

HARBOR

Episode 3 - "The Field of Meat"

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SCENE 1 - INT. SEDUM'S APARTMENT - MORNING

Sedum sits down, exhaling, getting comfortable.

SEDUM:

(Quietly)

Half an hour until I need to be downstairs in the office.. Enough for a chapter and tea.

He settles in, opening his book. Suddenly, there are many paws, Fergum is walking past, into the kitchen.

(Cont.)

Good morning, Fergum.

FERGUM:

(Distant, from the kitchen)

... Yes.

SEDUM:

I can't see you behind the wall- What are you doing in the kitchen?

FERGUM:

Nothing.

There is a pause.. Then the sink turns on full blast.

SEDUM:

What- what is that-

FERGUM:

We are doing *nothing!!!*

The sink turns off.

SEDUM:

(Worried)

... Please be careful with my things.

FERGUM:

(Offended)

We are!

SEDUM:

Alright, alright.

Another moment passes. Silence. Sedum is satisfied enough and hesitantly takes a sip of his tea. An enormous CRASH comes out of the kitchen. He chokes violently.

FERGUM:

That wasn't our fault!!

SEDUM:

(Guttural croak)

God give me strength...

He snaps his book shut and gets up, walking towards the mess. The sound of a flame bursting into life.

(Cont.)

Augh!- How did you get an open flame- It's in the sink!!!

FERGUM:

We don't know.

SEDUM:

Water- water we need- turn on the faucet-

Sink turns on. A deluge of flames belch forth.

(Cont.)

Fuck, *fuck*, there's only more fire!

Snapping, fluttering of a towel. Sedum is regaining his breath. There's a moment.

FERGUM:

(Softly)

We miss opposable thumbs.

SEDUM:

I know...

TITLE CARD

SCENE 2 - EXT. LEAH'S CONDO - LATE MORNING

Al messes with the front door of Leah's condo. TEENY out in the front.

AL:

Recruiting *is* work, Valen. *(She notices TEENY, a little louder)*

Hey Ms. Teeny.

TEENY:

Hey... you... Your mama ain't home. So don't you be looking to get thrifty with her china-

AL:

For God's sake- I ain't on drugs!

TEENY:

Not right now maybe! Cause you don't got vases to sell... I'm lockin' my screen door!

AL:

Good to see you too, Ms. Teeny... *(Lower)* Valen, if this "thing" with Sam is gonna get done with *any* hope, it'll require finesse, and dedication- meaning *work*. So guess what I'm doing with the rest of the day?

VALENTINA:

(Over the phone)

Al, we still gotta check up with Stick, I think some of her wiring is getting frayed around 5th and Anchor Street, and the Corwin Farm has been having sightings of something-

Al opens the door and shoves her keys into her pocket.

AL:

I'm sorry- I'll try to keep you updated- best I can do, ok?

VALENTINA:

Fine. Godspeed, Al.

AL:

(Dissatisfied)

Thanks.

SCENE 3 - INT. LEAH'S CONDO - LATE MORNING

Al closes the door behind her.

AL:

Sam?

SAM:

(Muffled)

Al... my one and only sister...

AL:

(To herself)

Is he still in bed? ... It's half past 1...

NARRATOR:

She took the stairs two at a time, and saw her brother's door halfway open, cold light from the window the only source to push back the shadows gathered in the corners.

She jogs up the stairs, and pushes open his door.

AL:

Hey, it's pretty late- You are in bed. With a pillow on your face.

SAM:

(Muffled)

...I... don't feel the best?

AL:

Well suffocating won't help. Here, can't see a damn thing in
this dark-

She flicks on the light.

SAM:

No... turn it off.

AL:

(Quiet frustration)
... You're hungover.

SAM:

No!

Sam sits up, ripping the pillow off of his face.

(Cont., Hisses in pain)

Ok... yes. So what, I can't have a couple of drinks now?

NARRATOR:

Al's mouth pressed into a thin line.

SAM:

I wanted a night to not think, is that so bad?

AL:

And the day after, too? Just shut the entire thing down-

SAM:

Don't- don't give me that-

AL:

If anyone can give you that, it's me and you know it.

SAM:

Calm down, stop pacing.

AL:

Mom's at work, clearly fine, clearly *functioning*- I talked to her last night- So... you were drinking alone. When did this start?

SAM:

Yesterday was a lot. If you knew- This isn't even a big deal!

AL:

Numbing yourself- That's not a big deal? That's not concerning?? Getting sloshed like a sad sack?

SAM:

Ah, no, geeze, Al...

AL:

You don't get to do this. I can't believe I have to tell you- You don't get to ruin a perfectly fine thing about yourself cause you had a hard time. (*Steadies herself*) We're getting you some ibuprofen and we're leaving this house and you are *not* going to down this road, alright? If for no one else, then at least for me, Sam.

A moment.

SAM:

... I'm sorry...

AL:

... You know I get it. Does mom know?

SAM:

(*Swallows*)

No. I haven't seen her since yesterday, before work... I'm sorry...

NARRATOR:

She inspected him, his knees drawn up to his chin on the messy bed, in the previous day's jeans. His deep eyes were punctuated with purple bags. Al rubbed her face, thinking.

AL:

We're getting you coffee. And you can tell me about yesterday.

He gets up from the bed, hesitantly.

SAM:

I don't wanna get you in trouble with your job.

AL:

Are you kidding? I already got the day off.

NARRATOR:

Sam grabbed her, burying his cheek against her hair in grip akin to that of treading water without a life vest.

SAM:

Thank you. Ugh, thank you, Al.

AL:

(Gently)

It ain't a thing...

She slaps his back a few times.

SAM:

(Laughs, taking a step back but wincing)

I need enough ibuprofen to dissolve *all* of my stomach-lining.

AL:

And a muffin.

SCENE 4 - INT. SLATE CAFE - EARLY AFTERNOON

Families are milling around, there's a calming hum of interior conversation and Slate Cafe and Creamery is hopping.

