROOSE:

Mmmm, my children can be insistent. It is tiresome.

VALENTINA:

Do what?

ROOSE:

They EXHAUST me-

VALENTINA:

No, not- yeah, I know, but you know the Cryptids round here aren't your children, right, Roose?

ROOSE:

Of course they are, what else would they be?!

VALENTINA:

Oh. Oh I see. Alright, what do you think the term "child" means?

ROOSE:

(A moment as she processes)

... "Burden"?

VALENTINA:

(Muttering)

You're not technically wrong- "Child" denotes a parental relationship, on your part, the "child" being someone younger that you *care* for.

Roose makes a noise akin to disgust.

(Cont.)

Just call 'em "Clients" from now on.

ROOSE:

Clients... I like it better, yes. Cold and distant.

VALENTINA:

Good. Remember, we're doing that testing today- show up, if you can?

ROOSE:

I will not bend to you, Hollow... I had work to catch up on anyway...

VALENTINA:

See you in a few hours, then.

Valen walks off.

ROOSE:

... This location has been compromised. I must move.

Title sequence

SCENE 2 - DREAM

The usual dream-scape. J is singing, per usual, peppier this time. He is singing the Manx lullaby "Ushag veg ruy" or "Little Red Bird" quietly while he waits, underneath Sam's dialogue.

J:

Did I not sleep on the cold waves crest, Cold waves crest, cold waves crest, Where many a man has taken his rest, O, Little did I sleep last night...

SAM:

Ah... the stars are back. At least I can see... well, nothing, still. (Loud) J?

J is there.

J:

You accepted my invitation! I was concerned. You're feeling well, strange son?

SAM:

Enough, thanks.

J:

Not consumed with thoughts of your place in the universe, the crushing weight of existence and it's fleeting, devouring pull?

SAM:

Only a little. You?

J:

Splendid as always, thank you.

SAM:

So, you haven't found me yet?

J:

When you must organize the torrent of information coming from 3,574 complex being's deep inner lives, then you will understand the delay. I am beginning smell you out, though.

SAM:

Apparently I'm a smelly guy..

J:

Does Lakewood Drive sound familiar?

SAM:

You know most people don't appreciate being taunted by their stalker.

J:

(Sincerely)

I do not mean to ridicule you! You could make this much easier by telling me your name, I wouldn't have to track your emotional trail for days on end.

SAM:

Dunno, not sure if I want to make it that easy for you.

J:

(Chuckles)

Annoyingly wise.

SAM:

I've never had a stalker before, are all of you this polite?

J:

You keep using that word. *(Giggles)* Would you say the homeowner searching for an intruder would be "stalking" the burglar?

SAM:

That's only if I accept your title as "owner" of Harbor. And that's a big leap for me.

J:

"Caretaker" would suit better... You seem... different.

SAM:

I do?

J:

(Examining the feeling)

Confident. Or at the very least... accepting. *(A thought, a change)* Have you been exploring mysteries, strange son?

SAM:

You've visited twice- three times now. I'm getting used to you.

J:

Evidently... *(Becoming cold)* Have you been enlightened to certain facets of my town?

SAM:

(Little coy)

Depends on your definition of enlightenment.

J:

(Laughing, stressed)

Will you make me draw it out of you, piece by piece?

SAM:

I know about the Cryptids, if that's what you mean.

J:

... What do you think? Do you like them?

SAM:

For the most part. I haven't met many.

J:

(Tightly)

Well I hope the ones you have are behaving.

SAM:

Are you a Cryptid, J?-

J:

-I want to see you, strange son. I want to know your face, your name. Won't you let me?

SAM:

I still don't know what- *who* you are. Until I see you out there, I can't give you any more in here. I-I'm sorry.

J:

(Almost emotional, biting)

This is why I like you! You're sensible, even when it costs my patience.

SAM:

If you're threatening me, I'm not that scared.

J:

It would be a dark day if I ever threatened violence upon one of my wards... You needn't worry.

SAM:

I'm sorry. I... don't know what to expect anymore... I'm sorry.

They've had their first argument, their first reconciliation. The tension that comes with both is palpable.

J:

You need space to organize your mind... And I suppose I *have* been visiting too often, yes... Yes, I should let you rest...

SAM:

I... I'm scared, J.

J:

Yes, this realm is difficult for your kind. I apologise-

SAM:

Not of this. Or you, really. I'm... scared of reality. This all having been so close and I couldn't see, let myself see- It's like realizing I was treading water over a bloom of jellyfish. I feel like I'm this little thing... surrounded by giants. Gods. I know they're not, but I feel weak... Disappointed in myself? (*A pause*) I like that I can talk to you. And you want to talk to me. It's nice to share.

J:

(He is deeply impacted)

Your vulnerability is not weakness, strange son. It is raw strength, untainted by ego. You are enviable.

SAM:

(Flattered)

I bet you say that to all the girls.

J:

I have, most assuredly, not said that to any girl children that I can remember.

Sam laughs awkwardly, and J joins in, not entirely understanding the joke.

(Cont.)

I'll let you loose. Do not build up walls around your light.

SAM:

Ok. See you, J.

J:

Hopefully, strange son.

SCENE 3 - EXT. HARBOR, MAIN STREET - MORNING

Low chatter of distance life, of birds singing, cars passing. (WHEN STICK'S BULB FLICKERS, A SFX OF ELECTRICITY ZAPPING ACCOMPANIES IT. ONCE FOR YES, TWICE FOR NO.)

AL:

Hey Stick.

