

**HARBOR**

**Episode 8 - "Dry Rot"**

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**SCENE 1 - INT. LEAH'S BATHROOM - NIGHT**

The shower is blasting hot water down on Al's head. She's singing, muttering, a sort of chant as she scrubs at herself.

**AL:**

*(breathes deep)*

Ok...

Theres a neat little lass and her name is Mari Mac  
 Make no mistake she's the girl I'm gonna track  
 Lots of other fellas try to get her on her back  
 But I'm thinkin' that they'll have to get up early.  
 Mari Mac's mother's making Mari Mac marry me  
 My mother's making me marry Mari Mac  
 Well I'm going to marry Mari for when Mari's taking care of me  
 We'll all be feeling merry when I marry Mari Mac.  
 Now Mari and her mother are an awful lot together  
 In fact you hardly see one without the other  
 And people often wonder if it's Mari or her mother  
 Or both of them together I am courting.  
 Mari Mac's mother's making Mari Mac marry me  
 My mother's making me marry Mari Mac  
 Well I'm going to marry Mari for when Mari's taking care of me  
 We'll all be feeling merry when I marry Mari Mac.-

She is processing her feelings, her anger.

**TITLE CARD SEQUENCE****SCENE 2 - INT. LEAH'S CONDO - NIGHT**

The shower is muffled through the bathroom door, as is Al's singing, getting a bit more impassioned. Sam has woken up, bleary eyed.

**SAM:**

Mmm, mom?

**LEAH:**

*(Behind her door)*

In my room.

He creaks open the door.

**SAM:**

Is... Al showering?

**LEAH:**

Yeeeeep.

**SAM:**

Why?

**LEAH:**

Because she doesn't have a hot water tank at her trailer, you know that, Sam.

**SAM:**

No I mean... it's almost midnight, what is she doing over here?

**LEAH:**

Mmm, oh, because she's having a crisis.

**SAM:**

You think?

**AL:**

*(Muffled, but practically screamed)*

-Well up among the heather in the hills of Beniffee  
Well I had a bonnie lass sitting on me knee  
A bumble bee stung me right above the knee  
Up among the heather in the hills of Beniffee!

**LEAH:**

I don't know sweets, what do you think.

**SAM:**

Right, you're... right.

**LEAH:**

Mhm. While you're up, would you mind go getting the couch ready for her?

**SAM:**

Sure.

**LEAH:**

And Sam? I hope this gas station gig really is worth it. For both of you.

**SAM:**

... 'K! Night mom!

**SCENE 3 - INT. LEAH'S CONDO - NIGHT**

Al moves through the space, and sighs.

**NARRATOR:**

Al's hand traced the darkened edges of the wall, slipping into the living room, awashed in shadows and deep slices of light from the distant streetlamp, beyond the cul-de-sac outside.

**SAM:**

The rest of your day went well?

**AL:**

Fuck a duck! Ugh, get off the couch...

Sam stands up. Al falls onto the couch.

**SAM:**

So??

**AL:**

*(Muttered into her pillow)*

*What?*

**SAM:**

God, Al, what happened? ... You're still in your jeans? Don't sleep in those, lemme get you some cozy pants-

**AL:**

We checked out the library. I took Becker back to the B&B.

**SAM:**

*(Quieter)*

... What happened?

**AL:**

Sam, I'm so tired-

**SAM:**

*(Very serious)*

I need to know if you're ok.

**AL:**

He didn't stop talking when I told him to. He said some shitty...  
weird... things.

**SAM:**

Was it sexu-

**AL:**

-No, it wasn't sexual. I'm ok... It's late and we both have work  
in the morning. I just need to sleep.

**SAM:**

Ok.

**AL:**

I'll... figure out how I'll skin him tomorrow...

**SAM:**

That's assuring.

**AL:**

Mmmf, go to bed, Sam.

**SAM:**

... Alright. Sleep as good as you can. I love you.

**AL:**

G'nigh...

He climbs the stairs.

**NARRATOR:**

Sam itched at his eyes as he climbed the stairs, burying the foreboding in his gut.

**SAM:**

*(To himself)*

Well... I guess I gotta brush up on my skinning techniques...  
*(Gasps, startled)* Geeze, mom! Why are we such a sneaky family...

**LEAH:**

Just checking to make sure that that GAS STATION is really really worth it, sweets.

**SAM:**

I'm going to bed!

**LEAH:**

Desperately hoping that the emotional turmoil from your GAS STATION is better than what both of you could be doing at the library! That's all I'm saying!

**SAM:**

*(Done with it)*

Good night! Love you! *(Door shuts)*

**LEAH:**

*(Almost a hiss)*

... You too...