NARRATOR:

The mid-day summer heat began to catch up to Harbor, the families around them peppered with the beginnings of peeling,

sun-licked shoulders. Ice cascaded behind the bar of Slate Cafe and Creamery. The siblings sat at a fussy little table; Sam slowly, carefully, sipping at the coffee fogging up his glasses as Al drug her spoon over the bottom of her empty cup, smeared with remnants of ice cream.

AL:

(Looking for a reason to talk)
I'm upset.

SAM:

(Swallows hard, sighing remorsefully)
Just tell me how many more times to apologise and I swear I will-

AL:

Oh, oh God, no, sorry, *(Awkwardly)* I was trying to segway... into... different... topics.

SAM:

Oh. By all means, please deliver me.

AL:

Ok. I, uh... *(She clears her throat)* Espresso ice cream isn't even in the same league as Toffee-Coffee-Bonanza. It's a shame Slate retired a good thing. There, segway... finessed.

NARRATOR:

She glanced at her brother, a lump rising in her throat. His foot had started to bounce softly below the table and a little grin creased his mouth.

SAM:

TCB will live on in our hearts, Al. We'll keep the memory alive.

AL:

Things change.

SAM:

..What. Why are you looking at me like that?

AL:

It's ok for things to change, right?

SAM:

(Dissatisfied)

Depends on the change, doesn't it...

AL:

Look how much Harbor's changed. Toffee-Coffee-Bonanza is dead.
And Slate didn't used to have a drive-thru.

SAM:

When I was 12 it didn't. It's not like that's been
earth-shattering in the decade since?

AL:

Remember when they installed the window and it kept getting
bricked up with stones from the creek?

SAM:

(Taking more gentle sips)

Heh, yeah. Wild. Glad they stuck to clearin' them out, though.
The drive-thru makes the cravings much more manageable.

NARRATOR:

Al slunk her head down and moved an inch closer across the
table. Samson busied himself with an enormous gulp, avoiding her
eye.

AL:

(Vaguely conspiratorial)

You know it wasn't so much wild as it was weird. Remember that
slimey-mortar stuff in between the rocks? They never found out
what it was.

SAM:

(Wincing from the gulp)

Hah, *hot*... I think the reason they never found out was cause it was gross-ass slime that no one wanted to touch. Not everything's alien baby-juice, you know.

AL:

But *do* you know?

SAM:

(Hesitating)

I... I don't care enough to find out! If it is, it is, either way, I'm not touching it, and therefore will not get impregnated. I win... I thought you said you'd left that monster stuff behind?

Like me? We have boundaries around that stuff now, right?

(Chuckling) We're not crazy anymore...

AL:

Force of habit. You being home's bringing up all sorts of memories.

SAM:

But no rebuttal. Logic prevails... *(A small chuckle)* You know, I didn't think I'd see this place again; not like this, just spending days... living here, dodging grotesque opossums to go out, and now... *(Laughs a little harder)* HERE I AM again! I thought this would be the last time I was *forced* to be here... Now, it's indefinite... *(Laughs quieter, drinking)*

AL:

You didn't wanna be here... at all?

SAM:

It wasn't you, or mom; I love you both so much. I really was going to buy you tickets for New York *whenever* you wanted-

Glenda approaches, high heels clicking.

AL:

Do you really hate this place that much?

SAM:

Ah, hates a strong word...-

GLENDA:

Well I'll be! Al Greer, I haven't seen you in an age and a half!
How are ya, darlin'?

AL:

(Warily)

Fine. Mayor Dickson.

GLENDA:

Well, aren't ya gonna introduce me?

AL:

To... that's, that's Samson, my brother. You've met?

SAM:

(Top) We've met.

GLENDA:

Oh, *that's* right. Leah's... boy. Finally able to put out some facial hair, I see, hardly recognized ya! Weren't you gone, honey?

SAM:

(Coolly) I came back. Wanted to get in some R&R after graduating cum laude.

GLENDA:

Hmmm, what was it in again? Some sort of... "social" degree, wasn't it?

AL:

History.

GLENDA:

Oh, just precious, big sister, always with the answers, just a picture, you two! It's like she's man enough for the both of ya!

(Chuckles) Sammy, what do you say to gettin' us gals some treats? Here-

She snaps open her wallet and hands him a bill.

SAM:

We already have coffee, thank you.

GLEENDA:

You most certainly do. But think of your sister, if you could?

AL:

Mrs. Dickson.-

SAM:

No, it's ok, Al.

He scoots his chair back.

(To Al, kind)

I'll get you some tea. Mayor Dickson?

GLEENDA:

The mayoral special. They'll know what it is.

SAM:

(Disdainful)

Right... You gave me a fifty.

GLEENDA:

Isn't it enough?

SAM:

... I'll leave the leftover as tip.

GLEENDA:

(Hisses out a breath)

Oooooooh... only if they work for it, Sammy. And only 5%. Do you need me to tell you what that would come out to be?

SAM:

I went to university, ma'am.

GLENDA:

Mhm, that you did, for a nice lil' *History* certificate, sugar.

SAM:

I'll figure it out.

Sam stalks away.

GLENDA:

Attitudes like that are unflatterin' on males. Mighty foppish.

Oh, one second, darlin', gotta answer a text-

She opens her phone, and bleeps a moment or two. The woosh of a sent text *doesn't* sound.

(Cont.)

You know how busy I get, bein' pulled in all sorts of directions- aaaand there! You have my complete attention.

AL:

For what?

GLENDA:

I wanted to check up on you! How are you?

AL:

Fine?

GLENDA:

Really. A birdie told me your department is, *hooo*, running on fumes. What mismanagements afoot now? *(Slight laugh, then serious)* Must be hard for a career-woman like yourself, when the career is in dire straits.

AL:

We're stretched a little thin but we manage. It's nothing new.

GLENDA:

(Serious, low)

So this has been a problem before? With other Mayors? Is there a track record of authorities findin' Aberration Affairs in money problems?

AL:

I didn't say that, the Department of *Cryptid* Affairs has always been underfunded, that's not Sedum's fault. He's not in charge of city budget or the State Department- we work with what we're given.