NARRATOR:

Al ran her hand around the middle of a streetlamp. The pole radiated a soft warmth, though the sun hid behind Main street's buildings. High above her head, the bulb flickered.

AL:

Did ya miss me?

NARRATOR:

The bulb blinked once (SFX), paused, then blinked twice (SFX).

AL:

Yes and no. I can see that... I've been an ass for not being around so much.

Stick zaps twice

(Cont.)

Ok... for not being around at all. I'm sorry I didn't stop to talk. There's no excuse. I mean, a lot's happened but still.

Stick zaps once.

NARRATOR:

The streetlamps all around her blinked many times over, methodical in their one beat rhythm, a comforting pulse before dissipating. She gripped the center of the pole gently again.

A pedestrian is walking along the street.

AL:

You're the best, Stick. Can... do you mind if we talk?

NARRATOR:

A stranger stalked past her, bags in tow, a narrow expression creasing his face.

AL:

(Louder)

Yeah, yeah, buddy, I'm *insane*, keep walking.

Man walks faster, muttering.

(Cont.)

So... (starting to reveal her buried insecurities) So, my brother he... he's interviewing to be a part of the DoCA.

Stick ZAPS once, encouraging.

(Cont., Struggling)

... I don't know if I like it.

Stick again, zaps once.

(Cont.)

I love him, don't get me wrong but... he's been gone for so long..

His now-self is getting mixed with his teenage-self up in my head... Stick, he doesn't *know*. He hasn't seen what we've seen. I don't know if... he'll have my back. I mean, hell he's gotta pass the tests first, but it's not like they'll deny him, really. We don't have anyone else. But that doesn't mean that he even wants to be here and was doing everything to escape. And I gotta depend on that?

Stick ZAP ZAPs.

(Cont.)

No? No what? "No I can't trust him"-

Stick ZAP ZAPs hurriedly.

(Cont.)

... You're saying, "No, I can't... assume" aren't you.

Stick ZAPs.

(Cont.)

It's *my* neck on the line, Stick... And...

Stick ZAPs.

NARRATOR:

The bulbs faded up, then back into nothing in the mid-morning light. A question mark.

AL:

And... This is petty... Not a word, alright?

Stick ZAPs again, prodding.

(Cont.)

The Department is... mine. It's my *life*. I poured everything into it, I gave up almost everything to stay here, with it. My pride, my future- I'm a joke and it's all to... protect you, for example!

To be a part of it. I... don't know what'll happen if I share.
(Murmuring) Can I... share without getting... *(Like it's disgusting)*
 insecure? *Weak... ?*

Stick ZAPs, once, pause, ZAPs again, emphatically, ZAPS one more
 time, drawn out, encouraging. Al chuckles.

(Cont.)

Alright, you big bolt. I get it. Now to not... go *batshit* if
 something happens to him... God-tits-fuck, can't think about that-
 Sorry, sorry. *(Deep breath in and out)* Thank you. I missed you.

Stick ZAPs.

NARRATOR:

Al laced her fingers together around the center of the
 streetlamp and swung herself around, pressing her cheek to the
 warm metal. The bulb high above her pulsed slowly, like
 inflating lungs, as did the bulbs around her, up and down the
 street. At the empty crosswalk, the walk sign thrummed.

JOANIE:

(Distant)

Get a job, ya fuckin' tweaker!!

AL:

(Yelling)

I'll eat your eyes, ass-face!!! *(Soothingly)* Sorry, Stick.

Stick zaps.

SCENE 4 - INT./EXT. LEAH'S CONDO - LATE MORNING

Sam is hanging out in front of the house. Leah is busy on the
 other line.

LEAH:

(Off the receiver)

Sweetie, medical books aren't for coloring in, alright? Here,
 I'll swap the Grey's Anatomy for a coloring page. Gooooood deal.

(Back on) Sorry, Sam, (Lowering her voice) It's a nightmare over here, I don't blame you going for this... other gig instead.

SAM:

Yeah, a little too chaotic for my tastes. (Chuckles)

LEAH:

Even though this is the same... gas station that your sister got that black eye from... those three times. And a broken nose that other time. And that drinking problem-

SAM:

Um, yeah, well, they've bumped up their security.

LEAH:

And that's what this intense interview process is for.

SAM:

Mhm, just making sure I can handle... all the procedures! Which I can!

LEAH:

Of course. (Distant) OK, ok kids, let's NOT climb on the computers!

SAM:

Al wouldn't've set me up on this if I couldn't handle it. Which, pfft, of course I can! She's been in it for so long, I mean, it's gotta be down to a science...

LEAH:

True. She even splurged on a second set of beans to keep in my freezer, so you know she's got it to routine.

SAM:

Mom.

LEAH:

Like you don't worry too-

SAM:

Don't, please. I, I got this. I have to... the bills are gonna start- What're a few bumps and bruises anyway...-

LEAH:

(Off receiver)

THINK BEFORE YOU ACT, CHILDREN!!

SAM:

I don't have time to.

LEAH:

- Sorry?

SAM:

(Swallows)

They also have healthcare? Vision, dental-

LEAH:

Lord knows you'll need it.

SAM:

Like I said, I can handle it. Don't forget, turning 25!

LEAH:

(Softening)

I know. Sam, please... Remember that this job, it... isn't everything. Don't forget about life when you're busy with it all.

SAM:

(Lower)

You can say "don't become Al" if you want...

LEAH:

I'm *not* saying that...

SAM:

It's not even gonna be a thing, mom. I can do work-life-balance.
Hell, I don't have kids, that's already a lot easier.

LEAH:

Kids are a life-suck.

SAM:

Oh, my ego!

