

HARBOR

Episode 6 - "Warm Front"

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TITLE CARD SEQUENCE**SCENE 1 - INT. SAM'S ROOM/ LEAH'S CONDO - VARIOUS TIMES**

Its early. There's soft music that plays underneath, the alarm buzzing, the radio announcer bursts in.

RADIO HOST:

It's 8 am, on this beautiful Monday morning, and it's a *gorgeous* start to the week, wouldn't you agree, Harbor?

SAM:

(Gasps awake)

Augh, ugggh. What, mmh, what time is it... *(Hisses)* SHIT!

He clatters out of bed, throws open his closet, and flings clothes to find what he can.

(Cont.)

God, why... on my first day...

A distant car horn beeps outside.

(cont.)

Just a minute, Al...

He leaves in a tizzy, we hear him calling out to Leah.

(Cont.)

I'm off to work, bye mom!!

The door closes downstairs.

LEAH:

Oh, bye!

A moment.

NARRATOR:

Time has a funny way of piling up, once one is aware of how finely it flows.

The door opens again, downstairs.

SAM:

(Exhausted)

Hey.

LEAH:

Hi! How was your first day? I have dinner...!

SAM:

It was... fine. I'm... I'm just gonna go to bed... *(He yawns)* Thanks, mom.

He climbs the stairs, still muffled. His bedroom door opens, closes. He collapses into bed. He groans... then dissolves into sleep.

NARRATOR:

As though time itself has become aware of a mirror, bent on chasing it's own reflection.

The same happens. The birds, the ALARM.

RADIO HOST:

Gooooood Morning, my lovely Harborians, on this, our very own beautiful Tuesday!

SAM:

Mmf...

RADIO HOST:

It's 8 a.m., on the dot today, my listeners-

SAM:

(Growling) Asssssssssssss.

It repeats. He's downstairs, clattering out the door.

SAM:

Bye mom I love you!

LEAH:

I love you-

Door shuts.

(Cont.)

-sweets.

NARRATOR:

It cannot stop itself. The hours of light mingle with the dark,
slipping, tumbling by like oily fish in weak fingers.

The BLARING alarm.

RADIO HOST:

Gooooood morn-

SAM:

Auuuuugh- *(Muffled)* Bye!

Door shuts- Door opens.

(Cont.)

Hey...

LEAH:

Sam... It's after 10-

SAM:

I just need sleep... I'm sorry, mom...

ALARM.

RADIO HOST:

Ready for this, our own special, perfect Thursday?!

Sam groans, dissolving into a pitiful little cry.
ALARM.

RADIO HOST:

(Whispering) Hey. Hey you. You know what day is it? It'ssssss...
FRIDAY!

SAM:

Hnnnnggh...

SCENE 2 - INT. DOCA - AFTERNOON

The sounds change. We're in a different location, the DoCA. A stack of heavy papers falls in front of Sam's face as he's leaning on his desk.

SAM:

Ah!

AL:

Good nap, Sam?

SAM:

(Blearily)

You can't prove it...

AL:

There's drool on your paper.

He wipes at the paper.

SAM:

(Sniffs)

Mmm, no, no there isn't.

NARRATOR:

Al hopped onto the edge of his hand-me-down desk, deep scratches embedded into a drawer he'd traced all week. She pushed the binder of "Harbor: A Tapestry of Beings - Part 2" to the side as Samson rubbed the sleep from his eyes.

AL:

Catching up on the latest Sam-brand fucked up nightmare-time?

SAM:

(Disgruntled)

No... they're all just nonsense... it's lonely... Ugh, what use is sleep if you don't even have interesting dreams to pass the time.

AL:

Biological maintenance is such a pain... You know, you're adjusting to the earlier call time about as good as I am.

SAM:

Why aren't you channeling the spirit of a duffle bag packed with shit, then?

AL:

Awww, bro, are you saying I'm pretty?

SAM:

Yeah, Al... Sure. I mean yes, *emphatically*. *(Yawns)* So purty.

AL:

You're just used to me lookin' way nastier. It's all a matter of perspective-

WILLIAM:

(From the other room)

VALEN! YA GOT A CALL COMIN' IN!

VALENTINA:

(Very distant, from her office)

JUST TRANSFER IT, FOR CHRISAKE, WILLIAM!

WILLIAM:

GOTCHA, BOSS! *(Muffled)* Transferring ya now.

AL:

Bet you 20 William gets put back on Ground Crew next week.

NARRATOR:

From their vantage point, shoved into the corner behind the side door to the yard, they peered out into the main work area. Crux's forehead had been nothing but lines, unable to tear his eyes away from the mess that was his former reception desk, the one which William had smothered in fluorescent sticky notes and mecha figurines.

SAM:

I don't have 20 bucks to bet, I haven't got my first paycheck yet... anyway I'm suppose to be... Ah, yeah, learning the cultures of local Cryptids, I'm on... earless humanoid-cats that scream... to... hear... wait, what...?

AL:

Come on, give me something, I need anything that isn't-

A door opens, and a pair of people approach from down the hall.

BECKER:

Team meeting! Let's go, have a little pot-luck of camaraderie, what do you all say? I hope it's yes because it *is* required.

AL:

... *Him*.

SAM:

(Hushed)

Again? Does Director Becker have, like, a *thing* for mid-day meetings? Like a *weird* thing... ?

AL:

Say fetish-

SEDUM:

(Curtly)

Greers! It's an open office, we can *hear* you.

SCENE 3 - INT. DOCA - AFTERNOON**BECKER:**

Always find you two together- like you're attached at the hip.
You sure you're not twins?

SAM:

We're not-

AL:

No-

BECKER:

(chuckles amicably, a hint of carelessness)
I'm joking, it's not like I get confused between you.

SEDUM:

(Strikingly deadened and strung out)

Well, uh, ah, good afternoon to you all, then. Director Becker has encouraged retention of this structure change, as... you can see. With all of us standing here... for the third day..