GLENDA:

But you'd think after oh, 15 years, he'd be a *bit* better at managing resources, being Lead Director.

AL:

No "Lead" except in paperwork- So if anything, it'd be all our faults for being so greedy with our tri-monthly pastry run...

GLENDA:

(Chuckles)

Another shirking of responsibility.

AL:

Mayor Dickson. Why do you hate us?

GLENDA:

Oh, I don't hate anyone, Al, most certainly not you, or Valen either, for that matter... My protectiveness flares up when I see disregard for tradition, though.

AL:

How do you mean? When we're helpin' all these different types-

GLENDA:

Everyone else, but not our own. Did you know, this is some extracurricular research I've done so I don't blame you if you haven't heard, you're innocent in this, after all, but did you know that Harbor's DoAA-

AL:

-CA.-

GLENDA:

Just going by the official title, darling -It's the only US branch with Aberration leadership? The only branch *without* a working confinement system. There's a reason for rules, Al. They keep us safe, give us order. And some things are built off of inborn instinct, no matter what twisted logic might have you running round.

AL:

So this is instinct?

GLENDA:

(Kind but serious)

Tell me you weren't scared when you first saw that beak- those claws. *(Silence from Al)* It's like saying I need to hug a stranger with a *knife*- can't blame me for bein' hesitant! *(Chuckles softly)* I know you were very young when all this started, but have you thought about what precisely gave him the right to set himself in authority over Humans like you, darling? Like your real boss Valentina? It was a quick attack of opportunity, I'll grant him that- could even respect him for it, if he weren't such a candy-ass.

AL:

Mayor Dickson... If I can-

GLENDA:

Baby girl, you can stick to Glenda, I shouldn't have to remind you.

AL:

We're doing the best we can here, with... the best intentions we got. No one can be perfect, and not everyone's gonna get along.

Why don't we think about having a liaison between our departments, makin' it easier on everyone rather than forcing you two together?

GLEENDA:

You're so smart, Al, so... ballsy- *usually*. Concession isn't your modus operandi, is it?

AL:

I... Like the arrangement the DoCA's got. I wanna see it continue.

GLEENDA:

What with you making so much money.

AL:

Glenda, come on.

GLEENDA:

(Sarcastic but not biting, trying to make Al see)

Sorry, darling, but then it's the excess of good clients, right? The oodles of respect your name carries round this town, being known as the bright one who launched "off the deep end"? Not that I'd ever say that.

AL:

No. It's... I *really* like my boss- I do. All of 'em, *mostly* but... Sedum's a good person. And I like what we've all built. Sorry if I get a little defensive when that's challenged. Can you to lay off on the verbal gymnastics, now?

GLEENDA:

Fair enough. You know... *(Sighing laugh)* I could use a straight-shooter like you helpin' out around town. It'd make life a sight easier.

AL:

I do. I do that. I help. That's, by definition, my job.

GLEND A:

Let me rephrase, around town, not in the... well, forest. Why you gotta be muddying yourself up, hmm? Getting that pretty hair wet with blood- stuck out in the rain... with... hoo, all sorts of nasty, gurglin' things.

AL:

(Taken aback)

Ah, hmm, I don't quite follow-

GLEND A:

Al, if you think I don't know what actually happens out in those woods, you're sorely mistaken.

NARRATOR:

The Mayor leaned across the table and grasped Al's hand, hooking her pinky around her's. The cold metal of one of Glenda's rings slid over Al's skin as a pit erupted in her gut.

GLEND A:

(Whispered)

Don't worry. I'm good at keeping secrets, no matter how old. Girls gotta have each other's backs, right?

NARRATOR:

Al's eyebrows lifted, finding no words at the ready in her esophagus. Glenda patted her limp hand.

Glenda reseats herself.

GLEND A:

Now, if you want some help with these... predicaments, I'll give you *another one* of my cards. Try not to lose this one.

Sam is walking back. She flips out a card. Al hesitantly takes it.

(Cont.)

I hate seein' wasted potential.

SAM:

A vanilla tea for my sister, and a black coffee for our Mayor.

Clattering of coins and bills.

AL:

... Thanks, Sam...

GLEENDA:

What a gracious gentleman. I'll be sure to count this change!

(Laughs)

SAM:

(Laughing, tight)

You do that!

GLEENDA:

What fun. Well, enjoy nursin' that cute lil' hangover you're sportin', Sammy. Have a *brilliant* day, Al. Remember, I'm just a phone call away.

She walks away, clacking.

AL:

They've gotta have whisky behind the counter.

SAM:

(Worried)

Al...

AL:

Let's leave before I decide I'm not kidding.

SAM:

Agreed!

SCENE 5 - EXT. CREEK - AFTERNOON

Al is splashing around in the creek. There's limited noise back here, only birds, the running of water, and them.

SAM:

Your socks are gonna get so dirty when you put them back on.

AL:

That's the reason why socks exist.

SAM:

But then it'll be both your feet and socks that are full of parasites.

AL:

You're welcome to join me if you wanna get in on the dirty foot fun.

SAM:

(Snorts)

Please let me never hear anything close to that come out of your mouth ever again, *LORD. AUGH.*

AL:

(Laughs)

I can't promise that!

SAM:

Hey, you remember when I forced you to drag me along on your class outing here, when you were doing the ecology lessons on that big storm?

AL:

That was fun... *(Trying to lead him back)* Hey, remember Ms. Van Houser?

SAM:

Ah... I, uh, don't like to...?

AL:

You remember, how she was the bus driver AND the gym teacher AND English Lit? And how she always talked about how she never slept, how she could never sleep? And we saw her on that trip out here, beyond the crest of that hill, in the middle of the forest and we called out and she disappeared, back, deeper and deeper, STARING at us. And when we saw her at school the next week, her eyes were all dilated and all she would talk about were road repairs, Lord Byron and tennis, nothing else? (*A little intense*) Do you remember that, Sam?

SAM:

... I blocked it out!