**SCENE 4 - INT. AL'S CAR - MORNING**

Al and Sam are driving to work.

**SAM:**

So... How's about we talk about last night?

**AL:**

That's a bad way to start the day.

**SAM:**

Ok, ok, cool... Aw, look, they're stringing up the summer christmas lights in the trees. Main street always puts forth such a good effort... ignoring all the disrepair and crumbling infrastructure. *(She's quiet)* So... Oh hey I've been... meaning to ask, who's that dream guy here?

**AL:**

*(Almost managing a smile)*

Despite not going on a date in 10 years, I am *still* a lesbian, Sam. Not judging your bi-ways, but...

**SAM:**

Wrong way to phrase it- I mean the guy who gets *in* your dreams-  
Woah, hey- Stop!

**AL:**

What??

**SAM:**

Pull over real quick!

She does.

**AL:**

*(Anxious)*

What's happenin'??

**SAM:**

... Finnick's Toy Shop. Something happened to the window- look.

**AL:**

Sam, don't- *(Frustrated)* Don't scare me like that- Please, ugggh... My heart.

**SAM:**

Al, look.

**NARRATOR:**

The old fashioned storefront, 15 feet from their opportune parking space, had a series of traffic cones set up around the display window... which was warped like a ripple in a pond, from the center out, the painted lettering having run down; the glass weeping in front of the stuffed animals and games.

**SAM:**

Something happened there.

**AL:**

It sure did.

**SAM:**

Oh, we should get pictures-

**AL:**

Tell Valen when we get in. We'll be late..

**SCENE 5 - INT. DOCA - MORNING**

It's raining, splattering in little pips against the windows.

**AL:**

Mmmm... *(She drinks her coffee, wary and sleepwalking)*

**SAM:**

Sister, I love you, but you're doing it again.

**AL:**

Do what?

**SAM:**

You're lookin' like you threw up a little in your mouth and you can't swallow. What're you staring at- The Director's offices? *(Trying to make a joke)* What'd those doors do to you, anyway?

**AL:**

Sorry.

**SAM:**

What do you say to taking lunch together, later?

**AL:**

No. It's fine.

**SAM:**

Al, it's like you're not even here, (*Chuckles*) you dissociative bastard.

**AL:**

Now's not the time for a therapy session. I'll eat alone.

**SAM:**

(*Hurt*)

... Ouch?

**AL:**

We saw evidence of the Pyre, again, that's more important. We have responsibilities here. I'm going to act like they matter. You should too, buddy.

She walks away, out the side door.

**SAM:**

What the hell... Fine. Figure it out myself..

He crosses into the main office. Crux is typing at his computer.

**WILLIAM:**

Mornin', Sammy.

**SAM:**

(*Trying to ease into the conversation*)

Hey, William... So, uh, hey- how *is* the leg coming along?

**WILLIAM:**

Oh it's... ahhh, what're you doing, are you trying to get to know me better?

**SAM:**

Well, I gotta start somewhere, right? Per your recommendation, teacher?

**WILLIAM:**

*(Chuckles)*

It's good, it's good... Well, I'm startin' in on some real PT this week! Can't wait until I can drive again- You never know how good ya got it till it's violently ripped away from you.

**SAM:**

Guess so.

**WILLIAM:**

But hey, I got a sick bionic leg now that'll... ache come winter. It's life. What a ride! It won't stop me though. Hah, workplace accident laws couldn't stop me from pushing forward, cold steel won't, neither!

**SAM:**

Can't argue with that.

**WILLIAM:**

No one else is gonna give you positivity, might as well make it yourself, amIright? I am! I am right. You gotta grab life by the gnarglies and squeeze out every drop of optimism that ya can!

**SAM:**

I'll remember that... Um, so, you don't happen to know... *(Low)* what happened yesterday, with the library?

**WILLIAM:**

Nope!- Hey Crux!

**CRUX:**

*(From across the room)*

What?

**WILLIAM:**

What went down yesterday?

**CRUX:**

William, I'm sorry, but I'm not giving you a play-by-play of every call I go on.

Crux flips through some papers.

**SAM:**

I was asking if something happened- Al's doing that thing... where she says she'll talk about whatever's bothering her but then-

**WILLIAM:**

She zones out for 8 days instead? (*Snorts*) Oh yeah, we're familiar!

**CRUX:**

Concerning *what*; Please Sam, I can't actually read your mind.

**SAM:**

Something between her and Mr. Becker, she's talking about flaying him- It's all I got.

Crux stops typing.

**CRUX:**

Oh... shit. (*Sighs*)

Crux walks over to them, lowering his voice.

(*Cont.*)

She took him back to his B&B. He must've taken that as an opportunity to do something.