VALENTINA:

I was on the phone.

SEDUM:

(Almost hopeful)
Was it pertinent?

WILLIAM:

It was one of those squatch-hunters. Just for you, Valen.

VALENTINA:

... This is still wastin' daylight..

BECKER:

Ergo our earlier start time, Hollow. And it's a good way to keep up morale when Stations take regular get-togethers. Speaking of, where's our Research Director? Sedum, did you forget?

SEDUM:

(Blinking out of his trance)

Roose? You'd like Roose to be here?

BECKER:

... Right... We'll get started without her, if she wants to... jump in later... Take the lead, Null.

SEDUM:

Well, then... we have... uh... Valen, what do you have?

VALENTINA:

Nothing! This nonsense doesn't work with our folks, look at 'em!

NARRATOR:

Valen gestured wildly; Crux held himself and was staring a hole into the floor, very quiet; William swayed in his hand-me-down wheelchair and smiled hesitantly; Sam yawned behind his hand, and Al coolly glared at Becker, softly clicking her teeth.

SEDUM:

We're giving this another chance, just to see. It isn't set in stone.

BECKER:

But it *is* official procedure, as you know... Though you've done away with so many of those, I shouldn't be surprised this is so difficult for your people.

NARRATOR:

Becker swirled his coffee mug and took a sip, catching sight of Al.

BECKER:

(Swallowing)

What? Do I have some crud on me?

AL:

Yeah, there... no, wait, there... oh, no. It's a losing battle.

Becker chuckles.

SEDUM:

(Quiet pleading)

Valen, humor me. Please.

VALENTINA:

Uh... Fine. Let's go over some updates: First... uh, oh yeah, Stick's wires are finally bein' routed outta Eaton, after the... accident-

AL:

(Distracted from her hatred)

I call it.

VALENTINA:

I said it was an *update*. City Planning specifically requested Management to go in to help with makin' sure it goes smoothly and she's comfortable during the process.

AL:

(Under her breath)

Damn...

BECKER:

"Management", even the other departments don't call you Lead Director? What's the point of the title now... *(Disappointed "tic" of the mouth)* Ah well. No accounting for gratitude. So, which face do you use for that kind of work, Sedum?

There's a moment for Sedum to choose his tactic.

SEDUM:

(Low)

Just... Nuller. The usual.

BECKER:

(Louder)

Oh, the "Human" you? Don't you feel like you'd get better treatment if you used, say, Nicholas, instead? The ones from real people look far more convincing. And less awful.

SAM:

You have more than one human face, sir?

SEDUM:

Yes, Samson, though I tend not to use any regularly aside from Nuller. That's how Harbor knows me.

BECKER:

(Under his breath)

Oh how times have changed-

SEDUM:

(Hurriedly)

-Sorry; Valen? You were saying?

VALENTINA:

Well, uh, we've gotta get the Window Licker PSA's out- Crux! You got a date for when we can print off those posters?

CRUX:

It can be done this evening. But before that, I was curious to read the reactions from the group on the mock-up? While we're all here.

VALENTINA:

Alright, yeah! Show off, Da Vinci.

NARRATOR:

Crux carefully unfurled his prototype. A blazing white font against deep murky blue, screaming out the phrase "Please refrain from looking into the night-time rain!" Continuing below in a sensible serif "Did you know Harbor has a Hairless Mutant Raccoon problem? Be prepared- simply refuse to look out your windows during evening storms!"

SAM:

Wow, that really takes me back. You knew it was summer when the posters came out.

WILLIAM:

But how're folks supposed to know what to look for when they're not looking?

CRUX:

(Not tracking)

Please elaborate, William?

WILLIAM:

Meanin', giving us some incentive to *not* look, like "here's an example, aren't you happy about your decision?", you know?

VALENTINA:

That's a fair point, but we shouldn't have a poster giving folks nightmares about the thing that'll give 'em nightmares.

WILLIAM:

That's very smart.

SAM:

I think it's good, Crux. I have never seen a Window Licker, and being reminded that they're hairless raccoons makes me happy about that.

AL:

(Low, to Sam)

They don't actually look like that.

SAM:

(Whispered)

Wha- what do they look like?-

CRUX:

I appreciate the encouragement. Thank you.

VALENTINA:

A storms blowin' in over the weekend, let's get a headstart on this.

BECKER:

You know what's interesting? If I can just jump in here..

VALENTINA:

(Barely covering her annoyance)
What's that, State Director?

BECKER:

The fact that all of you flow so well together.

VALENTINA:

Meaning?

BECKER:

Well, from the big city over here, but I've rarely seen such civility between Humans and a Changeling before.

A moment, this is out of turn.

SAM:

(Low, to Al)
What's a "Changeling"?

AL:

We'll it's ...

CRUX:

It's my classification, Sam.

SAM:

... Ah.

BECKER:

And falling in line under the leadership of a Terrene Itinerant, to boot! Really, it's just so intriguing. Well, but you have

more titles than that, don't you Null? Hard to sequester you to just one. It's like saying you're from Cleveland, not like Changeling; "Human become Aberration". Succinct, gives us a good look into what you're about, Cruz.-

SEDUM:

-Labels are helpful when trying to understand.

VALENTINA:

We prefer using folk's names, either way. Movin' on...

SAM:

Oh, Director Ivers Hollow? I have an idea.

VALENTINA:

(Obviously not used to this)

Uh. Yeah? Go ahead?

SAM:

W-well, I'm pretty good at writing, actually. I mean... that's not a big surprise, I've been writing non-stop for the past 5 years... Anyway, so I had an idea about the PSA's, what if we ran a radio spot? A lot of people walk around here, but with the rains comes shorter lifespans for the posters. We could reach more folks in the area.

VALENTINA:

Ah... Huh. That's interesting... What kinda budget we got for somethin' like that, Management?

SEDUM:

(Distracted)

What? Ah, uh... most likely none. We're talking about money, correct?