LEAH:

A beautiful, *miraculous* life-suck.

SAM:

Awww.

Al rolls up and parks.

(Cont.)

Al's here. Lord, I need to renew my license...

LEAH:

Oh no, keep your personal driving service as long as you can! I
love you, and good luck... with the *gas station*, sweets.

SAM:

Thanks mom! Love ya, good luck with your hordes-

LEAH:

Bye-*(Off receiver)* INSIDE VOICES, PLEASE-

He opens the passenger door and clamours in as the call ends.

SAM:

Hey!

AL:

Ready?

SAM:

Hoo yeah! I was born ready! Ready to kick some interview ass!
They're gonna love me!

They get on the road.

AL:

(A little taken aback)

Ah, yeah... Make sure you keep enough confidence back to last the afternoon, with all of the Directors in one room, it could drag on for a while.

SAM:

Not a problem. My confidence is a renewable resource.

AL:

Oh?

SAM:

How hard can it be? I'm their answer! This is a shoe-in, "this" meaning, uh, me.

AL:

(A little jealous)

They're still making you do the tests...

SAM:

Formalities.

AL:

You're a little pale.

SAM:

Yeah, that's how I always look before being judged. It's my intriguing glow.

AL:

You got enough to eat at home? We have some time before you have to be there, we can stop-

SAM:

Hmmm, no. (*Getting queasy*)

AL:

Are you ok-

SAM:

No, you mentioned food-

AL:

Sam, did you eat at all? You're gonna do a physical assessment, you know!

SAM:

NO, because when I eat before a performance, then I get the overwhelming need to shit myself-

AL:

Oh, God.

SAM:

And so I BEAT that by not eating. Don't question my methods, Al, I don't wanna think about them- Also pull over please.

AL:

Oh my god, are you gonna shit-

SAM:

No, I'm gonna *puke*, pull over-

She pulls over.

AL:

Fuck, uh, ok, go?

Sam pops open the door and hacks out a nerve-wracked series of coughs. Al is the tiniest bit smug.

(*Cont.*)

It's ok, Sam... It's ok to be nervous.

SCENE 5 - INT. DOCA - EARLY AFTERNOON

In the main office, it's a slow day, a Saturday afternoon.

SEDUM:

We're convening in my office for our group interview, I'm so sorry we didn't get to do this yesterday, the weekend is always a different feeling- And it's usually an excellent primer to be introduced to all parties, but... *Someone* likes spontaneity.

SAM:

Oh, no, it's fine, don't worry! Director Roose was a good, uh, primer.

SEDUM:

Excellent, showing flexibility! Oh, and thank you for delivering our subject, Al. An astounding display of teamwork on all accounts. On that note, Al, don't hang around. We don't need your nervous energy around our applicant.

AL:

(Snorts)

Oh yeah, me the ball of nerves.

SEDUM:

(A smile)

Then we don't need you slipping him tips. Follow me, Samson...

They walk away.

VALENTINA:

Al, I got a task on the docket for ya, needs some urgent addressin'- a few reports coming in about the Origin Bird.

AL:

... Like every day... There a problem this time?

VALENTINA:

Nothing outta the ordinary. But... folks keep seeing it, doin' it's thing. Flappin' around, coughin' up other birds in a miraculous display of life.

AL:

So it's fine?

VALENTINA:

Yep.

AL:

So you want me to do... what?

VALENTINA:

Just, you know, go keep an eye on it. Go... distract... Humans from getting freaked out.

AL:

What, what can I do about them deciding to look outside and see a semi-divine turkey vomit up another live bird?

VALENTINA:

You're smart! Figure it out, all I know is jackasses keep calling in about a Jesus Bird and it's concerning!

AL:

It's concerning- Valen. I've taken the fuckin' thing 10 miles outside of town 3 times now, and it *always* comes back- What am I supposed to do-

VALENTINA:

Get creative, I BELIEVE IN YOU!

AL:

This is the most useless assignment you've put me on in months.

VALENTINA:

It's a direct order, though.

AL:

We're doing orders, now? What about the Eaton Factory-

VALENTINA:

No.

AL:

No?

NARRATOR:

Valen glanced to their right, Crux flipping through one of his calendars, dutifully. She pulled Al closer to the doorway to the kitchen and turned her back to the open office.

Valen's voice lowers.

VALENTINA:

You don't need to be going out there.

AL:

You want me to dance around strangers to keep them from seeing the Origin Bird, and NOT look into the violent sabotage?

VALENTINA:

(Stiffly)

Best let the police handle it.

AL:

The Mayor was convinced there was Cryptid activity-

VALENTINA:

(Sourly)

The Mayor's convinced a rock in her shoe is Cryptid activity. Go keep an eye on the Origin Bird.

AL:

... Yes, ma'am.

ROOSE:

At your convenience, Hollow.

Valentina starts walking away.

VALENTINA:

Keep your nose in order today, Al.

A moment of silence, as the door to the office closes, distant.

CRUX:

Well, that's some palpable intention just oozing off of you. I'm getting, oh... determination, hints of resentment and a whole cavalcade of curiosity. Are you planning an escapade, Al?

AL:

'Ey, keep it quiet, Crux.

CRUX:

Me? Rat you out?

AL:

You got an honest face. Can't trust those beautiful eyes to lie.

CRUX:

Oh I love it when you butter me up with bullshit.

NARRATOR:

Crux blinked serenely, maintaining a measured gaze on her. Al sat on the edge of his desk, bending close.

AL:

You wanna know what's bullshit? *(Low)* That clear attack on Eaton.