**SAM:**

Mhm, that's what she said, still hasn't answered *what*, though-  
Only it wasn't, uh, sexual. So that's something, at least.

**WILLIAM:**

*(Slightly disturbed)*  
Bottom of the barrel.

**CRUX:**

That's why that feeling was in here. It's like... smoke. Stagnant  
and choking, confused, incensed... despondent- It's hard to  
decipher everyone from it... Get Al back with us, Sam. This can't  
last a week, she needs to be functioning as soon as possible-  
*(Sighs)* And now Valen's overloaded, what with Sedum freezing-  
Ugh! Really are turning into a second-rate circus.

**SAM:**

How does this place even operate normally?

**CRUX:**

Poorly, when it comes to communication. But bearable.

**WILLIAM:**

It was a mess, but it was *our* mess.

**SAM:**

This would be easier if anyone would talk.

**WILLIAM:**

Yeah, just *try* pryin' it outta either Al *or* Sedum- those two  
especially are wound tighter than those little toys that you can  
wind up real taut, and then they go *BZZZT*- Tighter even than  
that.

**SAM:**

Mmm.

**CRUX:**

You have the most pithy analogies, William.

**WILLIAM:**

You know, I try pretty hard on 'em, thank you for seein' that.

**SCENE 6 - INT. DOCA - AFTERNOON**

The side door clatters shut, Al stalks in as low conversing happens in the breakroom between Becker and Sedum. Sam closes the fridge door.

**AL:**

... I said I was eatin' alone, Sam.

**SAM:**

We have lunch at the same time, that doesn't mean I'm gonna even talk to you, ok? I hear you- I'm just getting my food and I'll go eat on the front porch.

She yanks open the fridge door and pulls out her lunch bag, closing it again and taking a few steps.

**AL:**

... Thanks.

**SAM:**

Oh, wait- don't go in the breakroom-

Al stops.

**BECKER:**

*(Low)*

... I'm *advising* you to *look* into the Aberration population, if you'd *regin* in your inflated ego, you'd see common-sense. Isn't this what you wanted- for us to be *equals*? This is what equals, *do*, Null- play the part.

**SEDUM:**

But Becker, please- a-all I'm trying to say is, bringing in civilians because they share ONE trait with a suspect- one *very* generalized-

**NARRATOR:**

Al clenched her teeth, her limbs having gone static. Sedum met her eye from the sunken breakroom, head almost brushing the ceiling, concern creasing the edges of his beak. Becker glanced over his shoulder.

**BECKER:**

Al, a *sensible* Ranger- settle this. If a suspect shares a important feature with a broader, known population, would you neglect to check into that know populace, or sacrifice some *minor* feelings-

**AL:**

I'm on my lunch.

**NARRATOR:**

Sam skirted around his sister's back, pulling a paper towel off the roll.

**BECKER:**

This one's being orney again. You know how he gets- he likes dragging it out.

**AL:**

Not today, Becker.

**SEDUM:**

You look ill. Are you feeling alright?

**AL:**

... I'm on my lunch.

Al walks out, through the side door again.

**BECKER:**

*(Low)*

Something's got under her skin... What do you think? She'd tell you, wouldn't she? *(Small gasp)* Let's hope it's not serious.

**NARRATOR:**

Sam wadded the napkin in his hand, heading towards the front of the house. He stole another glance, unexpectedly locking onto Sedum's attention, who quickly turned about face and walked into his office.

**BECKER:**

Have a good break Sam!

**SAM:**

Thanks, Mr. Becker...

**SCENE 7 - INT. DOCA, AL'S SHED - AFTERNOON**

Al is deep into her work, scratching on paper. The windows are open, the rain is a soft backdrop.

**AL:**

*(Clenched cigarette in her teeth)* If Eaton is here... and Corwill's Farm over here... they're covering a large distance if they're based in Harbor... But Becker mentioned Asheville- *(inhales, low)* Becker- no. Don't think about it, don't think about it... *(Releases her breath)* Along Mainstreet-

A knock at the door.

*(Cont.)*

What??

The door creaks open, Valen entering.

**VALENTINA:**

*(Attempting small talk)*

Cold out today, huh? Rain makes it worse- Ah... smoking at work. Now I know somethin's up.

**NARRATOR:**

Al stared dead-eyed at Valen, measuring up her boss, lightly misted with water. She set the cigarette in a half filled

ashtray under the window and took a swig of her coffee, refusing to break eye contact.

**VALENTINA:**

... Really helping your case there. Gonna head out to check out that lead on Finnick's shop.. But before that, I need to ask you something.

**AL:**

Mm?

**VALENTINA:**

You spiraling?

**NARRATOR:**

Al blinked, then slowly spun back to her desk.