VALENTINA:

Yep. Sorry, Sam. Might be why that kind of approach doesn't exist in the first place. Good idea, though.

SAM:

Gotcha.

VALENTINA:

Weeeeelp. That's about it. I guess. Crux, head off to the printer, Al and Sam, you do your chicken guarding tonight for the Corwill's, you two still alright-?

AL:

Fine, Valen. We're good.

VALENTINA:

Ok. Let me know if and when that changes. Will- ah, sorry, keep forgetting... Yeeep... ok. Incredibly necessary meeting this late in the day..

BECKER:

That was a good idea, Sam.

SAM:

Thank you, Mr. Becker.

BECKER:

Shame it was shot down.

VALENTINA:

(Very tired of him)

Look, Becker, I ain't gonna coddle my crew. If doesn't work, it doesn't work. We don't need to waste time slatherin' on the honey when we can do jack-all. It wastes honey!

BECKER:

Mmm, I really don't agree, Hollow. This is part of why I'm here. Someone remind me, where's HR? I feel like our newest employee could use some affirmation in his work environment.

SAM:

(Embarrassed)

I don't need affirmation, I'm fine!

BECKER:

No, Sam. It's important to feel heard. ... HR?

SEDUM:

(Low)

That's me. I'm, uh, ah, first HR, Becker, as I've said, we all have to pull several carts.

BECKER:

(Snorts)

Oh yeah. You, being Human resources.

AL:

We call it "Healing Resources".

BECKER:

Always renaming things, "Department of *Cryptid* Affairs", "Healing Resources"- you know, rename the coffee-pot while you're at it.

NARRATOR:

Becker swirled his mug again,

WILLIAM:

Oh my God, I got a good one for that- Hot Bean Juicer!

NARRATOR:

His grip faltered around the handle,

CRUX:

Ah-ha, what about Thinking Soup Extractor?

VALENTINA:

Alright, fellas.

WILLIAM:

(Chuckles)

Resuscitation Dirt-Water-

SEDUM:

(A snap)
Enough.-

NARRATOR:

And the mug slipped from Becker's grasp.

The mug shatters. Everyone gets quiet.

BECKER:

Shoot! Butterfingers over here..

SEDUM:

I'll clean it up, may we all return to work?

BECKER:

Oh, this isn't a big *deal*, Null. Calm down.

SEDUM:

Let's get on with the day... please?

SCENE 4 - INT. SEDUM'S OFFICE - LATE AFTERNOON

William is answering the phone in the background, but it is generally quiet. Al approaches the door to Sedum's office, and hesitates.

AL:

He's fine. I bet he's... peachy. But he'll never turn down lemongrass tea.

She knocks.

SEDUM:

(Pained) Yes?

The door opens and closes again, softly, not fully.

AL:

Hey Director dude.

SEDUM:

(Exhaling, muttering)

Al. Hi.

AL:

I made... this. For you.

She crosses the space and sets the mug down, to a little squeak of surprise from Sedum.

(Cont.)

Seeing as how Becker's still out, bothering the guys... Figured you didn't want to go into the kitchen.

SEDUM:

You're a God-send, Spirit. Thank you...

AL:

That man's a grade-A asshat.

Sedum makes a noncommittal noise as he drinks.

SEDUM:

That's bureaucracy. Enough about him- How are you? Adjusting to Samson being around? I'm sorry, I've been distracted, I was hoping to check in earlier.

AL:

It's been a long week, I get it. I'm, yeah, I'm alright. Sam is catching on ok, too. As much as he can with all this.

SEDUM:

That's good, but I'm asking how *you* feel about him being here.

AL:

Uh... *(Exhales)*

NARRATOR:

Al crossed to the lone window, peering out into the carport, slowly filling with late-afternoon sun catching the glittering paint of the rental car. Sedum swiveled in his chair to face her, taking the chance to stretch out his wings one by one across the width of the office, scrunching up on the cabinets with quiet pops and cracks.

AL:

I dunno. It's like... wearing pyjamas to work.

SEDUM:

(Laughs, stretching)

Now you understand how I felt when *you* started!

AL:

At least he isn't a teenager. I was a whole 'nother mess.

SEDUM:

No, never a mess, you're so hard on yourself... *(Chuckles, then a moment)* ... I'm sorry for snapping back there. This evaluation has been... difficult. But I shouldn't have taken it out on everyone.
I'm sorry.

AL:

It wasn't that bad.

SEDUM:

It was bad enough. It's not that I don't want you all to enjoy your time when possible, it's... it's understanding when and where to enjoy it? ... and around *who*.

AL:

If Becker can't take it, he should get outta the fire. Er... pan-
(Snaps) Kitchen.

SEDUM:

(Laughs halfheartedly)

I don't say this to demean, but you've never worked in a traditionally structured Station. It's like any other government entity- sterile at best.. Valen, Roose and.. Uh, Valen and I have curated this place to be something hopefully better but, I feel we've done you all a disservice by not preparing you.

AL:

That's right, you worked at Raleigh Station before. Wait, was he... was Becker your boss then?

SEDUM:

(Slightly uncomfortable)

... Yes, though... complicated. It was, it was different, Al. It... was very, very different and controlling and suffocating... I don't want to replicate it. For anyone.

AL:

... Say he's an asshole.

SEDUM:

What? No.

AL:

But he is. It's the truth. And you love having moral integrity, don't you?

SEDUM:

Al, don't try to "moral" me into calling him names-

AL:

You owe it to yourself, to that *integrity*, to call him a rancid dick.

SEDUM:

(Smiling)

No, in fact, I have to be better than that.

AL:

What, when stick-up-his-ass isn't here? Isn't that how he wins?

SEDUM:

There's no "winning" here.

AL:

Come on, just one good swear- I'll give you some options:
Dick-Ass-Bastard-Bitch-Cho-

SEDUM:

Sorry, Spirit, no.

