

Harbor Season 2
Episode 10: Shiver in Sweat

Written by
Faraday Roke

© Faraday Roke and Tartarus Jenny Studios, Ltd. 2021

COLD OPEN: SEDUM'S APARTMENT, INT.

Sedum is on the phone with Valen. It's late, after 10.

VALEN:

(Over the phone)

... Think I explained it concisely enough, so, that voicemail Al had, and the... event from earlier today... Hel says there's enough there to warrant a visit.

SEDUM:

(Processing the concept)

She's coming out...

VALEN:

Said it's her top priority. If it goes well enough, we have him.

SEDUM:

(Mind racing)

Good... Ah, when does she arrive? Soon? Monday?

VALEN:

I said Wednesday. We can't risk him weaseling out early- it has to cover the time- Wednesday afternoon-

SEDUM:

Valen, that window is *tight*. Please tell me we have a backup- I could do something- directly *agitate* him- it wouldn't take much-

VALEN:

If you or any Cryptid makes a fuss, there'll be a new hunt, along with the Field. There'd be no getting away this time. The best case scenario is back to *prison* for you- It's not worth it.

SEDUM:

Is it not...?

VALEN:

No, it's *not*. Come on, you can't leave me on my own with all this.

SEDUM:
O-oh, of course, you're right, quite right.

VALEN:
It's a good plan, it's hitting him where he lives.

SEDUM:
(Recognizing the truth there)
It is, however, I-... I want to make absolutely sure this works...

VALEN:
You're probably the only one willing, anyway. None of the Wild Neighbors are answering my calls.

SEDUM:
(Sighs)
So that's our option. It's Hel's perfect timing or martyrdom.

VALEN:
(Correcting)
It's Hel's timing. Becker submitting to his own bureaucracy is the best we have- We can't stoop to a physical-

SEDUM:
-A physical confrontation, I agree. We'll be over a barrel if we lose tempers. Yes.

VALEN:
(Convincing herself as well)
Besides, she said there was precedent for this- that he'd have to abide as State Director.

SEDUM:
Hm... Then let me at least petition City Council on Monday and clear the way for her.

VALEN:
You sure?

SEDUM:
Entirely.

VALEN:

... Thanks. I wasn't... looking forward to it...

SEDUM:

Yes... Delegation is needed... Three days. Can we make it through three days?

VALEN:

We will... I'll update the others as we go on.

SEDUM:

All in it together, now.

VALEN:

Yeah... Ah, I'll let you get back to... however you're enjoyin' your night. Just wanted to tell you.

SEDUM:

Thank you, Valen. Stay safe.

VALEN:

You too.

The phone hangs up. Sedum sits down on the couch, sighing, troubled, nervous.

SEDUM:

Three days... She'll be here in three days...

FERGUM:

... So... as we were saying, You are wrong and reading subtitles *is* too much effort.

SEDUM:

Fergum, you don't even have eyes-

FERGUM:

(Speaking over him)

AHAJAGAJAH- We will not simultaneously watch *and* read! It makes no difference- the story remains the same!

SEDUM:
It doesn't! There's no direct translation for some words- let alone the unnecessary censoring- subtitles are the best compromise!-

FERGUM:
-It's cartoons! CARTOONS!

SEDUM:
Yes *and* it's art!

FERGUM:
Just admit you're an "old taco"!

SEDUM:
It's "otaku" and no I am not- I simply appreciate different culture's storytelling in the way it was intended to be told-

FERGUM:
(Hacking, coughing)
Ah, ugh, do you see- Do you see us gag? We're choking on your self-righteousness!!

SEDUM:
(Mutters an insult in Japanese under his breath, roughly translated to "You stupid dogs")
We are never watching anime together again!

FERGUM:
(A sudden gasp)
You... you don't mean that... we have to finish the season... *(Whines)*

TITLE SEQUENCE

SCENE 2: LEAH'S CONDO - EVENING

A spoon spins in the dregs of a hot chocolate. The family sits in the kitchen of Leah's condo, decompressing after the Pancake Shack.

LEAH:

Now I'm not saying that spoons *should* be used to scoop out eyeballs, but I am saying that it's a mighty convenient shape...

SAM:

Mhm, forks have too much goin' on and knives simply aren't lady-like enough. It's the best choice.

AL:

We should make tactical spoons- for sudden yoghurt emergencies and... assault.

LEAH:

(A small chuckle)

Exactly so.

NARRATOR:

Their mother sipped the last of her hot chocolate, a few more grey hairs having colored around her temples since the Pancake Shack two hours earlier. She smiled half-heartedly, before dissolving into a sigh.

LEAH:

(Sighs)

I don't like bein' forced to embarrass myself in public...

SAM:

You weren't the one left embarrassed, Mom.

LEAH:

Second-hand embarrassment travels... I'm ok. Tellin' him off was a long time coming. A long, long time coming... I'm jealous of you, baby.

AL:

That's a mistake and also why?

LEAH:

Women never pull this shit!- feelin' all entitled to you- Mmmgh, *men*...

AL:
 Wow that's completely not true, but
 if delusion helps, then yes, women
 are always rational and considerate
 of others feelings and autonomy.

LEAH:
(A little laugh)
 People are people, huh?

AL:
 Unfortunately.

LEAH:
 Great... So much hope... I'm goin' to
 bed.

She pushes back her chair.

SAM:
 Do you want me to get you anything?
 Water? Snacks?

LEAH:
(So tired)
 How about a do-over?

SAM:
 There's probably a way to reverse
 time, considering everything.

LEAH:
 Look into it for me.

Al gets up too, and embraces Leah.

AL:
 Sleep will help. G'night.

NARRATOR:
 Al kissed Leah's cheek softly,
 rubbing her back.

LEAH:
 You can take the couch if you want.

AL:
 No, I'll head out soon.

LEAH:
 M'kay.

SAM:
Goodnight mom.

LEAH:
Sleep tight.

Leah wanders upstairs. At various points we hear plumbing come and go.

AL:
... What a clusterfuck.

SAM:
I just don't know how... how one person can get so obsessed. One person who has so much...

AL:
It's rich comin' from me, but I think the answer you're looking for is "he's unhealthy".

SAM:
Yeah, putting it really gracefully. For Becker, not you. You... You try. Trying's good!

NARRATOR:
Sam fiddled with the handle of his mug, twisting the toe of his shoe against the linoleum, not meeting his sister's eye. Al hopped onto the kitchen counter.

Al hops onto the counter.

SAM:
Like, you don't have to be perfect- It's not like... any of us can be perfect- but so long as you try- Y- you're getting somewhere. Just keep movin' forward. Right? Don't get... entrenched.

AL:
I mean, if you stop, you die.

SAM:
Objects in motion stay in motion.

AL:

(Light laugh)

Yeah, that too. Hey... I been meaning to talk to you about somethin'. If you have any space.

SAM:

Uh- y-ye- sure. Is it serious? Did something happen?

NARRATOR:

Al scratched her neck, pulling a grimacing smile.

AL:

Nothin' happened! Not a thing, I just, uh, I... How was your date?

SAM:

... My... date? My date! Oh, it went... It went really good. Like really, *really* good. Heh... You had that "I'm gonna tell you someone died" expression...

AL:

Oh, sorry- So you... you got all you needed? Scratched that itch?

SAM:

(Snorts)

Not by a long shot. I felt... seen. You know? Aha, it was a very good first date.

AL:

*(Quieter to
themselves)*

Heh, first... *(Louder)* Yeah, he has a way of naturally makin' you feel at home. Like his power of somethin'!

SAM:

No, this was different. I can't explain it... and I know what you're thinking and it's *not* just me being all gooey, there's something there.

AL:

Didn't know the crush was that serious.

SAM:

It wasn't, but... I think it could be.

NARRATOR:

Al swallowed and mussed up their hair.