**VALENTINA:**

You get in, glare at everyone, and shut yourself in here for *hours*- Really leaning into that belligerent isolationist persona, don't ya think?

**AL:**

*(Dangerously light)*

Everything is peachy-keen, Valen.

**VALENTINA:**

Ya can't just say it like that and expect me to NOT be concerned.

**NARRATOR:**

Valen set a hand softly on the back of Al's chair, who, repressing a surge of irritation in her belly, spun to face her, reaching automatically for her cigarette, again.

**AL:**

So you're just here to ignore your own work. *(Taking a drag)*  
Don't worry, I get it.

**VALENTINA:**

Come on, let's get this- are you... you're wearing the same clothes from yesterday.

**AL:**

Is there suddenly a dress code, now?

**VALENTINA:**

*(Sighs)*

Back to the point. You're derailing us more than you're keeping us on track. So you might as well get it out with.

**AL:**

Look at that, the correct arrangement of familiarity *and* guilt-tripping- Congratulations, you've unlocked my damage-

**VALENTINA:**

What in the hell is the problem here, Greer?

**AL:**

My problem is we have a job to do, but instead everyone just *insists* on digging up *bullshit*.

Another knock. They both stop.

**SEDUM:**

Ah... I'm interrupting.

**VALENTINA:**

Thank Christ, Sedum; Help me here. Do your... "concerned" thing, please.

**NARRATOR:**

A twitch began spasming under Al's left eye. She choked down as much smoke as her lungs could hold, staring at the floor, focused on a loose board, now wet from the open door.

**SEDUM:**

*(Gently, almost overly so)*

Al... What's going on? (*Hesitant*) Al, can you look at me... ?

**AL:**

Did both of you forget we're dealing with a *terrorist* in this godforsaken town that we are *directly* responsible for? Why is my shit suddenly top priority?

**VALENTINA:**

Fuckin' pullin' teeth, isn't it...

**SEDUM:**

(*Dreading, knowing*)

What happened? ... What did Becker say to you, Al?

**AL:**

Well, *Director*, if you can't drop it while we're on the clock- He told me... (*The disappointment slips through*) that you smiled with his face.

**VALENTINA:**

... Oh...

**AL:**

That you violated his life.

**VALENTINA:**

(*Muttering*)

Ah Christ. Uh, um, if I can just squeeze past yaaaa, Sedum, I don't need to be here for this-

**AL:**

(*Quietly*)

Is that enough?

**SEDUM:**

(*Horrificed, trying to keep it together*)

Uh, w-well, A-al, I, I, if... Al, I am so so sorry-

**VALENTINA:**

*Reaaaally* don't need to be a part of this-!

**SEDUM:**

You weren't supposed to be told this way.-

**BECKER:**

Calm down, Null.

**NARRATOR:**

Valen and Sedum both jumped as Becker's voice sounded behind him. Al sucked down the end of her cigarette, leaning over in her chair, feeling the heat rise in her ears, willing the smoke to sear her throat, to feel *anything* other than the torture clawing her innards. Becker leaned against the doorway, a bemused smirk on his face, undisturbed by the drizzle raining down on him.

**BECKER:**

This is an important step, take your time. Though, of course, I took it *for* you... Remember when you weren't near as bashful about all this? I, surprisingly, miss those times! *(Chuckles)*

**VALENTINA:**

*(To herself)* I could try crawlin' through that window, maybe...

**AL:**

Why are you here, State Director?

**BECKER:**

To help, kiddo. Seems like there's a conflict.

**VALENTINA:**

Nope, windows too small... Could try tunneling out...

**SEDUM:**

I'm sorry... Al, I'm sor-

**BECKER:**

*(Low)*

Oh, can't you say anything else besides "sorry"? You're a broken record-

**AL:**

I am looking at three *goddamn* middle-aged *professionals*.-

**BECKER:**

Now *that's* a write up-

**AL:**

*(Devastatingly quiet- a weird sort of stressed smile)*

*Brick!* You are here to do your pointless assessment and help us find the Pyre. Apparently you've forgotten, so let me tell you again- You are here to help us protect innocent civilians. Now get back to your work, be "State Director", and stop *eatin'* my time.

**BECKER:**

*(A moment, then he chuckles awkwardly, trying to hide something of a twitch)*

Well, suppose ya got me there, kiddo. Got a bit lost in the moment... My bad. I'll be back to detail your punishment when you're in a more receptive mood. How's that sound?

**AL:**

That's fine.

**BECKER:**

*(Low)*

Oh, and don't look away from all this, Sedum, come on. I thought you always enjoyed a good train crash?

Becker walks off, back into the house.