AL:

(Sighs, but still thinking fast, new tactic)

Well... then... Guess I... misinterpreted your... look-alike species in
this dimension. Didn't realize you were a big ol'... *chicken*.

A moment of tension.

SEDUM:

(Barely keeping out baffled laughter)

... What was that??

AL:

(Slightly strangled, trying to keep a straight face)

Say a swear dammit-

SEDUM:

(Giggling)

Since when did the edge make a comeback? I thought we left that
behind at 16!

AL:

(Snorting)

Nah, nah! It's started up again since you got too posh to say
Dick-Ass!

SEDUM:

(Laughing)

Want some help in the grave you're digging? We'll get to the bottom much faster-

AL:

Look at you, signin' my death sentence! This is clearly a foot all the way down my gullet situation- Ya can still heimlich me- if you cared at all about my well-bein'!

SEDUM:

Oh no, it's much kinder to let you choke. You won't have to live it down-

The door creaks open. They both stop laughing.

BECKER:

I just had to come in to see who got Sedum in better form- Kiddo, you gotta tell me your ways, I can't even force a smile out of him!

Al turns on the freeze. Sedum is back on edge.

AL:

There's your problem, Mr. Becker; I don't force anything.

BECKER:

Of course not, that's not your way. Not a fan of overextending yourself I've seen. So exactly how long have you two known each other? It can't be more than a decade, can it?

AL:

Do all city-folk like pryin'-

SEDUM:

15 years, this July.

BECKER:

Really! Almost as soon as you landed up here... Boy, you must've been young, Al.

AL:

I have a baby-face. I'm actually 56.

Becker snorts.

SEDUM:

I-I'm sorry, can I interrupt? We should start arranging all we need for our meeting later, yes, Becker? And I need to go see about the wiring- A-and Al, why don't you go finish up the rest of the casualty filing before your watch tonight? ... please?

AL:

Can do, Director. *(Lower)* Sorry bout the... poultry jab.

SEDUM:

(A small smile, also low)

Apology accepted. Go have some peace and quiet.

She walks out, but Becker stops her before she can leave.

BECKER:

Oh, Al? It's alright if I call you Al? Right? Only, theres two of you Greers and it'll get confusing..

AL:

It's my name. You're fine.

BECKER:

Wonderful, great- Keep an eye out for me, ok? I've been meaning to get around to a chat with you- get to know you a bit better.

AL:

(Lightly, sarcasm)

... Afraid I'm all booked up, Mr. Becker. Lot's of meetings to get to, 'specially round mid-day, they're very important. But next time you're in the area I'll be sure to get real chummy.

She continues out and away.

BECKER:

(Distant)

No wonder you two get on, you're both so bubbly.

SCENE 5 - EXT. DOCA - EARLY EVENING

Sam shuts the gate, while Fergum runs on ahead. He catches up to them, breathless. Crickets are starting in the late afternoon.

SAM:

Better route for our run today, Fergum?

FERGUM:

It was acceptable. One of our bodies is on the brink of exhaustion, thus passing satisfaction.

SAM:

(Panting)

Oh, only one...?

NARRATOR:

Sam glanced up at the house, catching a pallid face at the lower right window, pulling back a ragged curtain. Roose glowered from inside, one hand by her face- it twisted, writhing with a twinge of effort. Fergum's bodies shuddered, rebound to the property. Sam waved. Roose's lip curled in derision as she let the curtain fall back.

FERGUM:

The remainder of us are bored, and hungry, and deprived, and restless and bolstered-

SAM:

I'm sorry, I really shouldn't play Risk right now... I'm forgetting something, I just know I am... Raincheck?

FERGUM:

You would leave us alone, *helpless*?

SAM:

Fergum, buddies, you know I'm not abandoning ya'll, ok?

FERGUM:

Give pats as recompense.

SAM:

Fine, come here..

Sam leans down and starts patting Fergum.

FERGUM:

Why is the air tainted with suspension? Hollow is overworked-
The Bird is flighty. (*Wheezes at the pun*)

SAM:

I don't know.

Fergum scoffs.

(*Cont.*)

I... I don't like gossiping.

FERGUM:

Noticing is not *gossip*. You are a part of the infection as well,
with your apprehension.

SAM:

Sorry, Fergum... That's kind of how I am.

FERGUM:

Are you afraid of us, still? After Roose muzzled us from living
flesh? Keeping us tethered here, to this house, unless we are
affixed to your side?

SAM:

I'm afraid you'll tear my arm off if you keep tugging the leads,
sorry we have to roll with the belt situation.

FERGUM:

There remains too much to smell.

SAM:

... I don't see how I contribute here. I feel off my game and pointless. There's so much more going on than I know and I'm just hovering... That's the trepidation. It's not you all.

FERGUM:

You speak of feelings?

SAM:

I'll stop.

FERGUM:

We "feel" similarly useless, if such a remark would assist.

SAM:

You do?

FERGUM:

These bodies, they are flimsy. They are fettered by needless laws. Burdensome, clumsy. We... "feel" locked inside with no release.

SAM:

I know exactly what you mean.

FERGUM:

The only moments of respite we find are in the depths of the evening, when it is sunless. It reminds us of our existence before that *terrible* day when everything changed-

SAM:

SHIT, night!! Oh my God, what time is it?

His phone bleeps.

(Cont.)

AUGH, it's 6! I'm sorry Fergum, I, I gotta go, I have that stupid farm thing!

FERGUM:

(A little hurt)

Oh. We comprehend.

Sam takes off, over the lawn.

SAM:

You can let yourselves back in upstairs?

FERGUM:

Yes, we will settle for knocking books off of shelves for entertainment.

SAM:

(Distant)

Sounds good, have fun!! *(Calling)* Al, I'm so sorry-!

SCENE 6 - INT. AL'S CAR - EARLY EVENING

The doors shut, and Sam sighs, sliding down in his seat.