AL:

I-i-it'd be nice! I known Crux for a long while now and uh... never seen him seriously date before. He tries to keep things pretty free and easy... About 6 years, I think? Yeah, he's never even brought anyone he's seen around the office or around town- Pretty independent fella.

SAM:

Sometimes it doesn't work out, but this... I don't think this is just a hook-up. Not at all the vibes I'm getting, anyway. I mean, I could be wrong.

AL:

(Awkwardly)

What happens if you are?

SAM:

I just have this *feeling*, Al, like when he looks at me, it's different. It's... *there*.

AL:

What's there?

SAM:

Everything.

AL:

Oh... that's sweet. I'm just sayin'... You could be right but- Uh- he doesn't settle-down.

SAM:

People can change.

AL:

Uh-huh...

SAM:

(Suddenly remembering-suspicious)

What, do you know something? Oh, he talked to you, didn't he?

(MORE)

SAM: (cont'd)
 Outside of Sedum's apartment- What did y'all talk about...?

AL:
 Not about this! It was the whole situation, with the legal case- I just want ya to be safe.

SAM:
(Vaguely reassured)
 I know what I'm talking about, I know what we both felt.

AL:
(Hopeful)
 Cause you asked him?

SAM:
 Well... no, but... it's something you feel, you have to trust me.

AL:
 I'm not arguing with you, I-I agree! So long as you got a handle on this. You know, people make... dumb decisions. Even if they feel things.

SAM:
(Defensive, trying to act above it)
 Ah... do you... want me to text him to prove it or something...? I don't know why you're so-

AL:
 -No, no, it's ok.

NARRATOR:
 Her smile conveyed anything but. A cold flush rose in Sam's cheeks.

AL:
 We've had a really long day. I'll let you rest. I'm gonna grab my leftovers... I'm sorry I made this a thing.

NARRATOR:
 Al hopped from the counter, and began to dig through the refrigerator for the to-go box. An idea struck Sam suddenly- he focused his mind and reached out-

SAM:
(Psychically)
 J, can you answer something?

AL:
 French toast at a moment's notice...
 Must be how the rich live, right?
(Hesitant laugh)

J:
(Psychically)
 Oh, Samson, of course, anything! I
 thought I'd irritated you last
 evening-

Al shuts the fridge.

AL:
 Wonder if they use french bread or
 texas toast...

SAM:
(Psychically)
 No, you're ok! Does Crux have deep
 feelings for me- or am I imagining
 it?

AL:
*(Not wanting to but
 pressing him,
 getting more muffled
 as it goes along,
 with J and Sam
 talking over)*
 Look... I know it's not fun to hear,
 but... I only want you to be careful
 with your heart. Not everyone's out
 to settle down and I know you, you
 can't help but want that... and there's
 nothing wrong with it... !

J:
(Psychically)
 My strange son, he is *sick* with
 affection for you. He can hardly
 contain himself, it is quite the
 hurricane of emotions!

SAM:
*(Psychically,
 relieved)*
 Thank you!

NARRATOR:

Al's mouth kept moving, as apparently, did J's. Metaphorically.

AL:

It's only that sometimes values don't match- We want different things even if it's all *feelin'* the same- If it doesn't work for one reason or another, then...

J:

(Psychically)

And might I say, the lavish breakfast, superb, excellent choice, you continue to out-do yourself.

SAM:

(Psychically)

Thank you, I gotta-

J:

(Psychically)

And don't wait so long to tell me of your adventures! Please! I enjoy it so much more when I hear of your escapades from you personally, there's more spark than the simple flood of images and happenings.

SAM:

*(Psychically,
Frantic)*

Ok, I gotta go! Talk later!

J:

(Psychically)

Oh. Very well...

Sam slips from the link with a small twinge of pain, and the sound of the room comes back into focus.

AL:

I only want to see good things for you. That's all.

Sam pushes back his chair and approaches her.

AL: (cont'd)

Do you get what I'm sayin'?

NARRATOR:

Sam nodded and grasped her shoulder, holding her attention gently, trying his best to pick his way around a conversation that he already regretted missing.

SAM:

(Bullshitting, and a bit defensive, but still kind)

I... do. And I also know what I feel and... Al, it's my relationship.

AL:

Its gotten to "relationship"...?

SAM:

(His pride grows during this)

Not, well- I... I'm sussing out stuff that might be difficult to read from the outside. But I need you to trust me. And to not get worried, kay? You're doing too much of that lately. Just... stop assuming, ok? I know what I'm doing! *(A light attempt at a diffusing laugh)*

A moment while Al ingests this.

NARRATOR:

Her expression morphed. From one of concern, albeit an almost painful expression of intensity, into... blank. A twitch involuntarily spasmed under one of her eyes before she slipped on an easy smile and shrugged.

AL:

(Spinning it casual)

...Aha. Me? Worried? Pssh.

NARRATOR:

She grabbed him in a hug, suddenly, finitely, before he could maneuver through the gut feeling that *something* had shifted.

AL:

Ok.

SAM:
(Doubling back)
 Not that I don't appreciate-

Al pushes him away.

AL:
 -But you're big and grown and make
 your own decisions, yeah, yeah, I get
 it. Just need to be reminded- I'm
 dog-tired, I'm gonna go home.

SAM:
 Let me walk you out!- make sure you
 don't get midnight snacked by a
 cannibal or somethin'.

NARRATOR:
 Al smiled, nodding, pulling on her
 jacket- keeping her attention down
 and away from his.

AL:
 Thanks, bro, uh, yeah, I, I'm gonna,
 let's go.

SAM:
 Ok-

NARRATOR:
 She breezed past him, straight to the
 front door, swinging it open quickly.
 Somewhere distant, an unplaceable...
tearing sounded- subtly building..

AL:
 'Night bro.

SAM:
 Drive safe, don't let the bed bugs
 bite-

NARRATOR:
 A wave over the shoulder, a glance of
 a smile, a beeline to the dingy car
 in the drive- and then-

Mia's signature reality ripping TEAR.

NARRATOR: (cont'd)

A figure manifested through the night air, spilling cold mist from her invisible rip through nothing- A spectre, oozing ichor, languidly alighted on the grass at his sister's back, sliding a bolt from her throat along her shoulder, whispering something.

Al is unlocking the car, a soft inhale as Mia appears.

SAM:

(Stunned)

Ah... A-Al-?

NARRATOR:

His sibling looked back to him, as did Mia. A broad grin split the apparition's lips, tumbling out a fresh glob of something, slipping over Al's clavicle, leaving a trail of dark wetness. Al barely flinched.

MIA:

(To Al)

Oh, does the *living* sibling want to say something?

AL:

Hm?

NARRATOR:

The ghost unfurled a finger to her lips, keeping Sam's eyes transfixed across the lawn.

AL:

What's up?

SAM:

-I love you! Be safe.

AL:

... Love you too. See ya later.

They pop open the car door and clamber in, shutting it.

NARRATOR:

Mia winked a bloody eye, and gave Sam a single finger gun of approval. She was gone in a blink.

(MORE)

NARRATOR: (cont'd)
 One driver and one passenger sat
 illuminated by the headlights that
 flicked into life.

The car roars into life and starts the journey home. Sam catches his breath heavily.

SAM:
(Quietly, stunned)
 She's real...

SCENE 3: MONTAGE- INT./EXT. TIME PROGRESSION.

A building, uncomfortable droning music plays. Matching the cracking uneasiness of the sequence, of juggling all the anticipation.

ANSWERING MACHINE:
 One unheard message.

Valen's voice message plays.

VALEN:
(Voiceover)
 We have one shot at this.

Sam's room ambiance. Bloops of typing.

SAM:
(Typing it out)
 I want to see you... before it all
 comes down.

NARRATOR:
 Reach out. Untangle what you know
 lies inside.

The text wooshes off.

SAM:
 Before it all changes.

VALEN:
(Voiceover)
 Becker sits up there for the next
 three days and three nights. He
 exhausts himself... And none of us
 check on him.