**SEDUM:**

It's... too much to ask but if... if we could ta-

**AL:**

Do you know what I was doing before both of you came in here? I was projecting the scope of the Pyre- possible origin points. That sounds important, don't it? Finding a terrorist before they do worse damage?

**SEDUM:**

... Yes.

**AL:**

In short, I'm doing my *job*. What I get paid for. What *you've* dropped. (*Lower*) ... Get back on the horse or get out of the way, Director Nuller.

**SEDUM:**

(*A choice*)

Is that what you need?

**AL:**

Yeah. Get out of my shed.

**SEDUM:**

Okay.

He leaves. A moment, again, as Valen decides what to do.

**VALENTINA:**

... SO... I did forget to tell you, but I did get aahn email about an abandoned house with charred bullet-like holes in the side of it.

**AL:**

... Where at?

**VALENTINA:**

Here, down Old Fork Way, off a side road..

Al goes back to scribbling.

**AL:**

Right here?

**VALENTINA:**

Yep, mhm...

**AL:**

... That's... North. It *could* be North... East...

**VALENTINA:**

*(Sighs a little)* Sure could.

**SCENE 8 - EXT. SAM'S ROOM/LEAH'S CONDO - NIGHT**

There's music playing softly in the background, from the radio. The window opens, letting in a deluge of crickets and night noise.

**SAM:**

I am a 24 year old man. Sneaking out of my mom's house via roof...

He squeezes out the window, onto the roof. He delicately closes the window enough behind him... then slips slightly.

*(Cont.)*

Geeze, God! ... Ok. I'm ok... Glad it stopped raining... If I drop down, I won't have a way back up. I guess... I'll just get comfortable up here.

He sits.

*(Cont.)*

Ok. *(Inhales, then sings hesitantly)* Hovan, Hovan, Gorry og O, Gorry og O...

There's nothing.

*(Cont.)*

... Gorry og O, Hovan, Hovan Gorry og O... I've lost my darling baby... oh...

Another moment passes. Then, a soft rustling.

**J:**

*(Distant)*

Apologies, I adore the full chorus. It's such a charming call-  
you needn't be self-conscious.

**SAM:**

*(Hushed)*

Oh, Thanks- Where are you at, J? Are you... that light in the  
trees?

**J:**

Yes, yes- You are just full of surprises, Sam. Eager to meet,  
after a single day! I suppose we are friends, now.

**SAM:**

Well, I can't *not* think of you... I need your help. You're the  
only one who can.

**J:**

Most often that's the case. How may I assist?

**SAM:**

You said you knew most of my life, my... stories, right?

**J:**

Yes. Much of what you've experienced here in the bounds of our  
Harbor.

**SAM:**

Who else do you know about?

**J:**

Anyone, practically everyone here. Why? Who has piqued your  
curiosity?

**SAM:**

I don't... Ok, J, I don't want to go behind anyone's backs, but I need to know if... Al is ok... with someone. Well, two someones.

**J:**

Yes, yes, *who?*

**SAM:**

Sedum Nuller? And a man named Mr. Becker? Do you know them...?

**J:**

*(Stifling a giggle)*

Indeed, yes, I am quite familiar with Sedum, and by extension- Well which story would you like- oh, I have *anything* you'd care to know. Even before the Bird came to Harbor.

**SAM:**

How's that possible?

**J:**

There's a payment for those Cryptids who wish to settle here. I need to know they're trustworthy. He barely scraped by. And believe me, I've regretted curving the grade.

**SAM:**

I want to know what *exactly* happened between him and Becker.

**J:**

How long do you have? There's years worth and this will take time.

**SAM:**

I don't want to push it, I still need to sleep. Morally either, I don't want to hurt or... *(To himself)* But no one will tell me anything- I have to know. Have to make sure Al's safe. *We're* safe. *(To J)* I guess let's call it good at what happened first, their initial... stuff? Whatever made them like they are. If you can tell me.

**J:**

I can do better than that- I can *show* you. I need you to close your eyes, Sam, and keep them closed. I'm coming out.

**SAM:**

I'm still not allowed to see you?

**J:**

Patience. We're going forward at such a rapid pace, I don't want to overload you, especially with this particular request.

**SAM:**

Alright. I'm closing them.

J brushes past the remaining foliage and approaches, his weird diffused, strides "echoing".

**J:**

*(Close)*

I need to hold your head.

**SAM:**

*(Slightly nervous)*

Oh, to show me?

**J:**

Yes. I'll grasp around the base of your skull. May I?

**SAM:**

Knock yourself out.

**J:**

Oh, that is a comically ironic statement. You'll be unconscious during the process, so it is more akin to *me* knocking *you* out.

**SAM:**

... Funny.