SAM:

I'm sorry I was late. Again. In general... Sorry...

AL:

You're fine, don't sweat it.

She is rifling around.

SAM:

Today's been... a little ugh, you know?

NARRATOR:

Sam cradled his face in his hand, staring out the car window at the back lot, bursting with foliage. It had been a place for picnics, once... Al tossed aside a handful of leftover receipts in the backseat.

AL:

Ugh is right... *(Muttered)* Damn. *(Normal)* Sit tight, k? I left the field journal... *somewhere...* Ah, Valen's office, she was looking through it.

She unbuckles herself and pops the door open.

(Cont.)

Be back in a minute.

SAM:

(It's catching up to him)

Mmm, take your time...

AL:

Don't get too cozy!

SCENE 7 - INT. DOCA - EARLY EVENING

Papers shuffle. A drawer opens, shuts. More rustling.

AL:

Where are you... Ah... ha. Here we go.

She grabs a pen out of a jar.

(Cont., Muttering)

Take your nice pen, too. That's for not returning my journal, Valen.

She takes a few steps and closes the door softly.

(Cont.)

So quiet... Not a thing outta place...

A great clatter comes from upstairs. She winces.

(Cont.)

Knocking shit around again, Fergum...?

A few voices murmur from behind a closed door. Al gets quiet and draws closer. The voices grow clearer.

GLEENDA:

... I've already shown Mr. Becker more than enough proof of your lacking leadership skills. It's alright, Sugar-Beak, it's just a fact that you gotta try harder, but I will admit the evidence is... *(Sighs)* unflattering. I shouldn't, for your pride's sake... oh, but honey, you *should* know. Just last week, Alelia divulged in me... Well, listen for yourself?

She plays the recording, chopped together.

AL, VO:

"The DoCA has always been underfunded, that's-Sedum's fault. He's not in charge--"

GLEENDA:

I'm so sorry, maple-glaze. Never a good day to hear dissent amongst the troops.

AL:

(Whispered)

Fucking- I didn't say-!

BECKER:

It's concerning when your employees are so openly negative. I didn't want to start my visit on that note, but it had to be addressed.

SEDUM:

(Distracted, saying the right things to get through it)

I didn't know it to be so dire.

GLEENDA:

Tried to tell you, darlin', I really did. But it was so difficult, when I couldn't keep your attention long enough, what with your internal crisis', your badgering for more and more money- It's exhausting, when I have the entire town to help-

Another clatter from upstairs, a sudden burst of barking.

(Cont.)

Lord, what kind of demon you got up there...?

SEDUM:

Some friends are staying with me- I do understand, Mayor Dickson. I'll be more open to your warnings in the future, and hopefully avoid a situation like this. My apologies.

GLENDA:

Good. Doesn't this all just go so smoothly when we play like nice well-mannered folks?

SEDUM:

Yes...

BECKER:

And thank you, from my deepest heart, Ma'am. This is precisely why communication between government departments is so important- Accountability. That being said, I appreciate the work you've *both* put into this.

SEDUM:

(Almost snippy)

I appreciate your grace, Director Becker, seeing the extensive proof laid out...

BECKER:

There's no harm in second chances. Oh, no, scratch that, *third* one, isn't it? You've been so dutiful, I almost forgot about your grand exit. Funny... so yes, this is a bit more concerning.
(Sighs) Your file continues to grow...

GLENDA:

Speaking of, it's lucky for us this one has done far better in his anger management than he did in Raleigh, so I've heard.

There's hope for anyone! (*Low*) But you did take an awful big risk sending him here...

BECKER:

I didn't send Sedum here. Happy accidents, all around.

A huge cacophony, and a distant wail of Fergum ("*Submit, knowledge!!!*")

GLEENDA:

You don't say... ! (*Chuckles thoughtfully*) I'm so glad we had this meeting- as you can see this place has been heading downhill lately- hardly front-line work. I suppose now with all this laid out, I should tell the police to broaden their focus?

BECKER:

Who said anything about the police, Mayor?

GLEENDA:

Well, I'm assuming now, but won't this local Aberrations Department be more limited in reach, while the discipline gets doled out.

BECKER:

He is only one of three Directors.

GLEENDA:

And such a tight team they are.

BECKER:

I'm taking another week to decide my full course of action.

GLEENDA:

I understand, Mr. Becker, though, while we're here, I do want to go over one more thing; I am just a smidge puzzled by what's being done to look into the attack on my gun Factory.

BECKER:

I haven't forgotten. How could I, it's *(Sighs)* ... I might as well bring you both up to speed. It's the biggest Aberration case in Western North Carolina presently- Not your Factory, *per se*, but reports from here to Asheville talk of similar occurrences, threatening messages, arson, destruction to private property. The papers decided to call it "The Pyre", an effort to name the boogeyman... We can't leave whatever arsonist beast this is to the police alone. Their tactics lack when it comes to Aberrations. Heck, it'd be better to get the fire department in, considering!
(Laughs)

GLEENDA:

Ah ha... my mistake, then, jumping the gun on due process, as it were! *(Giggles)* Well, gentlemen, I'll scoot. It's always lovely, aside from the crass entities you keeps as company, Sugar-Beak. Other than that, always a *pleasure* to stop by.

AL:

I have to get out of here..

NARRATOR:

The door's handle turned. Al's stomach dropped directly past her knees.

AL:

Shit.

Al quickly runs and jumps into a chair, dropping her pen.

NARRATOR:

The only option- the large, wingback chair in the open breakroom, facing away from the Cryptid director's pair of doors. She launched herself into it, drawing her knees up to her neck, holding even the breath in her lungs still. The door swung open.

Glenda clacks through.

GLEENDA:

Take care- Oh!

She stops. And picks something up off of the floor.

(Cont.)

Beautiful pen. This either of your's?

AL:

(Barely hissed)

Dammit.

SEDUM:

(Distracted)

No.

BECKER:

(Half a moment)

Yes- mine. Thanks.