AL:

Aha... Yep. What a weirdo...

Al is flustered, trying to think of another way to bring the conversation around, disoriented from the day.

SAM:

... Remember those chicken sandwiches in the cafeteria?

AL:

Those were good. I heard the hormones they pumped into the chickens made kids get their periods early.

SAM:

Wow. Is that true?

AL:

I have no idea. Watch me skip this stone.

Al throws a rock. It splooshes a distance away.

(*Cont.*)

Nice.

SAM:

(*Laughs slightly*)

... You know why I try to... try to make it seem like I'm cool with change? When I'm obviously not- I hate it- I had plan and it- *(Stops himself, returning)* Anyway... it's because of Harbor. This place taught me I could never count on consistency- I had to... adapt. And it was so hard for me. It felt like everyone else had it under control; you, mom, it all rolled off your backs, it didn't matter what it was... And I was the ghost, trying to keep up, fighting against the wind.

Sam is getting almost emotional throughout. It's his deepest insecurities, his perceived selfishness laid bare.

(Cont.)

And school, university, that internship, it all made me feel stable. Like I could be the one who changed on my own time. It was full of busywork, and so stressful... but routine. Normal. What I was told life should be.

AL:

Normal's what you get used to.

SAM:

Mm. I think I cultivated a taste I could never get. Not that I would be like a millionaire, but I couldn't help but think that my life should look... Predictable, to help me when I couldn't be. When Mom and Dad split, that wasn't normal. It was statistically average, but it blindsided me. I thought I was better than that, uh... "othering". To be a part of a "broken" family... Pretty fucking judgey for a 9 year old.

AL:

I did the same thing. I assumed we were the exception. Life has a way of cuttin' that out.

SAM:

I didn't like seeing Van Houser out there. ... She got stuck in my head... made me more transparent, cause I was the one who couldn't look away- I was the one who got rattled- Do you know what I mean?

AL:

Yeah. I do.

SAM:

Like it's been two days, and I've seen those sick dogs twice- and it's like the same shit over again- it loops in my head, and I don't understand it and I can't think of anything else... Except my other obsession in failure... So it was easier to not think last night, and just throw the whole thing out, like you said.

AL:

Unsettlin' things are everywhere, not just Harbor. That doesn't mean we gotta enjoy them... No one is asking you to *like* these weird things, necessarily. But we can't avoid them. And so what if you have bad days, bad brain goo sometimes. You've *built* stability to accommodate it, Sam- You're not a ghost; You *floss*. You've kept your beard the same for five years, you get excited to rearrange furniture- You look forward to doing taxes! Sam, you're so "normal", I can barely stand it sometimes.

SAM:

(Getting a little teary)

Aw, Al... really?

AL:

Of course. It's disgusting.

Sam snuffles out a laugh, Al joining in, thoughtfully.

(Cont.)

It's good. Just please don't *forget* your adaptability, though? Being open to change is important. And you never know when it might come in handy...

SAM:

How's about letting me recover from yesterday's big one? Then I'll be good...

Sedum approaches, full Nuller regalia, including voice.

SEDUM:

Oh, joy! The youth taking in nature!

SAM:

(Startled, then sniffing and composing himself)

Ah, geeze- hello.

AL:

(Wearily)

Nuller. You're really hikin' here? Now?

SEDUM:

Yes, I was in the area- Good trails! So can it be said an emotional breakthrough has happened between the Greer siblings? Have you learned much about the world this afternoon, Samson?

Al gets up and walks to him, leaving Sam on the ground.

SAM:

Hah, I guess... I hope you're enjoying your walk.

AL:

None of life's great mysteries have been solved yet, *(Whispered)* so you can stop hoverin'.

SEDUM:

Well, the best mysteries are shared before the end of the work day! So they say.

AL:

(Low)

They sure have some catchy phrases that aren't useful right now.

SEDUM:

(Also low) They stick to deadlines- Especially when *they* take the entire day off-

SAM:

Ok, well, don't let us interrupt your exercise! Thanks for the..
encouragement!

SEDUM:

Of course Samson! Be seeing you- Oh. *(He lowers his voice)* Your
gold star I promised.

AL:

(Stifling a sigh)
Just stick it on my arm.

SEDUM:

Right. *(Awkwardly, quickly patting her on the arm)* Good job.
(Louder) Be seeing you both!

Sedum ducks out of the scene, as quickly as he arrived.

AL:

Speakin' of weird, isn't his face *just*?

SAM:

Al, you shouldn't say stuff like that about people's weird
faces. He has a circulation condition... I think.

AL:

Why's he always wearing that coat? Its fuckin' 92 degrees.
That's not normal.

SAM:

(Deep breathing)
Maybe that's *his* normal. ...Hmm! Mmm, that does feel pretty good.
Everything's normal in perspective... I shouldn't care, just
accept. See? I'm fixed. When did you get a sticker-?

AL:

(Masking a sigh, muttering)
This isn't helping... Sam. I have to tell you somethin'.

SAM:

(All confidence gone)

Ah, I'm still not feeling great- I, I do wanna hear, but can it wait?

AL:

Ok. I don't have to tell you.

SAM:

(Relief)

Thank you...

AL:

(Determined)

I'll show you.

SAM:

Nnnngggh...

AL:

In the mountains.

SAM:

HNNN-

AL:

Sam, I love you more than anythin'. Trust me, this will not be fun. But I need you to be with me on this.

SAM:

Are you gonna show me a body?

AL:

... Kind of. Not really! ... But sort of. Do you trust me?

SAM:

(Like he is already regretting this)

Oh God. If... if it's this important to you... then yeah.

SCENE 6 - EXT. FIELD OF MEAT - AFTERNOON**NARRATOR:**

Even with the windows up, Samson could smell the sticky-sweet waft of something visceral snaking in through the vents, as Al maneuvered the overgrown road with her car. The sun was dipping past it's apex, magnifying heat through the roof. Sweat trickling from his underarms had only a little to do with it. Al unconsciously chewed her lip.