**NARRATOR:**

An enormous hand brushed against Sam's hair, like trickling water or breath. Fingers with cold bone-like ends settled over his forehead and across his cheekbone, the mass itself wavered in existing.

**SAM:**

Ah. Wait, I'm up a storey, how tall are you, exactly...?

J chuckles and starts humming, not a particular melody, but rather a single tone; it's disconcerting and disorienting.

**NARRATOR:**

Something pawed against Sam's inner ear, then even deeper, something seeping through the lining of his conscious and subconscious.

**J:**

You'll encounter pain in these memories. It isn't your's. Pay it no mind and it won't hurt. I'll be with you all the while. May we begin?

**SAM:**

*(Swallowing)*

Yes.

**NARRATOR:**

The hand suddenly took on a weighty, flesh-like quality, pressing down Sam's hair. He relinquished. A feeling like warm, moist tissue flitted into his mind, surrounded his sapience, clutched it close. His shoulders dropped and his head fell back, limp, cradled in J's palm.

#### **SCENE 9 - MEMORY LANE**

There's rushing whispering, hissing, many many people talking, explosions of noise, a cacophony.

**SAM:**

Augh- it's so loud- What is all this?

**J:**

We won't linger, its something of a river of accumulated memories. They bleed into one another, there's no way to keep them more organized than this... I'm trying to find..

**BECKER VO:**

Aberrations with... true malicious intent..

**J:**

Ah, yes. Good enough.

They are yanked, into the memory, the noise funneling into a cohesive set.

**SCENE 10 - INT. RALEIGH STATION - DAY**

It's a busy office, low commotion around.

**SAM:**

It's Raleigh. It's March of 98- How do I just know that... ? Oh my God, this is *bizarre*. Ah, why am I moving- why can... that man he's moving- I'm that man. I'm seeing him, and I *am* him-

**J:**

*(Filtered, outside the space)*

You are experiencing another's memories, you are both in his perspective and your own. Don't misinterpret it as your's, remember.

**SAM:**

Is that why you're not here with me?

**J:**

Yes, I am your conduit.

**SAM:**

This doesn't look like Sedum.

**J:**

It is. A different face, but no matter what he looks like, we follow and experience his recollections.

**NARRATOR:**

A classical looking human man leaned against the wall of a cubical, tucked back into the corner of a large office, end of the work day stragglers lingering around the space. Something in his eyes *felt* like Sedum, the same resolve and flitting attention... though laced with a confidence that lacked in the present. Impulsive. *Young*. It didn't suit this man's face.

**BECKER:**

... I thought you left for the day, Nick.

**NARRATOR:**

Becker swivelled in his chair, hair fluffier, frame less meaty, fewer lines etched in his face. His cold eyes glinted brighter but the same easy smile sat in it's usual formation, the same perfect eyebrows arranged in a bemused tableau.

**SEDUM:**

I wanted to chat before I skipped out.

**NARRATOR:**

The Sedum-Nicholas smiled crookedly, cocking his head to the side as he shoved his hands into his jean pockets. Becker raised an eyebrow at the false Ranger, sticking out in the sea of polyester suits. He leaned back in his chair in a stretch.

**BECKER:**

*(Grunting)*

You're just asking for Director Moyes to smack you with a violation for that get-up. Why didn't you wait to change at home?

**SEDUM:**

That tie was choking me out.

**BECKER:**

*(Laughs quietly)*

Yeah, I feel that. So what's up, Nicky?

**SEDUM:**

I can't stop going over what you were saying the other day. Something about this Aberration being "clever", right...?

**BECKER:**

*(Hesitant)*

Oh. *(Low)* I said *crafty* but, yeah- Aberrations with true malicious intent... It goes against everything we've encountered but I know what I saw.

**SEDUM:**

*(Laugh)*

Crafty, huh... And what you saw, that was you, in Collie's Diner, while you were outside Collie's Diner, last Saturday?

**BECKER:**

*(A snap)*

I don't need your validation. This thing watches people; I've been going over the interviews- always interacting with a double of themselves that got in their heads- made them question their sanity. *That's* not an animal.

**SEDUM:**

You think? That rattling?

**BECKER:**

Use your brain.

**SEDUM:**

Mm, impressive. But... Brick, that's, that's... scary? Can you blame me if I don't want to... ?

**BECKER:**

And if we pissed it off, we could be in for a hell of a time. With everyone prattling on the Virus theory- we're spinning our wheels.

**SEDUM:**

We?

**BECKER:**

... Yeah?

**SEDUM:**

But it's only been... you, though? ... What if you're the only one? How would you respond to that? Wouldn't it be rather flattering?

**BECKER:**

Man, I don't need you turnin' this into a horror movie.