CRUX:

(Low) The Directors have gone haywire since last night.

AL:

Ah, really?

NARRATOR:

His hand crumpled his surgical mask as he leaned deep against his desk, imploring her through sheer force of sympathetic eyes, the picture of a sickly Human.

CRUX:

I'm going batty over here. They refuse to resolve their secrets, their motives, it just lingers and festers and it DRIPS off of each of them. Can you imagine what it's like, knowing, *feeling*, every one of their emotions that passes through? Exhausting- It's the worst when they look at me like this-

NARRATOR:

He clutched the desk, showing the whites of his eyes, eyebrows straining at the muscles in his forehead.

CRUX:

-And run for the door. All since last night. Help a fella out? With this ridiculous reassignment happening, I'll be caught up in Ground Crew work and helping William adapt. I won't have time to... nose about.

AL:

What do you want me to do, then?

CRUX:

Well... The police won't be out at Eaton until 3, I heard.

AL:

Cover my ass and I'll get us some answers, bud.

SCENE 6 - INT. SEDUM'S OFFICE - EARLY AFTERNOON**SEDUM:**

... Psychological passed with flying colors, and onwards and upwards we-

ROOSE:

That's a massive alteration to my notes.

Roose shuffles her papers.

SEDUM:

... He passed. That's what's important.

ROOSE:

(Clears her throat)

"The applicant should be put on probation," per my unaltered recommendation. "Not permitted to be a part of potentially violent altercations until time on the job has exceeded *at least* 90 hours." *(She sets the paper down)* More inconvenient than outstanding.

SAM:

Oh.

SEDUM:

(Tight smile)

Yes, well, he isn't a serial killer. May we proceed?

VALENTINA:

Seein' how he's my applicant, I propose we nix this whole song and dance and let *me* get on with it. You two can get back to business.

SEDUM:

(Lower)

Valen, there's an order to the interview process, and we've already rearranged it once-

VALENTINA:

Sedum, I don't need you holdin' my hand all the way through.

ROOSE:

I'd like as many chances as possible to see who exactly is going to be interacting with my *clients*.

VALENTINA:

You can trust me to make the right decision, Roose.

ROOSE:

I could.

VALENTINA:

Ah, *ha*, and I'm suppose to put my trust in *your* opinion of character-

SEDUM:

(Hurriedly)

Let's remember our applicant in front of us, *please*? Samson, tell us, why are you pursuing this position?

SAM:

(Clearing his throat)

Uh, there's a need, for both you and I. I have bills to pay and groceries, rent, crushing responsibilities... *and* quite a bit of experience in conversational conflict. You need someone! I can be the... someone.

ROOSE:

(Dryly)

Where was that passion yesterday, Greer?

SEDUM:

What a honest examination of our respective circumstances- thank you.

VALENTINA:

Do you got a heart for this work? It's hard and strenuous- we got long hours and spontaneous happenings, not to mention the risks- We want someone who *wants* to be here, you understand?

SAM:

I think... it's insincere to say I have a huge drive for the job when I was introduced to it all two days ago. I haven't had many opportunities to learn about the specifics- B-but that I do have a passion for- Learning! I'm eager. For knowledge.

VALENTINA:

(Aside)

I thought you said he was supposed to be good at this?

SEDUM:

(Stressed, low)

I said he was good with *people-* *(Louder)* Transparency is highly prized here; Thank you for being honest, Samson. But ah, you are aware that you'll be "boots on the ground", as they say? In Ground Crew- you won't be assisting Roose in Research... with... learning?

SAM:

Oh, yeah! God, no. Yes, this job would be a... a challenge! *(Uncomfortably)* continuing my honesty-streak. I may not be a, a, *naturally* physically inclined guy, jumping in, but I can provide, uh, good... interpersonal conflict... resolution... in theory?

There's a strong silence.

VALENTINA:

(Chuckling)

Well, that's as solid an answer as we're gonna get outta ya, isn't it. Next question- You're not a coward, are ya, Sam?

SAM:

(His voice cracks)

No! I face my fears every day!

SCENE 7 - EXT. EATON FACTORY- AFTERNOON

Al is walking over dirt. There's ambient sound of this isolated place; quiet, gentle, life.

NARRATOR:

Al picked her way through the wreckage of upturned dirt, the foundation of the Factory painting the scarred earth. Before her, a drop of 10 feet down into what would've been the basement. Shards of work trucks and construction vehicles

smattered the concrete and the clay around her. Great swaths of black charred the cement skeleton. The scaffold, resting against the towering far wall, lay slack against itself. Al traced her fingers along a sizable stack of headstones, crumbling against her skin.

AL:

I wonder what happened to the bodies. Poor guys... *(To the quiet world)* I'm not here to taunt you, if you're... still fucking around here. Hope you moved on by now... ghosties..

She walks over the remaining dirt, onto the concrete foundation spilled over the graves. Suddenly, from out of nowhere, we hear the distant gobbling of a turkey.

(Cont.)

Are you fucking kidding me, the Origin Bird is all the way out here...?

There's silence. Perhaps it was a dream...? She moves on.

(Cont.)

Mmm... imagining things... They left the trucks... *(Inhales)* Those engine block's have seen better days... Good luck to whoever's gotta deal with this mess.

She drops down into the foundation, and kicks a few loose screws.

(Cont.)

And look at that... a wholly fucked up scaffold.

She runs a hand across a pipe. The thing groans. She stops, suddenly, letting out a low exhale of breath.

(Cont.)

What is- there in the ground- Well. That's a calling card if ever I seen one.

She moves forward.