SAM:

Just give me something, just a bit more info-

AL:

I, I honestly didn't think you'd ever have to see this, ok? Just... promise me you'll keep an open mind- Get comfy with... change, ok? Oh, and do what I say and you'll be fine.

SAM:

(Shrilly)

Excuse me? Are we going into a mine-field?- *(His words get caught in his throat)*

NARRATOR:

The final crest. And there, laid naked for the sky, was indeed a field, like any other mountain field, dappled with wildflowers, ringed by the forest... with mounds upon mounds of pulsing red gore intermingling with the daisies.

Al shuts the car off.

AL:

We're here.

Al opens her door and gets out.

(Cont.)

It's ok, come out.

He pops open his own door hesitantly.

SAM:

(Hushed, trying to keep a hold of his gag reflex)
What... the fuck is this?

NARRATOR:

He turned slowly to Al, clutching onto the car door as a shield. Her hands were buried deep in her pants pockets and her lips pursed in a measured, rather disinterested way. She shrugged.

AL:

Dunno. I call it the "Field of Meat". Don't... step into it, though. Where the tall grass starts, hang back from that.

SAM:

Ah... *(Gags)* Oh my God- *(Heaves)*

AL:

Yeah, it takes a while to get used to the smell. Here-wintergreen around the nose helps.

NARRATOR:

She crossed to him, Sam doubled over, holding his knees to stay upright. She held out a tiny bottle.

SAM:

(Recovering)

Ugh, thanks... *(Coughs)* I don't know what's worse, the smell, the sounds, or the fact that this does nothing but make my nose tingle.

AL:

It's mainly a distraction.

NARRATOR:

Samson stood up straight, an inch shorter than his sister, slouching against the front of her car. They stared out, together. He ran a trembling hand through his hair, the height steadily building.

SAM:

How long have you known about this?

AL:

...A while.

SAM:

(Trying to push down a sigh)

Ok. Ok, ok, ok, okaaaaaay...! *(Heaves again)*

AL:

(She's kind of regretting this)

Take your time...

SAM:

You're so calm... You didn't even do the nose thing.

AL:

Oh, yeah... Some days are worse than others and it's good to challenge yourself. Don't get me wrong, it still smells like death, but, after a few years-

SAM:

(Softly)

A few years?? What *is* this, Al?

AL:

We have no idea. *Pretty* sure it's not human.

SAM:

... O-oh.

NARRATOR:

Samson nodded. And kept nodding. It was comforting, his voluntary movement, not a reaction forced on him by grief, pity, disgust, or horror. He liked when he could move of his own volition. A pulling, sharp grimace morphed his face.

Sam is forcing out a weak giggle.

AL:

Sam?

He forces it out, hard, growing into a barking laugh.

(Cont., Barely audible)

...Hmmm...

He finally screams out a peel of false laughter, and fades back into silence. The camera of Al's phone clicks.

SAM:

(Weakly, hoarse) W-why are you pointing your phone at me?

AL:

Posterity, for when my brother finally descended into the abyss.

SAM:

Delete that. A "few years", what's that time-frame, really?

AL:

Hooo... If I'm 28 now, that'd be... 15. Years.

A deep pause.

SAM:

Ah.

AL:

It's been a time.

SAM:

I am really... *(Steadying)* upset... with you right now.

NARRATOR:

Al nodded and focused on the swaying grass.

AL:

Ok.

SAM:

Why didn't you- you know what? Never- No, ok, don't tell me, We're not- I mean, there are WAY too many questions now. Number one! You were, what... 13? What kind of preteen sees this!!

The meat SQUELCHES.

(Cont.)

And says "Hmm, okie-doke, better run on home for dinner!"

AL:

-I guess me-

SAM:

-TWO! Were these things alive?? At *any* point-

AL:

-Not that I've ever seen-

SAM:

-*Three*, what. Is. It?

AL:

(A bit tired of the question)

Like I've said, I don't know. We have some... half baked theories, though.

SAM:

There! Again, "we"! Who's we?

NARRATOR:

He smoothed back his mangled hair as the final punctuation to his grilling. Al's blank stare into space broke with a blink and a sniff as she met her brother's eyes.

AL:

Your neighbors. People who've been around protecting and...
cleaning up messes here. Helping people. Me included.

SAM:

I don't know what any of this means...

AL:

We're a part of local government.

SAM:

Politics? When have you ever enjoyed politics?

AL:

(Bitterly)

Why do you think that is?

SAM:

So, you've been a... closeted politician for 15 years? That or an
assassin, I honestly can't tell!

AL:

No. Oh God, *(she laughs, nervously)* Valen and Sedum would've
died before lettin' me dive right into the bullshit. I had to
wait til 18, when I couldn't be legally stopped. It's akin to... a
kind of... we're sort of like... We're a resource for interspecies
safety and relations? We're called The Department of *Cryptid*
Affairs.

SAM:

Al, you keep saying words and names and I am not tracking, and
it still smells like ass-death. *(Deep breathing, with a hitch of*
gagging)

AL:

(Growing tired)

Alright, I'll explain it again. Listen carefully, please-

SAM:

(Snappish)

It's not that I'm not comprehending, it's that this is completely demented! There's nothing to get in the first place!

NARRATOR:

The field shuddered.

AL:

Fine, I'll break it down itty-bitty; There's people called Cryptids- They're undefinable, they're *weird*, they're my friends, and-and coworkers- and I help them sometimes, and stuff like the Field of Meat, ok- That's the reason for Slate's drive-through getting stoned up, for Ms. Van Houser, for everything that freaked you out when you were a kid- It's all this. It's all my life!

NARRATOR:

The gore piles writhed. Individual stutters racked their masses. A radius-wide pulse shook the whole, ruffling Sam's hair and softly lifting up Al's in a curtain around her shoulders.

Something *like* a voice, but not a voice groans somewhere.

SAM:

And you kept it from me.

AL:

Because you couldn't decide if you loved it or wanted it burnt down- So I made the choice to keep everyone happy.

NARRATOR:

Samson's shoulders rose instinctually.