Crux's house ambiance. A buzzing of a phone. Crux opens it.

CRUX:

(Reading... regretful)
 Sam... I... *(To himself)* No... No! No, I
 can't do this. *(Sighs, relenting)*
 I'll see you at work tomorrow.

NARRATOR:

You'll give yourself away, piece-by-
 piece, til nothing's left. Pull back.

VALEN:

(Voiceover)
 Helena will be here Wednesday at 2.
 We've cleared her with City Council.
 She'll enter unimpeded.

An otherworldly hissing breath expands and Sedum stumbles
 out into a forest clearing, panting, frazzled, almost in
 pain.

SEDUM:

*(Twitching, flitting
 through his
 shapeshifting,
 taking on different
 compositions)*
 Pathetic, poor, *pity them-* Simple
 organics, aren't they- ... Haaah, ah,
 stop it, you're you, *Sedum, you're
 not like them-(Breaking)* Mmmngh- Ah...

NARRATOR:

Unlatch obsession's chain they helped
 tie 'round your throat.

He steps forward shakily.

SEDUM:

City Council knows. You'll be safe,
 Hel... Oh, please let me sleep tonight...
(Pushes on)

VALEN:

(Voiceover)
 And Greers... he trusts at least one of
 you. That manipulation's come due-
 You keep him at the Field until we
 get there, no matter what. We can't
 lose him.

Al's trailer. The splattering of blood drops in the sink.

AL:
*(Uncomfortable sigh,
 to herself)*
 Goddamn cold air... Auugh, that's a
 clot...

MIA:
 Another bloody leak... It's only
 Monday.

AL:
 You implying I'm stressed,
 sweetheart? You're imagining things..

MIA:
(Tauntingly)
 Faker...

NARRATOR:
 Wipe it away. There's work to be
 done.

VALEN:
(Voiceover)
 I'm counting on you. All of you.
(Softer) Thank you.

The voicemail ends. Another room tone..

WILLIAM:
 Wonder how much paperwork is gonna
 come outta all this. *(Sighs)*

A purring "mreow" of a cat.

WILLIAM: *(cont'd)*
 At least we got one Beckerless
 Monday! *(Baby-talking his cat)* Hoooo,
 how many late nights is daddy gonna
 have to work this week, hmmm? Way too
 many! Waaaaay too many, Ms. Pants!

Another affirmative "mreow!"

SCENE 4: INT. DOCA - DAY, TUESDAY

Depressing music plays tinnily through a pair of headphones.

SAM:
 Crux? Ah, Crux? Hey-

NARRATOR:

Sam tapped his coworker's shoulder. Crux flinched ever-so slightly and slowly turned from his desktop. He pulled out an earbud with a bemused arch to his eyebrow.

The music is tinny and low through the headphones.

CRUX:

(Overly casual)

Oh, hi! Uh, what's... up?

SAM:

(Half of a huffing laugh, a bit put off by the coolness)

Telepathy acting up?

CRUX:

What? No, I *speak* telepathically, *you* don't. I can still hear. I was listening. To music.

SAM:

Ah. Kinda... depressing music?

CRUX:

Helps the workflow. What is it you want? I'm, uh... getting this case ready.

SAM:

That's important. *(Lowering his voice)* Uhm, I was just... well, wanting to be selfish, if I'm being honest and wondering if, um, you know, we could find some time to-

CRUX:

(A last ditch effort for fuckbuddies)

Even if Becker's slowly go insane camping, I don't think it's the best idea to be getting handsy at work-

SAM:

... I was gonna say "talk".

CRUX:

... Ah.

SAM:
No rush, but, you know...

CRUX:
Yes. I mean-

SAM:
-I just want to see where your head's at. You don't text well. And yesterday, with... getting everything prepared.

CRUX:
No, hm, yes- Only not-not right now... I'm in the middle-

SAM:
-No, no, it doesn't have to be right now! Just soon?

CRUX:
Soon, yeah! I'm a bit busy with everything, ah, since... the plan. And... That Helena person needs her resources in order.

SAM:
Right, yeah, that's, I mean, you would be... Tomorrow's Wednesday!

CRUX:
Yes. Time is ticking..

NARRATOR:
Sam bit his lip and nodded. Crux looked vaguely ill. A butterfly spasmed in Sam's stomach, and the soft care flooded in to fill the void neglect had left.

SAM:
I understand. You have a lot on your plate. Just, let me know if you need anything... I can help, even if it's grabbing something off the fax machine or-

CRUX:
(His kindness is too much)
-Sam,

NARRATOR:

He twisted in his chair, clasping his hands firmly together between his knees, casting half a glance behind Sam to William, who courteously, seemed absorbed with his phone call.

CRUX:

Thank... you... I am sorry. For being busy. Life gets... complicated.

SAM:

(A bit more tender)

We're all waiting. I'm ok with waiting. Really... Crux, I'm really ok with waiting. So you know.

CRUX:

*(An unintentional
small forlorn groan)*

Hmmm... !

SAM:

Are you o- ?

NARRATOR:

Sam watched as Crux seemed to actively deliberate, turning from his computer, to the reception desk, back to his computer, then... grabbed his hand.

CRUX:

It's- it's, just two more hours til we clock out, and, we should, we *should* talk, you're right- Come with me.

He gets up from the chair.

SCENE 5: INT. DOCA SHED, DAY.

The door to the shed shuts, somewhat hard.

SAM:

Heh, good old Shed... Thought you said something about handsy at work not being a good idea?

NARRATOR:

Crux turned from the door handle, head tilted low, fixing Sam with an inscrutable bent to the upper half of his face.

SAM:

What?

CRUX:

Why... Do you have to be like this?

SAM:

(Taken aback)

I'm sorry?

CRUX:

That came out wrong- What I mean is... What I'm trying to- *(A groan of frustration)*

SAM:

Tell me, what's happening? What's wrong?

Crux crosses the room fast.

NARRATOR:

Crux pushed him back with a mixture of frustration, hunger, and longing pulsing off of him in waves. Sam hands caught the potting station desk roughly for support.

A little jostle as they hit the desk in unison.

SAM:

(Flustered)

H-hi there.

CRUX:

This was supposed to be a good *lay*.

SAM:

I thought it was?

CRUX:

Oh, it was!

SAM:

I'm lost.

CRUX:
I'm a slut! I'm a raucous *hussy*, do
you understand?!

SAM:
Uhhhhhh...?

CRUX:
And you come in here, with your... cute
face and-and *kindness*, your sweet...
everything- You being considerate and
honest and *real*- It's ridiculous!

SAM:
Is that wrong?

CRUX:
No!- It's, I, I FEEL YOU!

NARRATOR:
Crux's hand pressed against his
chest, tugging at his shirt, his tie
wrapped in cold fingers.

CRUX:
*(Like he's in pain,
sincerely, close to
tears)*
I... *feel you*. You're seeping into
me. And I can't stop it.

SAM:
(Touched by this)
I feel you too. I think that happens
when you start... really caring about
someone.-

CRUX:
I don't want it! I don't know who I
am anymore!

He lets Sam go, and sighs.

CRUX: (cont'd)
I try so, very, *desperately* hard to
keep my head above all of these
emotional waters and I'm damn good at
it, there's a system to it! I
couldn't survive a hundred years
without it... But... You. You're pulling
me under! And I let you.

SAM:
(*Shocked, unsure of
what to say*)
I don't mean to.

CRUX:
I know. You can't help it.

SAM:
It doesn't have to be, I can... I can
ease off-

CRUX:
It doesn't work like that. You're
doing nothing wrong.

SAM:
But I have to do something- I'm
putting you in pain.

CRUX:
... Yes. And it's me who should do
something, not you.

NARRATOR:
His cold hand trailed gently over
Sam's chin, manipulating his head
ever so slightly.

SAM:
Is it so bad to sink?