NARRATOR:

Her fingers dipped into the divets in the floor, smearing char onto her knees. Splashed across the cement, half covered in debris; a message written in gashes, clumsily scrawled. Al lifted her sunglasses.

AL:

It's a phrase.. "Alight Your Shame" ... Hmmm...

The gobbling comes again, distant still, causing Al to tense up. A moment passes.

AL:

Goddamn fucking stupid turkey-

J is scraping his feet along outside the walls.

NARRATOR:

A something or a *someone* slid their hand over the remains of the high wall around the foundation, out of sight. Al let her sunglasses fall back down over her eyes.

AL:

(Raising her voice)

Whoever's there.. I'm lookin' for a little conversation. If it suits ya.

J:

How cordial! Thank you for the offer, fierce daughter.

AL:

Ahhh, it's you. The singer... The big guy out of his neck of the woods.

J:

You remembered!

AL:

You can come down here, if you want.

J:

I suppose I shouldn't cradle you as porcelain, should I, Al?
You've prided yourself on durability.

AL:

(Muttering)

So, you're one of those types. *(Back to normal)* Have we met?

J:

I suppose I am more of a *feeling* to you, than a presence at this point.

AL:

Wanna give me any more than that?

J:

Not currently.

AL:

Right. So is this more of your neighborhood?

J:

No... There was an accident. I felt it my duty to investigate.

AL:

Can't see much behind those walls, though. You're welcome to hop on down, join me in the pit.

J:

You've seen many a being in these forests, Al, but I wonder if the sight of me will hinder or help our blossoming relationship...

AL:

We all get self-conscious. I got a big ol' zit on my face, I trust that you're mature enough not to point and laugh.

J:

Turn around and I will come down.

AL:

That'd be stupid- Turning my back on a stranger who knows my name.

J:

Then here I stay. It's in your hands.

AL:

Come on, Singer, sweeten the pot. Give me something.

J:

... I cannot physically touch you. Does that earn your trust?

AL:

Prove it and we have a deal.

J:

I am trusting *your* honor as well, fierce daughter.

AL:

... Here, then.

NARRATOR:

She scrambled up the side of a bit of construction equipment, in easy reach of escape from the foundation, back turned to keep her balance.

AL:

Now you probably can't reach me easily, I can't turn around easily... Come on down.

J:

I admire your compromise. Thank you.

J drags his feet for a moment... He drops down.

AL:

Honorable all around, right Singer?

J:

Yes... *(He absorbs the display)*

AL:

You got a name? Since you have mine. It's only fair.

J:

(Distracted)

You've bestowed one upon me. I like it. "Singer". Please, continue using it.

AL:

Alright... so you got the itch to see the Haunted Gun Factory on this, a bright Saturday. Your weekend that slow?

J:

Is it Saturday? Its tiresome counting the same months and days over and over and over and over-

AL:

-Gotcha... It's a shame four people got hurt here.

J:

They were propagators of an unrelenting guzzling violence, weren't they? And you extend them sympathy? I know you have your proclivities, but even *you* have a limit on bloodlust.

AL:

(Breathes a laugh)

When you put it that way...

J:

This place was born on desecrating the dead... It would have been a bane to Harbor. And you're sorry that it ended?

AL:

No. I'm sorry it took all this to get it shut down. Thought we were better than to let them get this far in the first place.
(Scoffs) Don't know where I got that idea, but there ya go.

J:

Sins are disappointing, yes, fierce daughter?

AL:

I prefer Al.

J:

(Correcting)

Al.

AL:

What do you think of that message in the floor? "Alight Your Shame".

J:

Hmm... It's an unbecoming grab for attention...

AL:

Oh? That condemning?

J:

I don't have your answers, Al... At least not for free.

Al lets out a breathy laugh, realizing just what kind of "thing" he is- specifically a thing that *likes* playing games.

(Cont., Sincerely, gently)

I can easily tell you anything you'd ever care to know about our home and the people inside, for a price.

AL:

Not interested, Singer.

J:

May I ask why?

AL:

Yep, well, you are obviously... one of those *old...* things. And I happen to know it's a dumb fucking idea to play with old things. You know me, you say you're a *feeling* in my life, won't give me your name- I've never interacted with you in the damn near 30 years I've lived before this week. That doesn't leave me many cards.

J:

Sensible... I must familiarize myself more with your wary generation. So very paranoid, so very... clever. (*He is sensing something familiar, growing curious*) Mmmm, quite wary... Do you believe in providence?

AL:

I bet whatever this is, is something more intentional than fate, with you having a full deck on me.

NARRATOR:

She traced the cement ledge in front of her, debating how quick she could hoist herself out.

J:

I'm tired of the accusations. I had no scheme to intersect with you here. I am, regrettably, not *constantly* omniscient.

AL:

Oh so the *stalker's* divine, huh? Not very impressive, those are a dime a dozen in these parts, I swear...

NARRATOR:

She laced her hands behind her head, masking the surge of adrenaline pumping through her. A small gust of wind blew forward her loose hair. A breath tickled her back.

J suddenly crosses to her, intently bearing down upon her, searching, feeling a familiar tug, humming curiously.

AL:

(Nervous, but barely showing it)

Ah, so, you're ready to test your honor, Singer?

J:

(Close)

Your words- Your *smell*- your soul reeks of the same- You heart, wrapped around it, a thread- Yes, one I can't see-

AL:

(Lightly)

Hey, stop looking at my heart, creep.

NARRATOR:

Al swallowed the lump in her throat, and absorbed the periphery reflection in her glasses. Darkness... black as a void with a white pinprick in the middle, focused on her back. An eye surrounded by dark, soft hair, and the glint of spun silver strands.