**SEDUM:**

It'd be smarter to go for one, though. And isn't it just what this thing's been doing- with those fellows- that vile, laundering Principal-

**BECKER:**

You happy that guy got fucked over?

**SEDUM:**

*(Taken aback slightly)*

Not- no. Not what I was- but, but it's irrefutable now. Point being, you're the up-and-coming Lead Ranger; strong, wholesome... Brick, you should be prepared.

**BECKER:**

... Shit. *(Quiet)* Fuck, Nicky... The Squad keeps makin' me out to be crazy- What if I really am alone?

**SEDUM:**

Don't worry, I believe in you. Entirely.

**BECKER:**

*(Laughs a little)*

You're a real asshole, stringing me along like that- What made you change your mind?

**SEDUM:**

Hmm?

**BECKER:**

You said yesterday that I should go home, get in a good rut with Winnie, which I *did*, by the way, get my head screwed back on.

**SEDUM:**

... It just needed time to click.

**BECKER:**

It means a lot that you... That you're with me, Nick. That you respect me. I know I've been outta it...

**SEDUM:**

*(Low)*

Even if no one else ever believes you, I will. Always.

**BECKER:**

Heh, yeah-

**SEDUM:**

You have my undivided attention. I'm focusing. On you. On this. I want to see just how long it takes for us to figure this out. How you can overcome... Show me there's something in you worth admiring. Show me you aren't waiting to self-destruct. *(Encouraging, sighing laugh)* I'm rooting for you, Brick! Don't mistake my intentions.

**BECKER:**

*(A little shaken)*

How about ya calm down for me, buddy?

**SEDUM:**

How can I? You have the chance to show everyone what you're truly made of, justify your touted "humanity". And we get to share center stage, together! The most engaging case-

**BECKER:**

The whole squad's assigned, it's all six of us.

**SEDUM:**

It's really just you and me, though. *(Testing his limits, low)*  
I'm sorry I left you alone for so long- I assure you, I won't neglect you like I did over the past week. I wasn't taking you seriously enough, friend.

**BECKER:**

*(Chilled.. then laughing)*

You- you already started in on your bourbon, didn't ya? You bastard. At work-?

**SEDUM:**

Sure... I should get going now. Bye.

He starts walking away, giving Becker time to mull.

**BECKER:**

... Don't... Don't you hate wearing jeans, Nick?

**SEDUM:**

Good night, Brick Becker! See you soon!

He walks off.

**SAM:**

Well, that was... AH-

**SCENE 11 - EXT. ALLEYWAY - NIGHT**

There's a rushing, pulsing, surging. It stops, and we're street-side, a dog barking in the distance, cars passing on the wet street every once in a while.

**J:**

Forgive me for the abrupt change- I'm trying to condense, there's months and months of this...

Becker runs into the scene, panting, hissing into the phone as the fluttering, flapping of wings sounds above. A landing.

**BECKER:**

*(Distant)*

Winnie, no, I'm not coming home until I know *exactly* where this thing is- I'm keeping you and Kristi safe, for Chrissake! Stop fucking calling while I'm *working*!

He shuts the phone off with an archaic beep.

*(Cont.)*

Jesus, ridiculous... and this goddamn maze... where are you, you son of a bitch...

**NARRATOR:**

A woman this time- Black bob sensibly tucked behind her ears, a smart, albeit baggy, suit. The same intensity in her eyes, observing, calculating, rapid - Sedum again, behind another face. Sam's stomach lurched, a mix of queasiness and exhilaration.

**SEDUM:**

*(as Jordana)*

Here, over here!

Becker runs, skidding to stop, he hesitantly walks forward.

*(Cont.)*

I think it landed somewhere up top, over that industrial... What? *What, Becker?*

**BECKER:**

... are you Jordan?

**SEDUM:**

Is this really the time?! We got this thing!

**BECKER:**

Jordan... Tell me something, anything I'd know.

**SEDUM:**

Like what?

**BECKER:**

... Last Christmas, what was your white elephant to me?

**SEDUM:**

*(Scoffs)*

You think I remember that?

**BECKER:**

*(Mutters)*

... This is why I got you a candle..

**SEDUM:**

That thing's gone by now, anyway... Brick, you're going crazy over this.

**BECKER:**

It was on my CAR, it was ON. MY. CAR-

**SEDUM:**

Yeah, we all saw something on your car...

**BECKER:**

That mother fucker- I *know* that thing's obscene... Where's everyone else? Did you run on ahead again?

**SEDUM:**

They were too slow.

**BECKER:**

Stop showing off like that. Think of the team. Jesus..

They start walking.

**SEDUM:**

You're still convinced this thing's after you, then.

**BECKER:**

It looked right at me!-

**SEDUM:**

It was dark, how could you tell?

**BECKER:**

It came into the office.