NARRATOR:
Crux's thumb smoothed over the
bristles of Sam's stubble. Inspecting
him. He dropped his hand and crossed
his arms defensively, breaking the
close quarters between them.

Crux moves away a few steps.

CRUX:
That's easy for you to posit. You're
breakable; you will, you *will* break,
and sink, and... eventually leave. But
I? I can't break. I *can't* leave. I
can't... *sink*. There's boundaries to
this, there has to be.

SAM:
... I think you love me.

CRUX:

*(Almost a laugh, a
bit frustrated)*

Really? And how would you know what I
feel-

SAM:

I don't need powers to tell.

CRUX:

Oh... Sam. You're such a romantic...

SAM:

I may be but you know there's
something real here. You're falling
in love with me. We both know it.

CRUX:

(A bright chuckle)

You know, I *could*! But I won't.

SAM:

(Flabbergasted)

That makes zero sense.

CRUX:

*(More like a
statement)*

Pray tell, why?

SAM:

I'm scared too, it's scary to care- I
don't know... what's gonna happen with
this Becker and DoAA situation, I
don't know if we're gonna be ok or
safe or changed, but I won't sabotage
a chance at a little bit of happiness
when it lands in my lap! I can't!

CRUX:

Being slowly *wrecked* as you grow old
and senile and *die* isn't *really* my
definition of a good time.

SAM:

That is so far ahead- What about all
the days in between? Every day I can
care for you and support you and
touch you? What about those? What
about now? The fact that I can kiss
you *now*...

NARRATOR:

It was Sam's turn to back Crux gently against a tippy stack of files, rekindling the space between them.

SAM:

(Softer)

Right now... Isn't that what matters?

NARRATOR:

The mask slid away suddenly, sharply, clutched in Crux's hand.

CRUX:

This *old man* isn't going to be your happily-ever-after boyfriend.

SAM:

You're not- I'm not *asking* you to-

CRUX:

-I don't get an end. And my freedom is more important than *any* of this!

SAM:

I'm not taking that away from you.

CRUX:

I'm *selfish* and I like that!

SAM:

That's ok. All I'm asking is for you to let yourself be surprised. Until we run our course, can't we help each other be happy? Even if just for a little while, let's just see!

CRUX:

Get your *feelings* out of your ears and *listen* to me!

SAM:

They're your feelings too, you said so yourself!

CRUX:

*(Breaking, scathing,
beyond frustrated)*

I don't give a shit about my feelings!!

NARRATOR:

Crux tilted his chin up haughtily, lidding his eyes. He ran his tongue along his teeth.

CRUX:

(Building the wall again)

I'll tell you in simple terms: When it comes down to it... it's logistics. I'm a slut, and you're... well, on the fast track to house-husband. It won't work.

SAM:

(Trying to hold on, scrounging)

I... I, I can be a slut!

CRUX:

(Snapping)

Sluts don't say that, Sam! *(Sighs)*
I'm done here. This thing between us is done. It was a good lay. And that's it.

NARRATOR:

Crux peeled himself away from Sam's heat, now exuding a bottomless, sick adrenaline. The air encircling Sam grew heavier and heavier to breathe. Crux re-affixed his mask.

Crux stops at the door, his hand on the doorknob.

CRUX:

(He does mean it)

We're not talking about this again. ...
I'm sorry.

He opens the door and leaves.

SCENE 6: INT. DOCA, DAY

Al and William talk to one another.

WILLIAM:

Well, Ms. Pants didn't not like what you got her, she just has a very sensitive stomach. And a thyroid condition.

AL:
So you're saying cats can't just eat
anything you throw at them?

WILLIAM:
Uh, not my cat.

AL:
Huh! I thought they were garbage
disposals...

The side door opens and Crux comes in.

WILLIAM:
You're thinkin' of goats.

AL:
Probably, they both climb trees.

WILLIAM:
Yeah, easy to mix up. Hey, Crux,
where's Sam?

CRUX:
(Almost numbly)
What?

WILLIAM:
Y'all went out to the Shed like ten
minutes ago.

NARRATOR:
Al raised herself from her low stoop
over William's desk. Her eyes
narrowed.

CRUX:
... He's still looking.

Crux sits back down.

WILLIAM:
I thought he had that place
organized... Alright.

Al crosses the space to Crux.

NARRATOR:
Al made their way to hover over Crux,
who was distinctly absorbed in his
blank desktop screen.

AL:
I got that transcript for ya. From
the voicemail. Sent it through email,
too...

She presents a paper.

CRUX:
Thanks.

AL:
No problem. (*Lower*) So... Am I gonna
have to kick your ass, then?

CRUX:
(*Dryly*)
Only after I thank you for preparing
him so well. He was incredibly
receptive.

AL:
I'm not the one makin' office
romances, bud.

CRUX:
(*Snippy*)
Well, yes, it is all my fault.

NARRATOR:
She gave him a sharp slap on the
back-

CRUX:
Gah!

NARRATOR:
Followed by a gentle pat.

AL:
... At least you can solve your own
problems.

CRUX:
(*Tightly*)
At least...

SCENE 7: EXT. DOCA/INT. SHED, DAY

Valen tromps from the open side door from the DoCA, over the
grass, muttering to herself.

VALEN:
 ... The old laptop, first and foremost,
 then the printed emails from all the
 way back- if they're out here-

She pushes open the Shed, opens onto Sam crying.

VALEN: (cont'd)
 Sam?

SAM:
*(Sniffing back
 tears)*
 V-valen! What can I get for y-you?

VALEN:
 Nothing. The hell are you doin' out
 here? Why're you crying?

SAM:
*(Trying to compose
 himself)*
 I, well, you see, I... It's been a lot
 lately and- *(Dissolving)* Crux broke
 up with me.

VALEN:
 ... You were dating?!

SAM:
 No, not- we went out on a- well,
 stayed in for a d-

VALEN:
 You were *fucking*?! Good Lord-

SAM:
 I'm sorry, it was a stupid, stupid
 mistake-

VALEN:
 You're absolutely right, it was!

SAM:
 I-I'm sorry, I'll get back to work...

VALEN:
 Nooo. Crux's in there, and I need him
 to finish the documentation.-

SAM:
 I-is he ok?

VALEN:
He had his headphones in, I didn't ask.

SAM:
Oh. Smart of you...

VALEN:
Apparently. ... Go home.

SAM:
No, please, I'll be useless! I want to help!

VALEN:
You're useless like this! You'll help by going home. Get ready, you need to be in top chipper formation for Becker, you got that? We need you tomorrow, and not like this. Don't come in- just... just figure it out with Al and go with her as soon as she's ready, ok?

SAM:
*(Gathering himself,
his breath)*
O-ok... My mom threw coffee at him on Saturday. That might... affect this.

VALEN:
You two are still our best bet. Alright, get on.

SAM:
I'll be ready, I promise.

VALEN:
Good, see that you are! Jesus, this is why we don't fuck coworkers!!

SAM:
I'm sorry, I'm sorry, I'll go...

Sam exits the Shed.

VALEN:
God damn, what is with this shed...!

SCENE 8: INT. LEAH'S CONDO, MORNING

Sam lays in bed, silence all around him in his room.

NARRATOR:

October had brought release: A death of curiosity and birth of knowledge; A bloom of rotting color assuaging the melancholia of those journeying through their own decaying transformation. October had brought growth. Reproduction of cells and family. The loosening of binds once tied, now frayed into many. In short, October had brought a tightrope with no net.

November however... brought frost. And patience. An aching anticipation that murmured like a frozen lake, pinged with an alien language recognized only by the deep fear of bottomless, cold water.

And Sam found himself numbed by his own shattered hope. The quilt atop him weighed little compared to the shame absorbing his mind, leaving him with fitful rest throughout the night, swirling with ideas of do-overs and take-backs, second chances and unending embarrassment. The sun had risen hours before. A gray, frozen day. The skeletons of trees dusted in twinkling ice.