SAM:

That wasn't yours to decide.

AL:

Sam, you weren't moving, you were stuck! And-and look-

NARRATOR:

Al bent down quickly and back up with a rock in her right hand,
 as the tableau before them began to wink in and out of
 existence- blinking out, then back, then out, back, out, back,
 like a meaty strobe.

SAM:

What, is this a Cain and Abel, now??

AL:

Listen to me- This shit is dangerous, you were right to be
 scared; We don't even know where the Field goes, and it goes
somewhere. Look.

NARRATOR:

She threw the stone high, sailing into the organic rave. As it
 descended, it joined in the winking existence, until 10 feet
 above the confusion, when rock and gore and belabored breath cut
 out into nothingness.

Only the general sounds of the forest remain.

(Cont.)

A diffusion of wet mist blossomed up from the earth and diffused
 in the natural clefts the meat had nestled in, mid-summer
 wildflowers now free to sway in the mid-day sun.

AL:

I did this to protect you as best I could with the options I
 had. I'm sorry it was messy.

SAM:

(Quietly, never shouting. He is devastated)

I'm your brother. I thought we were best friends! That we'd
 always be there for each other... You-you said I could tell you
 anything, but *I* get left in the dark?! For 15 years?! That's the
 majority of my *life*!

AL:

And what about you. When were you gonna tell me you never wanted to see Harbor again.

SAM:

(Tearing up)

Ah- I was... I don't- I just wanted a choice.

AL:

I don't wanna see you so traumatized that its tortures you to even breathe here. Do what's best for you, Sam. You have all the answers now.

SAM:

I... I can't do this.

Sam stalks away.

AL:

...Sam, come back. ...Samson! Please, you can't go walking off in the woods! Augh...

He is gone.

SCENE 7 - EXT. FOREST - AFTERNOON

SAM:

(Wiping away tears, sniffing) Stupid... crying... fuck. *(Sighs)* This was a terrible idea. Do I have any signal through these trees...

Pulls out his phone, bleeps it awake.

(Cont.)

No. *(Sniffing again)* Well, if you felt like you'd rather die than stand one more minute, then old boy, I think you may get your wish. Death by lone hiking...

Forest noises are all around him.

(Cont., slowing his breathing)

What's worse, black bears or hogs... or massacre arenas... Or her...
(Becoming regretful) She could still be there... No. No. Not after
 that. She can't just... do that! Coddle me, treat me like glass,
 then show me that and expect it to be fine? It's not that long
 of a hike down. And I won't have to see anybody since the trail
 is closed... *(Realizing)* Oh, that's why. Cause of the murder
 field. Huh. Well, I'll just have to get used to having amazing
 legs because I can't rely on *anybody, apparently!*

SCENE 8 - EXT./INT. DOCA - LATE AFTERNOON

Al pops open her car door, now in the back lot behind the DoCA.

AL:

Sam won't answer his phone... fine. Fine! I'll just work. That's
 all I can do. Still have to write out Ground Crew casualty
 papers... shit, now William's too. I'll do that... Yeah, ok, I can
 do... something.

She picks her way through the underbrush.

(Cont.)

Wish we'd just clear this back area. It'd make parking so much
 easier. Secrecy can get fucked.

She pushes forward, unlocks the gate, and is dumped out onto
 short grass.

NARRATOR:

Al gave the backside of the DoCA a cursory glance. The yard was
 plain but tidy, some flower boxes peppering the second-story
 windows high above, large hedges bordering the perimeter, and
 the single elm to her left, isolated from the old growth forest
 she'd emerged from. The elm still bore the holes from the ladder
 her mom has drilled in when she was 7.

AL:

Who's here on a Friday now... Would've been... All of ground crew.
 And Roose. Sedum, hope he's still out. Valen- Ah. Oh, I should
 update her... later.

She picks up the pace and jogs across to a garden shed, and fiddles with the lock.

NARRATOR:

She stopped in front of a large garden shed, snugly deadbolted. A merry, if not slightly dilapidated thing, with white paint and red trim in need of a touch-up from years of weather.

She opens the door and walks in, shutting the door with a creak.

AL:

Let's get some light...

She flips on the switch.

NARRATOR:

Al's office maintained her minimalism in theory, but reverted to organized mess in execution. The shelving once used for potting was now cluttered with files and a laptop. A map of Harbor and the surrounding National Forest claimed the largest patch of wall, covered in trailing scribbles. Al flipped on the window ac unit.

She sits down, the buzz of the a/c a backdrop.

AL:

I just need a win... Ugh, why do I deserve a win, this mess is because of me...

She grabs a files and starts flipping through it.

(Cont.)

But, Sam wasn't giving me anything. Be the older, responsible one. Always take care of them before you... This is why- this is exactly why I *didn't*- No one listens. Somehow it's always my fault.

She shuffles the papers.

(Cont., Muttering)

How'd I get stuck on organizing the casualties.

She maneuvers them, typing out something.

(Cont.)

I just said "hey, let me blow your mind"! I thought I was insane when I first saw. (Groans) My head. You're an ass... I'm an ass, this is a mess!

SCENE 9 - EXT. NEIGHBORHOOD - AFTERNOON

Cars pass, Sam is street-side.

SAM:

My legs are going to swell up... my legs will swell up and fall off and I'll be in a pool of my own vindictive leg-ooze that no one will be able to move me from and this *alllll* will have been worth it... Ah-ha, fuck, they hurt... Oh... The old neighborhood. I forgot that trail backed up here...

He comes to a stop, realizing.

SAM:

I can go back... *Back home*. No one can stop me-

He is running.

I need to see it. I... (Swallowing) I didn't get to say goodbye. (Single minded) I couldn't even say goodbye. (Heavily breathing)

He slows to a stop.

(Panting) Hello... House...

NARRATOR:

The old building beckoned him forth with it's familiar stained brown siding, dark porch welcoming him from the walkway. Sam took his first step towards the door.

SAM:

This is weird. I'm such a creep.

He climbs the porch steps and stops.