Becker gets up and meets her halfway out the door.

GLEENDA:

Evenin', fellas.

She exits. There's a moment of silence.

SEDUM:

... Are you done...?

BECKER:

Mmmm... With you, at any rate.

Sedum gets up and moves to the door.

SEDUM:

If you could move from the doorway, I need to finish up.

BECKER:

What... was *that*? Not even an attempt at manners? So digging around in these woods uncivilized you that easy. After all I did. (*Tsks*) And I thought you outgrew your embarrassing immaturity. (*Lower*) The least you could do is use proper titles.

SEDUM:

(*Inhales*)

Ah... (*Settles for muttering*) Please, *Director* Becker? Please move out of the doorway?

BECKER:

(*A smile, low*)

... Almost got you there, didn't I?

The door snaps shut. He moves a few feet, then... it's quiet.

NARRATOR:

The tendons in Al's legs began to loosen when a weight suddenly pressed above her head, at the top of the chair. Becker, lazy smile and all, twirled Valen's pen clumsily.

BECKER:

Hey kiddo, told you I been meaning to catch you. Let's talk.

SCENE 8 - EXT. DOCA - EARLY EVENING

The door closes, the crickets chirping. Becker crosses to her over the porch as Al speaks.

AL:

I got somewhere to be, make this quick.

BECKER:

I feel like you have a problem with me, Al. I'm here to fix things, but seem to be... aggravating your personal issues. It's concerning.

AL:

Are you this dense or just masturbatory, State Director?

BECKER:

You get indulged regularly, don't you? Are you intimidated by a superior who isn't wrapped around your finger? I promise, out of everyone here, *I don't bite.*

AL:

We're all close, what can I say. You sure you're not the one whose intimidated?

BECKER:

(Chuckle)

So, when did you start this habit of eavesdropping?

AL:

Since certain folks decided to show up and cause a fuss.

BECKER:

That's territorial! Who do you think you're protecting?

AL:

No one. I'm leaving, I'm already late.

She takes a step away.

BECKER:

Wait, wait. I did want to check in on you, kiddo. You spit poison when you see me, obviously there's a problem.

AL:

Maybe we just don't get along. Personality types. Star signs. Whatever you wanna blame it on.

Becker purposely slows down the conversation, easing it into a relaxed pace to combat Al's strikes.

BECKER:

That would require us getting to know each other better. You've been here a decade...

AL:

We went over this.

BECKER:

(Whistles)

Now that's some loyalty, 'specially for one so young. That's telling. *And* impressive. Do you like this work, Al?

AL:

It's needed.

BECKER:

You're good at what you do. Aside from the inability to show *any* aspirations and that attitude you cop; Being on the receiving end, I could see that tanking your reviews, if it suited anyone to correct you. *(Laughs)* I just wanted to give you some personal encouragement- I've seen your work ethic, your reliability, your spirit. You're doing good.

AL:

If you wanna punish me for listenin', I'd prefer if you just hacked it out.

BECKER:

That's not my style, Al. Punishment doesn't do a thing unless the offender understands *why* it's happening. Really feels it. And that back there wasn't even worth a slap on the wrist, in present circumstances. You have... obstinacy. I want to support that. ... Now when was it, again, when Sedum, what, saved you? Rescued you, was it?

AL:

Where'd you get that idea?

BECKER:

I assumed. From what the report said: "child (13, A. Greer) encountered sight of bloodied field, one S. Nuller de-escalated situation." It's not hard to find out what I want. I am State Director.

AL:

He *helped* me. What's your angle?

BECKER:

You're so quick to judge... I guess this is the downside to that tenacity, you have to have oodles of self confidence, whether or not it's warranted... So you're close, you two?

AL:

I stalked him for neigh-on 5 months 'til he explained shit and then after that stalked him for a few more years 'til he gave me a job. So yeah. I guess we're close.

BECKER:

Hm. Listen, kiddo, I get the... protectiveness. This is all familiar, obviously from all that history. But I am just gauging how well you know your Director Nuller. That's all.

AL:

I'd say I know him pretty well.

BECKER:

(Sincerely)

You are, by all means, entitled to think that.

AL:

... Good night, Mr. Becker.

Al walks away.

BECKER:

(He's still very relaxed)

What, after all that you're not even a little curious?

She doesn't respond, continuing to walk away.

SCENE 9 - EXT. CORWILL FARM - EVENING

General atmospheric sounds of a small farm. Intermittent moo's moan in the distance, along with a few low humming "bwak"s of chickens, around the siblings in the early twilight. The cicadas and crickets are buzzing as night comes on.

SAM:

What'd Ms. Corwill pack for dinner?

AL:

Mmm... *(She shuffles around in a basket given to them)* Biscuits and gravy, chanterelles... and milk.

SAM:

No such thing as lactose sensitivity on a farm.

Al chuckles a little, distracted, as Sam busies himself with his dinner.

(Cont.)

So... chicken stealing... a usual suspicious event for the DoCA? ...

Al?

AL:

Hmm? Sorry?

SAM:

Our charge for the week? The chickens from being theft'ed?

AL:

Oh yeah... It's a trial for you. I thought you knew?

SAM:

Yeah. Figured... Are you bored?

AL:

Nah, it's nice. Even if it is busy-work. It's with you.

SAM:

You're just saying that.

AL:

There's nothing I'd rather do than hang outside a chicken coop, eating biscuits with my brother... Underneath the claw gouges.

NARRATOR:

They looked up, refreshing their minds to the deep scars in the window frame above their heads in the soft dusk. Splinters still hung by threads of fiber, the path trailing up the dark wood planks.

AL:

And the overtime ain't nothin to sneeze at- this needed to happen either way and Crux wasn't about to give up his nights.

SAM:

... Still. I wonder how long they'll stick me on stuff like this...

AL:

It's been a week, Sam. You're all still getting to know each other. You'll all trust each other with time.