She inhales softly, suddenly very nervous.

AL:

(Strong)

I said stop looking.

J:

HA! *(Peels into a bubbly laugh)*

AL:

What?

J:

My *GOD*, I've been quite the idiot, haven't I!? Right in front of me, it was on the *TIP* of my tongue, I knew- and you being here, truly is serendipitous, Al Greer, truly- I *KNEW*- *(Giggling)* How could I forget...

AL:

Wanna divulge on that breakdown you're having?

J:

You have my undying gratitude, daughter.

He turns and begins to leave.

AL:

(Quickly, stumbling)

Oh, but uh, I, I have more than that. A debt? Considering how much I helped you? Considering my integrity.

He stops.

J:

Ah... *(Narrowing, but acquiescing)* Yes. I suppose I *am* indebted to you. Don't keep me waiting to settle that, clever daughter.

He leaves. It's quiet again.

AL:

(Muttering)

Glad to help..

NARRATOR:

She glanced behind her for the first time, taking in the empty foundation. A shiver ran up her spine. She climbed out.

She's brushing herself off.

AL:

Gotta be more careful about that one-

The Origin Bird suddenly, out of nowhere, from behind her,
GOBBLES LIKE A MOTHER FUCKER.

(Cont.)

AUGH, FUCK- You stupid mother fucking Origin Bird! *(It continues to gobble)* I'm going to drive you into the lake this time, I swear to God.

SCENE 8 - EXT. DOCA - AFTERNOON

Outside, in the backyard of the DOCA.

VALENTINA:

Alright, well, look at you, Samson! Ready to get your sweat on?

SAM:

With my sweats on! *(Laughs nervously)*

VALENTINA:

Alright, calm down. Let's see, *(She flips through a few papers)*
It's been a minute... or years... since I had to dig the Physical
Test out, hang on...

SAM:

So, uh, Director Nuller and Director... Roose will just be... over
there... watching?

VALENTINA:

(Disgruntled)

Yeeep, can't stop 'em. Don't tell me you're anxious- Oh. Uh...
yeah guess that's less of a "get over it" situation with you.
You're not gonna pass out or anything, are ya... ?

SAM:

No. I'm just used to performing best orally- VERBALLY!

VALENTINA:

(Biting her lip to keep from laughing) Just, just do your best-
We'll work around your oral fixation- *(Laughs)*

Crux jogs across the grass to join them.

(Cont.)

Hey Crux, you ready?

SAM:

What is he... Uh, why, why are you in...

CRUX:

It's a jogging suit. I was told you needed company for this.

SEDUM:

(From afar)

Healthy competition!

SAM:

Competition... ? A-ah. We're... against each other?

VALENTINA:

Didn't ya know? Crux is testing for Ground Crew, too.

SAM:

You are?

CRUX:

I am. Circumstances being-

VALENTINA:

Yep, *and* he's Cryptid, so you never know what exactly he's got hidden up those sleeves!

CRUX:

(Whispering) My secret is I'm always cold.

VALENTINA:

Oh, Crux, it's been a few hours, is Al lurkin' around or anything...?

CRUX:

No. I haven't seen her since she spoke explicitly about going to deal with the Origin Bird.

VALENTINA:

Good, she's mindin' me. Alright, in that case, we're getting started with crunches, fellas. However many ya can push out in a minute. We'll start with Sam, Crux hold his feet if you could, then we'll swap. As soon as you give me the signal... Right, go!

We switch over to Roose and Sedum. Crux counting methodically in the background. After a minute, it switches to Sam, who is slightly breathless.

ROOSE:

You're underwhelmed by his "performance".

SEDUM:

I admit I expected more... pizazz. Him being from the Greer family. I suppose Leah funnelled all her genetic aggression into Al...

ROOSE:

He would do adequate in Research, actually. If he wasn't such a simpering fool... (*Cruel grin*) He'd fit best with you in Management.

SEDUM:

I'm aware. We're all aware. You'd do better to keep your disappointment to yourself, Roose, we're working with what we have.

ROOSE:

It was stupid to wait for another anomaly like Enfys; They were built for this- devout and *brutal*.

SEDUM:

Brutal? Enfys? Efficient, yes...

ROOSE:

I saw what you could not. I SEE what none can!

SEDUM:

Of course.

ROOSE :

I will remain vocally disappointed around the Greer boy. It will squeeze out a passable performance from him.

SEDUM :

He hasn't even started yet, let's see what he brings to the table before berating him. *(Pause)* So what have you dug up on Eaton? I haven't had a chance to get out there.

ROOSE :

And you won't with the police scouring the scene. I found a display for me.

SEDUM :

You?

ROOSE :

Implicitly. *(Aggravated)* Very well, us. A message, burned, written in set cement- impressive force was used. "Alight Your Shame" it said. Poetic. Dramatic.

SEDUM :

(Muttering)

Cheeky is what it is.

ROOSE :

And expected, considering the author's temperament.

SEDUM :

I'm worried, Roose.

ROOSE :

(Half a laugh)

You subsist off of worry.

SEDUM :

You aren't? Of course you aren't...

ROOSE :

He can't get in.

SEDUM:

Well, but we *don't* know if it *is* him.

Roose chuckles, hard, mirthless.

(*Cont.*)

We don't *know*. Yes, alright, there's no barrier to keep him out of the gun factory, it isn't in city limits, but the most he could do is compromise the integrity of the scaffold, realistically, for a Human- not this fire or force...