(Cont., Mumbling)

It's just a knock, it's ok. Nuller can tell me to go away. It's what he'll do. Its ok...

He knocks. A pause.

(Cont.)

That plaque. "DoCA"...

Suddenly, the door creaks open.

(Cont.)

Hello, I was- uh, you're not...

NARRATOR:

A man looked him up and down, an eyebrow raised. His loose, dark waves arranged in a precise coif. Overall, a *fairly* normal adult man, rather "proper" for Harbor standards in his button-down.

All except for the bright white surgical mask obscuring the majority of his face.

CRUX:

(Ethereal quality to his voice)

'Afternoon... You're here alone?

SAM:

Uh... yeah, I was wondering if I could, uh, talk to Mr. Nuller? I used to... I grew up here. Who are you...? Why did you ask-

CRUX:

Mmm, you still say that name... *(Slight laugh)* Come on in. Glad I answered the door.

NARRATOR:

The man stepped back, opening the door wider. His left eye squished up in an expression vaguely reminiscent of friendliness, or perhaps as though he was going to sneeze.

SAM:

Really?

CRUX:

Perfectly safe. Come along.

Crux walks away, inside.

SAM:

Wait- ohhhh... This is how I die, isn't it.

Sam follows.

SCENE 10 - INT. DOCA - AFTERNOON

Crux continues up the stairs.

CRUX:

It's nearing the end of the day and I'd like to go home soon...
But not before you get introduced. *(To himself, chuckling slightly)* Oh I did have a good feeling about today.

Sam closes the door behind him.

SAM:

(Hushed)

... *Everything's* changed. Doors everywhere... They closed off the den entirely- Frosted glass on the doors- This is like... an office...

CRUX:

Sam? Follow me. Mind if I call you Sam?

SAM:

(Disturbed)

... You know, that's funny, I don't know *your* name.-

CRUX:

Crux Prosody.

SAM:

Makes that far less creepy, then. How-

CRUX:

You and Al could be twins. It betrays you. I'll be inside when you decide to take the leap.

He lets the door close.

NARRATOR:

Sam stood at the top of the small set of stairs, that had previously not held doors, that previously welcomed all into the formal sitting room. Etched across the glass embedded into the double doors, a phrase in delicate gold letting. He ran a finger over them.

SAM

"The Department of Cryptid Affairs".

He wrenches open the door and rushes through. Sedum and Roose are talking in the kitchen, muffled.

(Cont., slightly shrill, but quiet, he doesn't yell)

Why are there desks in the living room?! You, Mr., uh, Crux.

NARRATOR:

The masked man leaned against the closest desk. He placed a hand over his heart and tilted his head.

CRUX:

Hmm?

SAM:

You, you, put doors on the *stairs*? Ah- There's no upstairs!
Why's there a wall over the upstairs- *Why?*

CRUX:

Follow the voices, Sam.

SAM:

... You're really no help.

NARRATOR:

Crux shrugged.

CRUX:

Not my job. This is charity.

SAM:

(Gathering his courage)

Alright.

Sam walks forward, the voices getting louder.

ROOSE:

(Low)

I was not informed!

SEDUM:

Roose, you must learn to use your email, you'll be kept up to date far better than any of us relaying-

ROOSE:

I will not willingly subject myself to Human surveillance- and the fact that you allow yourself to be diminishes my respect for you. As though it could get any lower.

NARRATOR:

Two humanoid shapes conversed close together, taking up most of the kitchen with their sheer size. One, a seven foot tall swath of black feathers, beaked face, a pair too many golden eyes, holding his arms close in an effort to make more room- The other a plank of translucent cream and pale green, blue veins visible, stooped against the ceiling and clutching around the room with

four spindly, stretched hands and two sets of arms to keep herself upright at the hard angle she bent at. A sleek fall of colorless hair pooled around her bare feet, bare feet framed by the edge of her sheath tabard, a multitude of off white charms sewn to the hem- sharp, knobbly structures, a multitude - *Teeth*. Teeth clattering against her ankles. Liddless, milky eyes flicked to Sam; the golden eyes followed.

SAM:

(Loud)

Ha, AH-

SEDUM:

Oh... Dear. *(Raising his voice)* Al? Is she... where is she?

ROOSE:

(Undisturbed)

Prosody! What did you let crawl in here?

SAM:

What-what-what- AH!

NARRATOR:

The masked man was at his shoulder. Samson clutched the door frame, surrounded.

ROOSE:

Are you that bored?

CRUX:

He wants to talk to Director Nuller, Roose, and I am here to help. Besides, you both could stand a diversion other than each other's throats.

ROOSE:

This isn't my problem.

SEDUM:

Is Al here? With you, did she bring you here, Samson?

SAM:

(Breathless)

N-no. You all know my name, *why, why, what is this??*

CRUX:

You wanted to speak to him, there he is, Sam.

SAM:

N-Nuller is... a person... not a...

NARRATOR:

The Bird-man's face twitched. A quivering iridescence erased the feathers as his voice raked high- in half a second, Nuller stood, nervously rubbing his un-clawed hands together.

SEDUM:

(Nuller)

Hello.

SAM:

Jesus... You're... this is all the same thing, isn't it?

ROOSE:

Same as what, vague whimpering child?

SAM:

The Field. Up, t-the "Field of Meat".

NARRATOR:

Crux's arms dropped from their protective cross, the one called Roose cracked her face into something resembling a smile, and the false Human disappeared, the Bird-man returning, beak agape.

SEDUM:

You saw *that*?

CRUX:

(Cutting in)

We aren't the same. The Field is... whatever it is, not Cryptid...
We assume.

SAM:

(Squeaking)

I (Clears throat) have had a LONG day. I would like more answers
and less assumptions.

ROOSE:

(Laugh)

Perhaps we should consider this one as the office jester
instead..

SEDUM:

Roose, it *is* a lot for him- He doesn't know.

ROOSE:

I have oaths to keep- And these sudden threats from the Mayor
must be paid back in full, Sedum. Don't forget.

Roose walks away, and her office door closes down the hall.