SAM:

Yeah maybe soon they'll let me be something more than dead weight.

AL:

Don't say that about yourself.

SAM:

'K...

AL:

... Here, take my jacket. You should nap.

SAM:

Am I that much of a baby?

AL:

I'm trying to help. Take the jacket.

Sam thinks for a moment.

SAM:

You're great.-

AL:

SLEEEEP.

SCENE 10 - EXT. CORWILL FARM - NIGHT

Sam wakes up with a start. Al is close, and it's quiet.

AL:

(Quiet)

Forgot you slept like a rock, I've been shaking you for half a minute.

SAM:

Mmf... How long've I been out-

AL:

Shhh.

Sam sits up.

SAM:

(Blearily but becoming alert)

What's happening?

AL:

There. In the treeline.

NARRATOR:

A soft orange glow flickered across the field, in the shelter of the forest. Sam mimicked his sister, and pulled himself up onto the balls of his feet, crouched. The light slid through the brush, low to the ground, pulsing softly.

SAM:

What is that?

AL:

Chicken thief?

SAM:

(Getting anxious)

I-I can't be here, I'm not supposed to be on dangerous assignments for another month- this was supposed to be a throw-away stake-out.

AL:

We don't know if they're dangerous.

SAM:

Those gouges don't say dangerous?!

AL:

They don't know we're here. They've been pacing...

Sam's phone suddenly begins buzzing.

SAM:

Damn-! Who... Mom, gah, no, not now!

He cancels the call.

(cont.)

The light... where's the light-

AL:

(Gently)

Shhh...

Quiet rustling. A pause. More rustling.

(Cont.)

Ah-

Something whizzes close to them. It lands with a plop and the hiss and pop of flames.

NARRATOR:

A compact ball rolled to a stop between them on the hay. The size of a clementine, wispy flames licking it's surface.

SAM:

Shit-

NARRATOR:

Sam jumped up and stamped out the ball, the embers having already crept to the surrounding grass.

A sound squeaks out from the treeline- muffled, faint.

AL:

Damn-

It's quiet. Tense.

(Cont.)

Should'a brought my crossbow...

SAM:

What do we do?

AL:

Wait.

Distant, at the trees, there's no movement. Then... a heavy thud. Quick footsteps away. A pause, straining for sound.

(Cont.)

We scared them off.

SAM:

(Tensely)

Yeah, that's what happened-

NARRATOR:

Al grabbed Sam suddenly, her hand a vice around his arm. The whites of her eyes glistened in the moonlight. A figure, barely discernible, stood between the edge of the trees and scraggly corn stalks.

AL:

(Hushed, horrifically serious)
Get ready.

SAM:

I don't think I can.

NARRATOR:

The figure twitched, once. Al's fingers squeezed Sam's bicep, their blood sharing the same driving rhythm. The figure hesitated, and... *shuddered*, a full undulation washing over their body, head falling back- the shadow's spine craning-Melting down, disappearing. Silence wrapped them... then the crashing of retreat.

Bones crack in the night, a muffled gasping groaning, morphing into something more guttural before they run back into the forest... A moment...

AL:

Grab the projectile, we're leaving now. We're not prepared for whoever that was and Ms. Corwill's inside with her shotgun- She'll be fine.

SAM:

Ok-

Sam picks it up, but recoils.

(Cont.)

Ah, it's hot! What is that?

NARRATOR:

Al kicked the rock, rubbing at the flaking charr with her boot.

AL:

... Flammable stone.

SAM:

Didn't you say you saw burnt cement at the Factory?

SCENE 11 - EXT. SEDUM'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Al knocks on the door. A moment. Someone unlocks it from the other side. The door swings open.

SEDUM:

Greers... it's 10:30. What happened? Are you alright? Are you hurt?

NARRATOR:

The warmth of electric light washed over the siblings onto the landing outside of Sedum's apartment. Al held her balled hand out. Sedum offered his own.

The stone falls into his hand.

SEDUM:

What is this?

SAM:

You don't know what that rock is?

SEDUM:

(Puzzled)

Should I?

SAM:

Oh God, if you don't, then we're really screwed-

AL:

That was thrown at us at Corwill's Farm. It was on fire.

SEDUM:

Really...

NARRATOR:

Sam clung to the wooden staircase railing, the cool night air cleansing his thumping head. He scanned the dense trees obsessively as Al wiped her hand on her jeans.

SEDUM:

Did you see who threw it?

AL:

A little. Is this The Pyre?

SEDUM:

(Not surprised)

Where'd you hear that?

AL:

Internet.

SAM:

Whoever it was was... glowing... They could turn it on and off... They could dissolve?- They could be watching us right now...

NARRATOR:

The ball stained Sedum's gray fingertips black as he inspected it, all eyes squinting in thought.

AL:

What's our next move?

SEDUM:

I'll pass this along to Roose. Maybe our Research Director will research for once... Both of you are relieved of that watch- Thank you for bringing this to my attention so quickly-

SAM:

(Almost squeaking)

Isn't it a little suspicious, though? Ominous, at least!

AL:

With how they, they were watching us- I didn't say. Seems like they were hiding.

SEDUM:

No matter the intent, we'll leave this to Roose to look into. It's late. You both should rest. Goodnight.

The door begins to creak shut.

AL:

(Rushing)

Becker stopped me today.

SEDUM:

(Masking his nerves, which have leapt)

... Mmm...?? He did?

AL:

Yeah. Is everything ok?

SEDUM:

Everything's fine. Completely fine. As long as you're fine. Are you?

AL:

Yeah? I guess?

SEDUM:

That's all that matters... Please drive safe.

The door shuts.

SAM:

I don't like it out here.

AL:

... Right. Let's go.

They descend the stairs, the sounds of night overwhelming them.

SCENE 12 - INT. LEAH'S CONDO - NIGHT

The front door shuts. Soft music plays as Leah reads her book.

SAM:

Mom?

Sam walks into the living room.