Sam shifts in bed.

SAM:

(Numb)

Come on... Be chipper... Be sweet... They need you to be on... Becker doesn't even trust me anyway, this isn't going to work...

He rolls over onto his face and groans into the pillow.

J:

(Psychically)

Samson! Oh wondrous, you're awake!

NARRATOR:

He rolled over in bed, staring into nothing, his quiet contemplation softly interrupted.

SAM:
(Psychically)
 Yep.

J:
 Now, I know you had a *charged*
 conversation with your beloved
 yesterday- How did it transpire?

SAM:
 He broke up with me.

J:
*(Quickly, still
 bright)*
 That *bastard!* He is a rogue and
 deserves a torturous death.

Sam sits up more in bed.

SAM:
 Ah, uh *no-*

J:
 Too severe? Very well, he should feel
 pain for the rest of his days, is
 that better?

SAM:
 No! No, he doesn't, he... just... it's
 not what he wanted...

J:
 He knew exactly what he was doing!
 Slash and burn, what a fool! It's
 only fitting he burns as you have for
 hours, yes? So, I shall reap some of
 what he's planted back upon him, to
 make things just.

SAM:
 No! Please, no, he made his choice.
 And I should've recognized what he
 was telling me from the beginning.

J:
 But consider what you want! And what
 he most definitely wants but is too
 stubborn to admit, the idiot!

SAM:
 It doesn't *matter*. We both got 51%
 vote in it.

(MORE)

SAM: (cont'd)

That's how relationships work. He can... sabotage himself or be free or... whatever. I did all I could... And then some...

J:

At your behest...

SAM:

... So. How was your day...?

J:

Let's not speak of my doings- Are you ready to corral that haywire Director today?

SAM:

I gotta be. ... Is he right about the Field?

J:

Whatever do you mean?

SAM:

He thinks it's a key, or... a birthplace? He thinks it's important.

J:

Many places are ascribed importance, whether or not they warrant it.

SAM:

J, please. I trust you, I trust you with so much... Can you not dodge this and just answer me?

NARRATOR:

He pulled at the unravelling edges of the quilt in his lap.

J:

(Measured)

... It isn't a birthplace. It is a grave. You've seen it, obviously it is, smeared in gore...

SAM:

Hmh. Yeah... What killed them?

J:

Each other. I'm... unfortunately spotty on the details.

SAM:
I wish we could just let ourselves be
happy.

J:
I wish for nothing more for you
organics. You make it so difficult on
yourselves... One another... It pains me...

NARRATOR:
An echo of a thought sprang through
Sam's mind. He sat up fully in bed.

SAM:
J?

J:
Yes, what is it?

SAM:
Can I ask something... Something you
may not like?

J:
... I keep things from you for your
safety, you know. You deem this...
integral?

SAM:
I do. I do, I... I want to know,
please...

J:
Ask your query.

SAM:
Are you on the City Council?

A held breath, a squawk of a crow outside...

J:
... Not *anymore*.

SAM:
You-

A sharp knock on the door.

SAM: (cont'd)
Just a second!

J:
Mustn't leave them waiting, strange
son. Stay safe today, I'll be
watching.

J severs the connection. Sam reacts slightly pained.
The door opens with a squeak.

AL:
Hey. G'mornin'.

SAM:
... You're... early again?

AL:
Well, just... thinkin', it might be
better to be early than late.

SAM:
... Mm.

AL:
Do ya wanna get ready?

NARRATOR:
Sam stared down the suit draped over
the spare chair, rumped beyond usual
recognition. His micpack coiled atop,
brought home the evening before.

SAM:
Guess so.

AL:
That's the spirit.

SCENE 9: EXT LEAH'S CONDO/INT AL'S CAR, DAY

In the driveway of Leah's Condo. The car is rumbling.

LEAH:
... Do you still have that mace?

AL:
Somewhere in here...

SAM:
We'll be ok, mom.

LEAH:
You shouldn't have to do this.

AL:
Yeah, and you should be at work.

LEAH:
Daisha's got it, this is a family
emergency-

SAM:
-It'll be worth it, Mom. We'll get
him outta here. We can handle him.

LEAH:
Text me, call me, anything, let me
know as soon as he's gone and you're
ok.

NARRATOR:
She squeezed Al's hand hard through
the rolled down window.

AL:
We will. It'll be done in a snap.

SAM:
We gotta go. The day's heatin' up.

LEAH:
Ok, ok, be safe! Be so safe! Do you
need my bowie knife?

AL:
Mace can't hit an artery. It'll be
good. Bye.

SAM:
Bye mom.

The car starts to pull away, and the window starts to roll
up.

LEAH:
Bye...

The car rumbles along. Uncomfortable silence.

SAM:
... So I brought snacks.

A rustle of a bag.

AL:
Ah, cool. We shouldn't be out that
long, but... you never know-

SAM:
-You never know.

The silence stretches once more.

AL:
I was thinking... we could park in that empty lot and hike up. If you wanted to stretch your legs.

SAM:
Sure.

AL:
We won't make as much noise.

SAM:
Yeah, smart.

AL:
... You dressed for it?

SAM:
I put on some layers.

AL:
Got an extra jacket in the back, if you need it. If it gets cold.

SAM:
Ok. Thanks...

The car continues, taking a right turn.

SCENE 10: EXT. FOREST, DAY

The siblings carefully pick their way through the forest. They both are a little breathless.

NARRATOR:
Al tied their hair back into a ponytail, beating the cool wind at it's own game. They turned about to check up on Sam, two paces behind. It was colder under the shade of the trees.

AL:
You doin' ok?

SAM:
Yeah... Uh... you're not.

NARRATOR:

Sam nodded at her directly. A dribble of red oozed from her right nostril. She thumbed the trail.

AL:

(Pushing against her nose)

It's dry.

SAM:

And you keep smoking.

AL:

I'm not right now.

SAM:

No, not right this second.

They continue on.

SAM: (cont'd)

Who'd've thought after almost dying in the woods we'd be jaunting back out, huh?

AL:

(A huff of a laugh)

... Ain't it weird how last time it was the two of us; You were askin' about Enfys... At Perdition?

SAM:

Oh yeah.

AL:

Couple weeks can change a lot, right?

SAM:

They're kind of an ass.

AL:

Everyone's got their thing...

NARRATOR:

Sunlight peered through the dead leaves and naked branches above them. Disconcerting beams shining vainly on the cool underbrush.

AL:

I know you're not ok. ... I'm sorry about Crux.

SAM:
(Soft sigh)
Thanks.

AL:
You're not crazy for seeing what you
saw with him. For some people, even
good change is devastating.

SAM:
I know.

AL:
You would've been good together... More
like you would've been good for him.

SAM:
Hm.

They stop.

AL:
How is it?

NARRATOR:
Al pulled away a bloodied thumb and
presented their nose to him. Sam
squinted, shuffling off the wrinkled
suit jacket from his shoulders.

SAM:
I think it stopped. It just left a
little rim around.

AL:
Nice. Presentable.

They start again.

AL: (cont'd)
You being good for him ain't your
issue though. You know, if he wants
to be a sad bastard, it's not your
responsibility to fix him. Especially
if he doesn't want it... Let's be
honest, you dodged a bullet. I can
say that, knowing both of you.

SAM:
Maybe. Still sucks... Thought we could
help each other...

AL:
And havin' someone to hold is nice,
too. I know.

SAM:
That too... I'm, I'm working through
it. It's hard not to be disappointed.
But I'll be fine.

AL:
I think you're entitled to that. As a
little treat.

SAM:
*(Closed mouth half
hearted chuckle)*
Oooh, my favorite. So... scrumptious.

AL:
I'm here for whatever you need.
Whatever it is, even if it's leaving
you alone- We gotta do this shit
first but after... hell, even during,
I'm here. We'll get through to the
other side of it all. We can still
save Christmas. Or whatever month
we're in now.