SEDUM:

(Sighed)

Threats from two days ago, but...

SAM:

Sedum... Al, Al said that name. *(Frantic)* Ah, where'd he go- Crux?
God, he's so quiet until he's right up on ya...

SEDUM:

He's finishing up. I can help you, though, if you'll follow me?

SAM:

(Twitchy)

Where?!

SEDUM:

Into my office. I can make you a cup of tea, and can leave the door ajar, if you'd prefer? I'll be behind my desk, you'll have full access to the exit at all times.

SAM:

... Only if you'll tell me the truth. ... Please.

SEDUM:

I'll tell you what I can, Samson.

SCENE 11 - SEDUM'S OFFICE - AFTERNOON

NARRATOR:

A single window let the late afternoon into the office, fluttering yellow bouncing off of the hand-me down filing cabinets. A large desk sat facing the door, appropriate for the owner's size, piled with papers, a rather dated computer, a double pair of half-moon glasses tossed to the side, a few photo frames arranged around it all.

SEDUM:

Have a seat. Door open or closed?

Sam walks forward and sits.

SAM:

Closed, actually. Crux... is *very* quiet. I'd rather hear him knock than have him breathing down my neck again.

Sedum closes the door, and crosses and sits down behind his desk.

SEDUM:

Where would you like to begin?

SAM:

Well... My sister... admitted a lot. Showed me... that place. I don't feel safe. I don't understand what's happening. And I want to *know*, not *speculate*.

SEDUM:

Mhm. Understandable.

SAM:

I'm sure we can find a... a good place to start out of that... You know, it's good this house isn't a house anymore. It almost makes it more bearable, to know there's no going back at all.

(Breath) Almost.

A door opens, distant. Al and Crux chat, also distant.

NARRATOR:

Sedum glanced through the window in his door through to the breakroom, obscured by the privacy film lining the glass. Someone was in the kitchen, a few rooms away. Samson could barely keep himself from slipping entirely onto the floor into a puddle, and occupied himself with scratching at his beard.

SEDUM:

(Wary, trying to keep him distracted)

Of course; It's taken adjustment for a number of people. So, Al broached the subject by showing you the Field?

SAM:

That heinous thing. How did she think I'd react- how anyone would react to that- she's so *dense*... *(Groans)* She said she knew about it since she was a *kid*.

SEDUM:

Indeed, I found her there. She was afraid... And in mourning. It was a anxious meeting, but memorable.

NARRATOR:

A flash of dark blue disrupted the quiet of the breakroom. Samson rubbed his face, frustrated. Sedum sat up tall in his chair, straining to see through the cobbled together windows.

SAM:

What, in mourning...

NARRATOR:

Sam counted quickly on his fingers- the years slipping by in flashes-

SAM:

If she said 15- then that'd make her, what happened- when I was 9- When mom and dad split?! Why didn't- It's not like she was the only one hurting-! She actually understood what was happening! She was the one that got a straight answer! I can't believe her, I can not *ffff-rrreeaking* believe her... Swear to *God*, I have so much more to say to her-

Sedum stands up suddenly, pushing his chair back.

SEDUM:

Samson, I deeply appreciate your vulnerability, it is commendable- but one moment- I forgot to get you tea! Hah! Scatterbrained! Please, stay comfortable- *don't* get up.

SAM:

Wha, oh, ok...

Sedum exits, closing the door.

SCENE 12 - INT. DOCA BREAKROOM - AFTERNOON

Sedum's office door closes.

AL:

(Calling to Crux, turning on the radio)
Crux, I'm drowning you out, ya wackadoodle-

CRUX:

(Sarcastic, but jovial)
Oh no, you've beat out telepathy with radio waves.

AL:

Yeah, I'm a genius-

Sedum crosses to Al.

CRUX:

Can't hear you.

AL:

Oh. Oh, Sedum, you're back. Nose to the grindstone today? Hardly workin'? What's up? How's life... What, what're you doing?

SEDUM:

Private meeting. Don't go in there, its, uh, *charged*. Oh, what a good song- *(He turns up the music, lowering his voice slightly)* Client confidentiality is important- No one should know anyone is here right now. Especially you and this party.

AL:

Why?

SEDUM:

Uh, Human. They're a little... cagey right now.

AL:

That's fair, humans are fuck ups.

SEDUM:

Well that's not true- Nevermind- What about you?

AL:

Hot coco. Ah yeeeeeep... cures all ills. But not resentment! Ugh...

SEDUM:

Can only ask so much of dessert. It's late enough, why don't you go home? Take an early exit, I'm sure you could use the rest-

AL:

No, can't. Cause... I need to work... It's all I can do... Oh, I need to see Valen, go over some... other options...

SEDUM:

She's out for the evening! Checking on William, she said.

AL:

Fuck. Well, then, what, what can I help you with? You got anything for me? I need... whatever you got. Please.

SEDUM:

(Leaping at the opportunity)

To do in your shed, away from here?

AL:

Sure.

SEDUM:

(Thinking fast)

Reorganize all Ground Crew reports by date and subject... since last January.

AL:

What?! How am I supposed to get through all that, our paperwork looks like a cat fucked a pen!

SEDUM:

(Laced with saccharine)

Is something troubling you, Al? Would you like to talk? No- we *must* talk.

NARRATOR:

Al took a step back as Sedum moved closer, seating himself on the couch under the window, and patted the cushion next to him.

AL:

No- I don't like this-

SEDUM:

It's important we work through any problems you have. We're not just a team, we're *family*, correct? Yes? We take care of one another? Come, sit, sit- let's work this out-

AL:

What's your problem, you have a meeting-

SEDUM:

You know I'm always here for you- The titles are nonsense, you,
our people come first!

AL:

No! Stop being weird! I'll do the damn organizing! (*Stalks away*)
Why can't you just twist my arm like a normal boss...

She exits.

SEDUM:

(*Sighs, catches sight of the clock and breaks slightly*)
... Oh God, it's not even 5... (*Sighs*) Children...

He slowly walks back towards his office.

END.