LEAH:

Hey, hon... Oh, it's late. You didn't answer-

SAM:

Yeah. Everything's... I... I'm sorry, mom.

LEAH:

Did something happen?

SAM:

No, but I... I'm making you worried. I'm sorry... for rushing off and passing out as soon as I get home. I didn't think we'd become ships in the night... Just... I'm sorry.

LEAH:

Sam. I'm only worried because... well, obvious reasons, I mean, tonight you're... covered in hay and smell like a campfire from your gas station job.

SAM:

I know I shouldn't ask you to trust me-

LEAH:

Sam, no. I know you. I can't control you. You're an adult, and you dictate what you want to and don't want to tell me. Just like I do you. That's... how growing up works.

SAM:

You don't tell me everything?

LEAH:

No.

SAM:

How menacing.

LEAH:

(Chuckles)

You don't want to know everything. ... The tighter you hold, the stronger the cracks become, I've found. *(A moment)* I want to support you, see what's best for you, not to strangle you. If that means easing off, then that's what it takes.

SAM:

... Is that why you've backed off on Al so much?

LEAH:

(Laughs a little awkwardly)

Oh... Well...

SAM:

I'm sorry, that was too-

LEAH:

As much as I can't tell you what to do, I *really* can't tell her. Which is good for a 28 year old, I think... The helicopter parent thing never jived with me. I trust that when you're ready, you'll tell me whatever you need to.

SAM:

I will, mom. I promise I will, as... as soon as I... understand it better... But hey, at least I'm making money. It'll almost make up for you having to sell the house... You know, in about three decades, replacing a lifetime of memories...

LEAH:

I don't miss it, you know.

SAM:

You don't?

LEAH:

No- the old house? No. I grew up there... Made a *lot* of mistakes in that place. Had more than my share of bad memories...
(*Reminiscing*) Got married there. Divorced there. (*Chuckles*) When I say I'm happier now, here? I mean it honestly, sweets. You didn't "take away" anything I wasn't already looking to pawn off.

SAM:

I didn't... think of it from, from your perspective... (*Sighs*) I'm so sorry mom. You'd think I could at least sympathize, but even that's shit right now.

LEAH:

Sam... I'm more worried about your concern for yourself.

SAM:

What do you mean?

LEAH:

You're done with the school thing, and I get that that's oh, God, how many years of constantly being told what to do? Where to go?

SAM:

Too many.

LEAH:

You're almost 25, birthday in a week? And you're done with going through the motions. You get to call the shots on what you're willing to put up with, now.

SAM:

(Tongue-in-cheek) I am?

LEAH:

You're running yourself ragged, Sam. That's the most concerning, watching you not having boundaries around your work. And what you want.

SAM:

I have so much to learn. I'm unbelievably behind, you have no idea. It's like a different language there.

LEAH:

Are you getting pushed to rush or are you rushing yourself? Either way, it's unsustainable.

SAM:

... I guess I haven't gotten a full night's sleep since... not for a while. It's like I can't sleep, though. I hardly dream anymore, either. I'm just... exhausted.

LEAH:

Maybe it's a part of acclimating?

SAM:

Maybe? ... I don't think I'm depressed, necessarily, but I don't know what else it is... This doesn't feel like an "episode".

LEAH:

You wanna set up an appointment with Dr. Morris? Get your noggin checked out?

SAM:

No... it'll pass. I'll make sure.

LEAH:

Ok. ... You have to decide what you can and can't do for yourself. No one else is gonna give it to you. They're concerned about the big picture, themselves, and you gotta be concerned about the

details, meaning lil ol' you. You're important. Take up the space and time you need to be healthy, sweets.

SAM:

Aww...

LEAH:

So important, Sam. You remember when we had to tighten our belts cause I ran myself so hard I got the super-flu and was out for two weeks? Almost lost my job if it weren't for the hospital stint?

SAM:

Bad coupla months.

LEAH:

Yeah... Don't... do that. You deserve rest *before* you burn out.

SAM:

You're right, mom. Ok. Uh, I'm going to go try to sleep for at least 12 hours, then.

SCENE 13 - EXT. LEAH'S CONDO - NIGHT

Crickets, but aside from that it's quiet.

NARRATOR:

Night held the world safely in it's mouth, Harbor sleeping, humming with unseen life. Sam rubbed his eyes, half collapsed against the window-sill of his bedroom, his new routine becoming as familiar as an unpopped joint.

SAM:

What am I missing. I'm forgetting...

NARRATOR:

He smoothed down his unruly beard, wiry over the week of neglect. The stars a fierce smattering across the sky, the world desperately unaccommodating, the forest creeping back into the sheared grass a storey below him.

SAM:

(Softer)

J... It's J. He's just... abandoned me... Oh God, don't be dramatic. ...
I haven't seen him since I started... What else am I supposed to
think? What did I do...?

NARRATOR:

He stared out over the trees, so many trees, ringing him,
sheltering him, choking him, even behind the glass. A light
winked in the growth below... It was gone. It was never there.

SAM:

Gotta take care of me... get myself in order. What *is* he though?
How is he in my head? No... calm down, it's ok... But it's not...
Don't get obsessed... Be patient... Oh.

NARRATOR:

The single glimmer quivered in the blackness below, again. It
had been there. Another joined. Two pinpricks of wavering light
among the bushes. Sam held his breath.

SAM:

(Breathed)

"They could be watching me right now..."

NARRATOR:

He pressed back from the sill, unable to tear his eyes away from
the pinpricks, from the wavering, undulating eyes. His neck
pulsed tight; an echo from earlier that night.

SAM:

Not here, not my family-

NARRATOR:

The eyes quivered... then broke apart, circling each other. More
joined their dance, a cluster of flickering eyes, many, blinking
in and out.

Sam sighs, groaning.

SAM:

Lightning bugs. I... almost had a heart attack... over lightning bugs. *(Groans)* I need sleep.

END