SAM:
(Little laugh)
November.

AL:
Right, that one. Guess what I'm
gettin' at is; I'm done lettin'
things get between us. I got your
back from here on. ... I could've
warned you better about him. I'm
sorry I didn't, I could've saved you
some... something. So I'm here, bro.
Whatever you need.

SAM:
*(Sickened with
guilt)*
Hnnngh...

Sam stops again.

AL:
*(Confused, slightly
oblivious)*
Why'd you stop.

SAM:
I need to tell you something.

AL:
Oh... Neat! Tell me later.

Al takes a step before stopping at Sam's words.

SAM:
-No, Al, no.

AL:
I'm kinda focused right now, on the Becker thing, that we have to get to, so we can talk about this lat-

SAM:
I've been avoiding you! And I know! What you've been keeping from everyone- I know, and, *I love you, I don't judge you, I could never judge you, after everything you've gone through- I just didn't know how to approach you- and-*

AL:
- You know I'm Nonbinary??

NARRATOR:
His chapped lips parted as he heard the words, then replayed them on loop, watching Al search his face, confused, relieved. He saw it reflected back to him. Hope. Release.

SAM:
(Deciding)
... I do. And I'm so proud of you.

He steps forward and hugs his sibling tight.

NARRATOR:
He swallowed back the pain in his throat as he squeezed his sibling tight against himself, trying to push back the twist of guilt to his face while unwatched.

AL:
Why'd you hesitate?

SAM:
I didn't hesitate.

AL:
Just a little, you did-

SAM:
Cause I'm a stupid idiot who don't talk good.

AL:
Oh. Yeah. Heh... I thought I was subtle.

SAM:
You're never subtle, not with me. (*A forced slight chuckle*)

Sam pulls back, then a step forward, and they continue on.

NARRATOR:
He wrapped an arm around Al's shoulders, silently cursing himself, giving his sibling a gentle smile, pushing both of them forward.

SAM:
But just with me, ok? You don't have to worry about anyone else. And I haven't said anything, of course. This is your's.

AL:
(*Hesitant laugh*)
Wow... Wow, I didn't ever think I'd... make it anyone else's issue.

SAM:
Are you kidding? Stop it, you aren't an issue. You're amazing.

AL:
Shit. Uh, tits- When did you...?

SAM:
I mean... Looking back, it's never really been any other way. I just don't think we had the words earlier.

AL:
(*Nervous*)
Yeah, I have been pretty... "queer".

SAM:

*(Putting on a
affect)*

Queer indeed, my good person.
Everyone's gonna be supportive. No
doubt about it, if you want them to
know.

AL:

It'd be nice to get folks to ease off
on the "lady lady lady" all the time.
I don't know if I'll be... imposing on
people. Not that I really care but...
well, I do; a little-

SAM:

You being wholly you is what's
important! And always enough. You're
never an imposition.

AL:

(Bashfully)

Stop... I don't really even know what
to do about it. If I should do
anything. Where's the guidebook,
right?

SAM:

You're forging new territory! You get
to think and decide and think some
more and... do whatever you want. It
doesn't have to be right this second.
But first and foremost for me,
pronouns?

AL:

Ok, it's happening, uh, "she's" still
good. "They's" good too, though.

SAM:

She they. Equal measures?

AL:

Yeah, halvesies.

SAM:

And name?

AL:

I like Al. Alelia *only* for family. No
one else.

SAM:
Well, then, Al... I love you, my
sibling.

AL:
(Touched)
I love you, brother. Thank you... I've
missed you.

SAM:
Ditto. Large same ditto. What do you
say... to us going and babysitting a
violent middle-aged man in the woods?

AL:
That sounds perfect.

They start off and their conversation fades.

SAM:
... Does it really?

AL:
No, not at all, it sounds awful.

SAM:
Oh thank God, I thought you went full
sick masochist.

AL:
Yeah, I'm also coming out as a
pervert.

SAM:
Congratulations! Don't tell me any
more! Please, God!

SCENE 11: EXT. THE FIELD OF MEAT, DAY

The two come up into the Field, and all is quiet, except for
the nature around them and their breath.

NARRATOR:
The flowers had long since died in
the Field. Golden-brown grass and
rattling seed pods frosted the crest
of the mountain, the bare patch like
a balding spot worn down by a hat... or
perhaps a massacre. The sun, once
bright overhead, had scurried behind
the gray mass blanket in the sky.
(MORE)

NARRATOR: (cont'd)

And still the air hung heavy, moist, and luridly warm for November. Al and Sam found their footing at the edge of the stark fairy-ring... and nothing else. No sign of their State Director.

AL:

He wouldn't camp in the open. He knows better than that.

SAM:

Everyone knows better than that.

Al takes a few steps forward.

SAM: (cont'd)

I'm glad you got me early... That took forever. It's hot.

AL:

We hiked, it ain't too hot.

SAM:

Keep telling yourself that, is it warm enough to spike the Field-

AL:

No, not yet- You see any signs of him?

SAM:

... Not really- (*Kind of happy he found something*) Oh. That looks like a shoe print.

A rustle of leaves-

NARRATOR:

A firm hand landed on Sam's shoulder, holding him in place.

Sam gasps.

BECKER:

Must've missed that one.

NARRATOR:

Sam jolted away, stumbling next to his sibling.

SAM:

T-there you are, Mr. Becker! We've been looking everywhere for you!

BECKER:

Hey kiddos. What do I owe the honor?

NARRATOR:

Becker's beard has grown remarkably fast. As had the hollows of his eyes, and the wear of his... Al blinked. He didn't wear one of his many suits. Instead a jacket, khakis, and a thermal. If it hadn't been for his perpetual lazy smile and imposing stature, they would have hardly recognized him.

AL:

You been MIA for a while. We've all been worried-

BECKER:

-Oh look, somebody caught on. You two look like idiots out here, why are you in your suits?

SAM:

... It's Wednesday?

Becker chuckles... then barks out a laugh.

BECKER:

So it is!! So it is...

SAM:

Are you alright, sir? Have you been eating...?

BECKER:

Shut up, Sam.

SAM:

Oook.

AL:

Hey now, he's tryin' to help, come on, he brought you snacks.

She rustles the bag.

NARRATOR:

Becker cocked his head, then motioned for the bag. Al obliged.

He takes the bag.

NARRATOR: (cont'd)

Without looking further, he tossed it behind him, into the underbrush.

It lands in the brush.

SAM:

Plastics aren't good for the environment.

BECKER:

How'd you get here... *Kiddos*?

NARRATOR:

He slowly, casually, advanced towards the siblings, never breaking his focus from Al. The two, just as casually, took steps back, up into the meadow, keeping their distance.

AL:

Well, we've been looking-

BECKER:

Didn't you forget this place...? For so long? You said you *blocked* it. What with your... childhood broken, your *shattered family trauma*.

SAM:

We asked Roose, she knows... so much, and we needed to find you, we've been concerned-

BECKER:

I'm not talking to you, Sam, so you can keep your simpering platitudes to yourself, you got that?

SAM:

Oh. Mhm.

AL:

Just because you been roughin' it doesn't mean you gotta be rude, sir. I know everyone gets grumpy when they camp-

BECKER:

-I've had a lot of time to think out here. A couple days, a couple nights, just me and the woods- And the remnants of... *kindness*... spat back at me... You know that doesn't wash off, right?

AL:

If you're talkin' about The Pancake Shack, Mama, she's been- I can't answer for her choices- Neither of us can.

BECKER:

No, apparently you can't even bring yourself to speak in her presence. Your family... Your fucking family... There's *beyond* dysfunction there.

AL:

I'm sorry, I really am, nothin' about that night was good or nice but, Becker, that's not why we're here- We're here for you as our boss, with the DoAA, let's try to keep this professional, right? Like you taught me?