ROOSE:

Franklin was always a conniving weasel. He's found a work around. Perhaps he chose a route like Crux and changed himself, perhaps he's hired someone- A multitude of possibilities at your unimaginative fingertips, Sedum.

SEDUM:

We must abide by innocent until proven guilty. (*Roose chuckles*)
Nothing's happened for 6? 7 months? It doesn't *have* to be Franklin-

VALENTINA:

Great job, Crux! Sam, you're laggin' behind, *gotta* pick up the pace! Now, let's keep that blood pumping. 200 meter dash! Through the fence, into the back lot, you'll see an oak, with a RED bandana tied round it. NO deviation from the path and NO politeness when squeezin' through the fence. This *will* be timed.
Show me what them gams do, fellas!

Crux laughs, before getting cut off.

SEDUM:

Inappropriate! No!

VALENTINA:

(*Sighs*)

On my count- 3, 2, 1! GO!

The two take off, over the grass. Their footfalls disappear into the brush.

ROOSE:

"Alight Your Shame". What is the saying.. If it looks like a duck, walks like a duck- (*Viciously dark*) And I can smell that stinking duck no matter where he hides. He isn't inside, but it is him.

SEDUM:

We shut that door half a decade ago and he's only gotten quieter over the years- It's held fast.

ROOSE:

If you ignore the jiggling handle, maybe.

A moment.

SEDUM:

(*Quietly*)

Alright, so if it *is* him..

ROOSE:

I am contented with putting a name to yet another enemy. You refuse to let Al be *useful*, the Greer boy is *useless*, Crux is a snoop to his own end, and William is now a convalescent. We are overwhelmed. We can do no more to investigate the incident- it's done. (*"Reassuring"*) Consider that he only had to cause one of the attacks; the scaffold collapse, the vehicle dismemberment or the arson, not all three. He's desperate for attention.

SEDUM:

It isn't adding up- Franklin is intelligent, yes, I've never seen a better Research Director, but he isn't strong... and certainly not amicable enough for friends..

ROOSE:

Do not speak of his time here.

SEDUM:

You were the one *insistent* on passing off your Director responsibilities when we started-

ROOSE:

Yes, and I pay for it by doing everything *now*, don't I... I'll have the situation within my grasp soon- give me time and *don't* ask questions. (*A horrible smile, a threat*) Unless you want to call in more favors... ? Payment will increase each time, Sedum.-

SEDUM:

-No, no, I trust you.

ROOSE:

Fine. Then stay out of my way and all will be well.

Valentina jogs over.

VALENTINA:

Sam's... eh-h-h? What with you two staring at him like he's our next biggest let down.

SEDUM:

We've heard.

Sam and Crux come back, heaving breath.

SAM:

Va-Valen... how's my time?

VALENTINA:

Oh, you're back! Uh... ah, shit, I didn't start the stopwatch. Uh, just run it again. Kay?

Sam and Crux turn back around and run.

SAM:

God... dammit...!

After a moment.

SEDUM:

Do you see *enough* potential? Even if it's just enough to keep Al more grounded-

VALENTINA:

She's fine, just been having a few bad weeks, like we all have. It ain't a relapse, Sedum, she's already doin' better today.

SEDUM:

Mmm... then will he round out the team well enough?

VALENTINA:

He's got a pulse doesn't he? (*Chuckles*) Fuckin' shave me hairless 'n call me a clam, it's hot out here..

SEDUM:

And Crux?

VALENTINA:

Fine, o'course. It'll be good to have another Cryptid-type person again, make folks feel more at ease out on calls. But hell if it isn't just my luck to go from two firecrackers to two bookworms. Roose, you told him about the Eaton debacle yet?

ROOSE:

It is done.

VALENTINA:

Franklin's a ballsy little fucker, ain't he? Hasn't gotten better with age... And now he's either like a witch or gettin' more help than we thought.

SEDUM:

You two are very quick to place blame on a man who can't even set foot in Harbor.

VALENTINA:

Must be cause we like usin' our eyes.

Sam and Crux are back.

(Cont.)

Ah! There ya'll are! *(She stops the timer)* ... Bad times! Specially you, Greer, you NEED to be picking up those knees, I spied you trailin' behind! Take a breather.

SCENE 9 - EXT. DOCA - AFTERNOON

Sam is breathless, lungs on fire. Crux is wheezing horribly, which persists behind his clear words.

SAM:

You're wiping the floor with me, Crux... are you ok?

CRUX:

Mhm. Just a second.

NARRATOR:

Crux turned his back to Sam, lifting his mask with one hand, the other clutching onto his own thigh for support. He lowered his head, staring at the ground, obscuring his face as best he could. Sam wiped the sweat from his upper lip, focusing on his own burning lungs.

The wheezing breath is ragged and clear, a striking rattle.

SAM:

Want some water?

CRUX:

That would be kind, thank you!

NARRATOR:

Crux raised a thumbs up over his shoulder, head still bowed.

SAM:

No problem.

Sam jogs over to the bottles and grabs them up.

VALENTINA:

Are you ready to impress me yet, Sam? After your warm-ups?

SAM:

Uh, um, I will, yes, sorry, but Crux might be having an... asthma attack? I'm not sure.

VALENTINA:

(Dropping the severity)

... Uh, oh! No! It's a mouth thing- Well, nose and mouth- Respiratory thing. He's fine, really. Don't make him feel self-conscious.

SAM:

Sure. We'll be over soon.

He jogs back to Crux, handing him his bottle.

(Cont.)

Here. Drink up. I told Director Ivers Hollow we'd be a minute.