NARRATOR:

The man before them stopped his slow advance. He thought for a moment.

BECKER:

Oh, that's right... business. Business as usual... Business separate from family, except that doesn't work, there's family right here. And this place, this Field, comes from family. So where does that leave me... right back where we started.

AL:

There's not even anything here. It's only a field.

BECKER:

I noticed too. Isn't that funny. Why is that?

AL:

Maybe you got the wrong address and it's over on the knob-

BECKER:

-Then WHY are you HERE?! I thought you were actually *learning*, Al! Cover your bases when you're lying!

NARRATOR:

Al licked her lips, watching him struggle through waves of vicious hurt... and the confidence of a predator closing in.

AL:

You don't understand everything- I had my hands tied- You know they are, they fucked with my head, to keep you out and confused-

BECKER:

That's enough.

AL:

Let me *explain*, they said everything would come down, if you-

BECKER:

As much as I'd *like* you to say what I want to hear... You're not convincing. Not when you're under pressure. Not after this weekend.

AL:

(A soft huff)

Guess this is what I get for being vulnerable.

BECKER:

I'm not stupid. But... I am disappointed. You caved so easily... It's pathetic... So! Tell me, how does this place work?

AL:

I barely scraped by in biology-

A clicking rattle as Becker draws a taser.

NARRATOR:

Becker held a taser. Finger on the trigger. Pointed at Al. The siblings held up their hands in unison.

SAM:

Sir-

AL:
Are we doin' that makeup lesson?
Right now?

BECKER:
(Dangerous calm)
How does this place work?

AL:
It's not electricity activated, if
that's your bent.

NARRATOR:
He shifted his aim to Sam.

BECKER:
Try again.

SAM:
Ah- Please, we don't have to do this-

BECKER:
*(Same cold
neutrality)*
How does this place work, Al?

SAM:
Mr. Becker, please, point your taser
away from me-

BECKER:
(Viciously)
-Would you shut the fuck up, Sam?!

Sam gathers himself shakily.

NARRATOR:
He swallowed, holding his tongue. A
hard pulse throbbed in Al's neck.

BECKER:
Ok... Now I really don't want to ask
again-

AL:
-It's more frequent in summer, it
seems to respond to heat.

BECKER:
(Half to himself)
Interesting... So the weather...

AL:
We've had a cold snap, that's why you haven't seen it. Ok? Like I said, it's outside of my control.

BECKER:
Well with an attitude like that, of course. Go to the edge of the tall grass. Now, please.

They all move forward, to the edge.

AL:
We don't like going into it-

BECKER:
-Then make sure you don't go *into* it. Both of you, get down.

NARRATOR:
The two carefully dropped to their knees, casting the other a glance.

BECKER:
You were in scouts, Sam?

SAM:
For a while.

BECKER:
Al, give him your lighter.

NARRATOR:
Holding one scarred hand aloft, Al dug in their pocket, and handed Sam their lighter.

SAM:
What should I do?

BECKER:
Good to see you'll follow orders now. We just needed incentive.

SAM:
It helps, what do you want me to do?

BECKER:
Let's start a fire.

AL:
You don't need to.

BECKER:

Did I ask?-

AL:

(Quickly)

-Once the sun comes out, shouldn't be more than 45 minutes, there'll be enough heat, it *will* trigger.

SAM:

We waited until now to show up for a reason.

BECKER:

Why else did you wait? Just wanted to catch the show with me? Spend a little "quality time"?

AL:

We wanted to explain where you could see, and we wouldn't have to describe. We only just found out, too-

Becker shifts the taser in his hand.

BECKER:

You remember how I said these things can reset pacemakers? They also hurt like a son of a *bitch*...

SAM:

(Quickly)

Al's not lying- I got confirmation- It isn't a birthplace or anything- It's a grave. It's a mass perpetual grave.

NARRATOR:

Al watched him out of the corner of their eye.

SAM:

I swear I'm not talking back. I got that from the Wild Neighbors, the Cryptids outside of the town, the ones who've been around. They know. And that's what it is.

BECKER:

Then why hide it?

SAM:

Because it goes somewhere, if you step in, it's a gateway to somewhere else. It's dangerous, not just hideous.

BECKER:

Sam, you're being very helpful but... A door isn't nothing. In fact, a door is even more interesting.

AL:

If you just wait-

BECKER:

I've waited long enough. And I won't wait on your sneaky little plans. Go ahead. Let's warm up.

NARRATOR:

Sam began to gather twigs from the dirt around them, the eroding bald spots on the crest, above the town. Al kept her hands high.

BECKER:

You know it's funny, you are right... I *don't* understand. When it comes down to it, I don't understand why you both... *keep bashing in* your heads rather than admit you might be wrong! Both of you! Sam, you have actual potential. You blend into *real* society, you don't have to stay here, you have competency, and yet you're so goddamn passive. Weak. You choose to be *weak*. How does that make sense??

NARRATOR:

A tiny log cabin lattice grew between them, built by Sam's shaking hands. Al brushed his gaze with their own, an attempt at comfort.

There's the click of the lighter through the following paragraph. It catches.

BECKER:

And you, Al. You think you're smart. You think you're *special*. Maybe you could be, but the effort's too much for that swollen ego.

(MORE)

BECKER: (cont'd)
 So you're left half-made. A sad
 threat of aptitude. What keeps you
 from it? Hmm? Can you answer me that?

AL:
 ... I don't... I don't know what you want
 to hear?-

BECKER:
 -Is it only your pride? Or is it
 genetics? Trauma?- I'm sorry I can't
 quite wrap my mind around it but I've
 had to sit and watch you both spit on
 every opportunity I've handed, no
forced on you- because I believed. My
 mistake. So you're right. Satisfied?
I don't understand.

SAM:
 Well in my defense, student debt
 sucks and rent's affordable here.

Becker hums half a laugh.

AL:
 Speaking of opportunities, how is...
 threatening us going to do anything
 but hinder your's?

NARRATOR:
 Smoke curled up. Sam piled on a few
 more dry leaves.

It's starting to pop and crack.

BECKER:
 Now that's a great question. And I'll
 tell you... It's cause in the DoAA...
 Monsters are everywhere. They can
 even look like us... You two can be
 easily replaced. By doppelgangers or
 possessing spirits- Anything really.
 And it won't even last that long.
 Just enough for you to have made a
 stupid choice, like coming up *here*,
 and threatening *me*.

SAM:
 Wouldn't it make more sense if a
 possessing spirit overtook you? As
 you're the one pointing a taser at
 our heads?

BECKER:

Sam, think before you speak. I wouldn't let that happen. And anyway, two against one... bad odds. Can you blame me?

AL:

Not at all.

BECKER:

Neither of you are going to be working at the DoAA that much longer, anyway. Don't worry, I'll make sure that it was a bad case of the "couldn't-control-yourselves". You'll be fine-

SAM:

-What about igniting a forest fire?

BECKER:

Oh, that'll be the Pyre, obviously.

NARRATOR:

The closest dry bramble and stems alit.

A fwoom of ignition. A response from the Field, soft, low, gurgling. The heartbeat begins.

BECKER:

Come on back, we don't need to pay for more hospital bills.

They get to their feet and take a few steps back.

NARRATOR:

Flames licked the gray air, leaping recklessly over rattling, popping seed pods.

SAM:

(To himself, like a prayer)

I'm sorry...

BECKER:

I think I do have it now. Your problem, the problem with both of you.

NARRATOR:

Fire devoured the dry grass with
shameless abandon.

BECKER:

It's your goddamn daddy issues. No
wonder you have them, with your,
frankly, *whore* of a mother leading
everyone on-

The fire pops and cracks, the field groans- Al claps
suddenly with an excited growl of laughter.

AL

(Manic, determined)

OOOOOOOH BOY! Now that's a step too
fucking far, my *friend*!

The flames are rising.