CRUX:

Thanks, Sam. This is... more exertion than I'm used to. *(Laughs)*
Can you tell?

NARRATOR:

Once again, Crux turned his back to him, maneuvering his mask away in semi-privacy, as Sam contented himself with a sip, averting his eyes.

Crux drinks awkwardly, a sickeningly weird gulp and exhalation. Sam feels the effort as he drinks quietly, and chooses to divert the conversation.

SAM:

You're really doing great. I hope it goes to you, you're crazy capable... *(Chuckles)* I mean, you're asthmatic and kicking my ass...

Ah, sorry, that was in poor taste, you can't help-

CRUX:

I don't have asthma. And we're both going to be a part of the team. I'm taking William's place. You take Enfys'. Or whichever you like, it's the same job, there just needs to be three of us.

SAM:

But- wait, she, they said-!

CRUX:

I'd like to get the last one done with.

He jogs back to Valentina.

SAM:

(Muttering)

Yeah sure, "we prize transparency" ... *(Scoffs)*

SCENE 10 - EXT. DOCA - AFTERNOON

VALENTINA:

1 minute push ups. Same as before, as many as you can.

Al rounds the corner.

AL:

Geek fight!! Go for the throat, bro!

VALENTINA:

No, get outta here, Al!

AL:

It's not my fault all ya'll are so slow. Crux, Sam has weak knees! Let's see some blood!

VALENTINA:

Get in your shed, you can come out when they're done.

Al and Valen bicker in the background. Sedum tenses and grunts, noticing something.

ROOSE:

The soot smears on Al's legs, the clay- she's been to the site.

SEDUM:

(Tired, disappointed)

Mmm... Al...

ROOSE:

If you broached the subject with her, this would all be much simpler- we could have someone with a modicum of capability-

SEDUM:

Roose, as soon as we broach Franklin, we broach *everything*. There is no getting around that. And there is no way we are doing that unless it's absolutely necessary. You push mortals too hard- Valen is right. We can't keep up as you do... The amount of self control it takes to stay away, when you *know*... *(He stops himself)* The fewer people that have to fight those instincts, the better, *especially* us mortals.

ROOSE:

Your coddling is demeaning in the extreme. She came back from her substance abuse-

SEDUM:

Roose! It's common sense! Have some pity on us, for God's sake, I'm not doing this to hold it over her. I'm following Valen on this. Her approach is the best option we have right now. And we don't need to be discussing this *here*.

The door to Al's shed closes.

ROOSE:

You ephemeral creatures give away your power so easily.

A moment.

(Cont.)

I'm saying you're weak.

SEDUM:

Yes, I understand.

ROOSE:

Good. At least you're not weak *and* stupid.-

VALENTINA:

Alright, back to it, fellas! Ready? Go!

They start, Sam counting his reps. A pair of footsteps approach around the side of the house.

(Cont.)

Al, goddammit, I just put you in your... Shed.

Valentina stops. Everyone stops. Except for Sam, who only catches up after a moment.

SAM:

6, 7... (Swallows, realizing everyone's distracted) Oh give me a break...

NARRATOR:

Glenda carefully made her way around the side of the house, teetering on the grass in her heels.

GLENDA:

Hope I didn't interrupt anything important, DoAA friends! Just stoppin' by with your weather report I promised yesterday!

Al's shed door opens.

AL:

(Dryly)

What're you doing back here, Mayor.

SEDUM:

(Very done)

We are in the middle of a test, Glenda! Another time, if you please!

GLENDA:

Oh, but, I do happen to think you'll find what I have to be a *bit* more pressing, Sugar-Beak. *(Calling back)* Everyone's gathered back here, darlin'.

NARRATOR:

A middle aged man rounded the corner, aging muscular frame tugging just so at the seams of his crisp navy suit. He cast a rather uninterested glance around at the crew, eyes framed by strikingly perfect eyebrows... until he locked eyes with Sedum.

The man's mouth stretched in a lazy smile, and though not particularly lively, it was simply... pleasant. Familiar. Sedum's multi-jointed wings shuddered.

CRUX:

What is this? What's happening?

GLENDA:

It seems like our local DoAA isn't taking their responsibilities seriously enough, even when their Mayor comes to them with their town's safety on the line! I'm sorry, but your stubbornness leaves me with no choice but to bring in the State- a good slap on the wrist for all this naughtiness. *(Not able to repress the joy)* Oh, but I am just *tickled* I could snag this one away from the capitol on such short notice, can you believe it? Our very own State Aberrations Director. Oh, what's it, now, sweet lumps? Not even a how-do-ya-do for your Boss?

SAM:

(Half a moment)

Uh, hi there-?

Sedum opens the door to the house, cutting Sam off.

SEDUM:

(Purposefully subdued)

Director Becker, Mayor Dickson, if you would, kindly, follow me inside, please.

NARRATOR:

Director Becker gave the crew a courteous nod, the little curl to his lips glued in place. He stopped for half a moment close to Sedum.

BECKER:

Prompt on the hospitality, Null. Color me impressed.

NARRATOR:

As Becker patted him on the chest, Sedum's face was, for once, expressionless. Glenda readjusted her waves in the wet heat of the day.

GLENDA:

I do think we're gonna be at *least* a minute, sugar-packets. Excuse us.

She clacks across the deck.

SAM:

What about our Management interview-

The door shuts, hard.

VALENTINA:

Well. She was right. She just stirred up a fucking hurricane.

A moment.

SAM:

Oh. ... So... do I have the job?

VALENTINA:

Yeah, Sam, you always had the job. Start Monday.

SAM:

Wooo... go me...

END