BECKER:

Al, take one step closer- I will pull
the trigger-

AL:

My lucky day, always wondered what a
taser felt like-!!

NARRATOR:

She reared toward him, red and white
hands balled into fists, one arching
back, over their shoulder in a wind-
up. Sam yanked the mic pack from
under his tied jacket-

SAM:

I'M RECORDING!!

A Field BURSTS onto the scene. It echoes, more pained than
ever seen before.

NARRATOR:

Gore blossomed up and over the
flames, extinguishing them; the
stench of burning flesh dousing them.
The Field of Meat bloomed in all its
glory. Brilliant red, bottomless
blue, gushing purple- a smear of
celebration in the dying gray
landscape. The recorder in Sam's
grasp blinked a soft red light.

(MORE)

NARRATOR: (cont'd)
 Becker turned from the display,
 looking at Sam, a bit befuddled, Al
 lowering their raised fist.

BECKER:
 ... Huh. Sam. You said something?

SAM:
 I've been recording *everything*, Mr.
 Becker, since we got up here- And
 I've already got more than enough
 here.

BECKER:
 ... Sorry, a lot just... happened just
 now. Everything? You said?
 Everything... Well, that's a problem,
 isn't it?

NARRATOR:
 His hand shot out, and twisted Sam's
 wrist-

A rustling of clothing- Sam gasps in pain. The cord pops
 from the recorder.

AL:
 Stop!

NARRATOR:
 The sudden rip of pain, sending
 trembling, furious nerves rattling up
 his arm, tore Sam's mind from seeing
 his sibling dart toward him- and of
 Becker, holding the recorder,
 pointing his taser back at Al.

BECKER:
 Let's all just calm down, alright?
 Take some deep breaths... You two get
 so excitable!

AL:
 Are you ok, Sam?

SAM:
(In pain)
 Hmh, ah, aaugh, the *same wrist!*-

BECKER:
 -Wastes of budget from the start-!

SAM:

-You were the one who said we needed accountability!!

BECKER:

Yeah! Turns out I was wrong! It's really fucking disappointing! Yet another way to exploit *me* and use *me*- You know what I really think of it all? Of today? You two ganging up on me- I'll show you what I think- *This* is what I think!

He lobs it into the Field.

SAM:

No-

NARRATOR:

He chucked it into the Field.

The Field roils. The heartbeat is sporadic.

BECKER:

Even I can say when an idea isn't working out. Now... Back to this... This... This is huge... This is something else... do you know what this means, either of you? It means... *something*. What does this mean... What does it *mean*? Come on, let's hear ideas!!

AL:

(Under their breath)

It's like a dog actually caught a car...

SAM:

It's a *grave*, I told you. That's all it is.

BECKER:

No, you said it was a *portal*-!

A clattering in the dirt. A pause in the roiling.

NARRATOR:

The recorder skidded to a stop between Becker's feet.

BECKER:

... Huh. Well, that's weird.-

The Field rears up and out, grabbing, cutting off half a gasp from Becker. A quick implosion- The Field is GONE.

Quiet.

AL:

(Quick)

... Where'd he go?

NARRATOR:

Scorched winter grass and stalks swayed, not a speck of viscera or flame in sight.

SAM:

(In a rush, gasping)

His shoes!

NARRATOR:

A pair of hiking boots remained where Becker had stood, the recorder between them. One tipped over, erupting mist.

It slumps against the dirt, fog hissing.

AL:

AGH!

SAM:

OHMYGOD- it ate him!

AL:

I didn't... I didn't know... it could do... that.

SAM:

(Deadened shock)

... Apparently he didn't... either.

The sounds of nature overtake them.

SCENE 12: EXT. THE FIELD OF MEAT, DAY

A rumbling of a jeep. It parks over the rock and dirt and shuts off. Two people climb out. Both siblings are entirely spent.

NARRATOR:

Valen's rock crawler perched a little ways behind them on the overgrown access road.

(MORE)

NARRATOR: (cont'd)

Sam raised his head from his reverie, nursing a slightly swollen wrist. Al pulled a deeply chewed nail away from their mouth, gave the car a glance, then returned to their staring contest with the abandoned shoes.

SAM:

Oh there they are.

AL:

Uh.

The car doors open, shut, and footsteps hurry over.

NARRATOR:

Two women rushed over- Valen, and a new figure. A sensibly dressed, petite woman. Dark black hair pulled into a chic twist, out of place in the wilds.

VALEN:

Hey, why are- what is- you're covered in dirt! Where's Becker?

SAM:

He's gone. He's in...

NARRATOR:

Sam gestured to the empty, scorched Field before them.

VALEN:

He went into the Field!?

HEL:

(Admitting she's lost)

I think I'm missing something.

AL:

No, it took him. Left his shoes though.

SAM:

Hi. You must be Helena?

HEL:

Yes, Helena Estigoy. HAR liaison of the Raleigh Branch. I uh... wasn't prepared for... this sort of investigation.-

SAM:

No, why would you. I'm Sam. I would shake your hand but my wrist is a little sore.

HEL:

*(Trying to catch up
on the situation)*

That's... fine- You said Becker went somewhere?

NARRATOR:

Al raised the recorder over their shoulder, the plastic smeared in dirt and flecks of red. They shook it like a tempting carrot.

AL:

He threw this in. Then it threw it back, and took him instead.

HEL:

If you don' mind- I'll take that.

AL:

'course. But the Field left his boots- why didn't it take 'em... ? Took everything else.

HEL:

*(Muttered to
herself, under her
breath as she
inspects the
recorder)*

Wish I'd brought examination gloves..

VALEN:

(Processing through)

That would be if you expected a crime scene.

HEL:

Well in this case that doesn't seem to be out of the question..

VALEN:

(Thinking)

Ok. aaaalright, ok... - Goddammit-

AL:
It just took him so fast, ripped 'em right off his feet. Didn't know that could even happen. But I *could* use new boots, we could be the same size, I think-

HEL:
Please don't touch the boots.

AL:
Ok.

SAM:
Ms. Estigoy, we didn't do anything to him.

HEL:
I wouldn't say anything unless I am asking you a direct question- even then, you should be advised that you don't have a lawyer present.

SAM:
... Good to know.

HEL:
Nothing else was recorded- nothing over the last file- Is that correct?

SAM:
It just happened a little bit ago, but I-I have the microphone, Becker disconnected it.

HEL:
The pack itself picks up ambient too, not as clear, but still there. Let's see what we have...

The recorder boops a few times before it plays a horrible static wailing, something truly otherworldly versus what's been heard before.

SAM:
(*Flinching*)
Mmh...

HEL:
... Are those screams either of you?

AL:
Nope.

HEL:
Was anyone else here?

SAM:
Just us and him.

Hel shuts off the recording.

HEL:
Hm. ... I can't say I'm entirely
qualified for this sort of... event.

VALEN:
What's the protocol for something
like this.

HEL:
Ahah... Well... Let's just say, I
don't think this will be the short
trip we *planned* for.

END OF SEASON 2

CAST

Valen - Samantha Weiler
Sedum - Marcus Cannello
Fergum - Joseph Rathorn
Leah - M. Kate McCulloch
Samson - Z Reklaw
Al - Faraday Roke
Narrator - Kiarra Osakue
Mia - Erin M. Banta
Crux - John Peacock
William - Jonathan Hallowell
J - Joseph Rathorn
Becker - Cory Moosman
Helena - Rachel McCulloch

CREW

Script Editor, Jacque Reiman.
Assistant Director and Script Editor, Joseph Rothorn.
Written, Directed, and Edited by Faraday Roke.
Harbor is a production of Tartarus Jenny Studios.

Thanks so much for listening to the show. Wanna help us out?
Write a review! We also have some spiffy merch at our
website, harborpodcast.com, as well as a donation link. And
of course, please tell your friends, family, good-natured
weirdos, and local cryptids about us- each new ear is a
great gift. Stay kind!