**SEDUM:**

Oh, that "Not-Nick" thing you keep harping on about...

**BECKER:**

And the other *three* times- Listen, I'm not gonna defend my sanity- You know what, just stay quiet- That's an order.

**NARRATOR:**

Becker scanned the rooftops as "Jordan" inclined her head, her black hair rippling in the wet night. She smiled toothily, nodding to herself. Iridescence winked over her.

**SEDUM:**

*(Becker's own voice)*

Let's switch it up, then. You prefer talking to yourself?  
Spotlight on Brick-!

**BECKER:**

Jesus, fuck!!

**SEDUM:**

We're equals now! No more orders. Let's chat. How are you? Er, we. How are we?? Enjoying our attentions?

**BECKER:**

*(Whimpering, angry)*

Fuck, shit, where's my taser-

**SEDUM:**

I think I saw me drop it out in the parking lot. Unfortunately.

**BECKER:**

*(Almost hyperventilating)*

You piece of garbage-

**SEDUM:**

You'll give yourself all sorts of nasty medical conditions if you can't relax. Breathe, accept life as it comes, wave as it goes...

**BECKER:**

Shut up! Gabby mother fucker. What are you?

**SEDUM:**

*(Smiles)*

I am a 27 year old Human man, I have a charming dependence on being powerful but playing like I'm weak to get people to like me- Let's see... I like my shirts pressed *just so* every morning, what else, what else... Oh! And my offspring doesn't come to me for daddy hugs because she can smell the self-obsession on my breath. *(Stage whispered)* It churns her stomach. My name's Brick Becker! What's your's?

**BECKER:**

Get your hand outta my face.

**SEDUM:**

This is fun, our rapport is so stimulating.

**BECKER:**

Get that smug look off... No, just get rid of my face. Get it off!

Becker rushes him.

**NARRATOR:**

Becker aimed to tackle the other him, who instead popped up into the air, landing heavily as the human stumbled against the slick asphalt.

**SEDUM:**

Are you asking or ordering? Because if you're asking *nice*, I can oblige.

**NARRATOR:**

The Sedum-Becker grabbed the human one's lapels and lifted him up, up, up against the alley wall. The mirage wavered from his hands, morphing into cruel, black talons, a claw tracing along Becker's sideburn.

**BECKER:**

*(Wheezing)*

Get offa me.

**SEDUM:**

But you ordered me to get rid of *your* face! With such authority, too.

**NARRATOR:**

One of Becker's dangling feet flailed up, square between the other him's legs. The claw flinched and tore a rip along Becker's ear, as Sedum bent double and dropped him.

**SEDUM:**

Agh-

**BECKER:**

FUCK-

**SAM:**

Ugh!

**J:**

*(Quietly)*

It's not your pain, Sam.

Becker falls in a heap, as Sedum backs off, whimpering.

**SAM:**

Huuuh... *(breathing hard, muttering)* It's not mine, it's not mine...  
Ow...

**SEDUM:**

I was joking!! *(Mingling laughing and pain)*

**BECKER:**

*(Hissed)*  
You'll pay for that, you freak.

**SEDUM:**

I'm sorry, I slipped, oh that looks painful, I am sorry... but  
YOU, Brick! Going straight for the low blow!

Becker dials his phone.

**BECKER:**

*(Frantic)*  
Come on, come on... Nick- I'm behind the canning plant- Get here  
NOW, I hope to God one of you remembered a gun.

He hangs up, and gets to his feet, grunting.

*(Cont.)*

I'll give you a chance to be something other than a coward... Show  
me your real face.

**SEDUM:**

I don't think you'd give me nearly as much attention with that  
old thing. I'll stick to your's.

**BECKER:**

Then I'll cut it off myself.

A knife clicks out.

**SEDUM:**

Oh, a KNIFE. *(Laughs, masking nervousness)* Yes, rearrange me, make me ART, Brick! Isn't this what you always wanted to do?!

Becker runs at him again.

**NARRATOR:**

Becker, red dripping down his jaw, charged again at the kneeling him. Before he could collide, he was tripped up, and sent splayed out over the asphalt. Sedum stood up, folding away a wing back into nothingness behind his grinning Becker face.

Becker groans on the pavement.

**SEDUM:**

Apologies, I can't bear to commit. Didn't stab yourself, did you? No one's *supposed* to bleed in all of this.

**BECKER:**

Why... are you doing this... to me... Huh? What makes me special?

There's many people running, shouting close by, down a few alleys away. Sedum takes a few steps away.

**NARRATOR:**

The Sedum-Becker strolled into the darkness underneath a fire escape. His shadow morphed large. Becker flinched on the ground, panting, a peel of blood dribbling on the wet concrete.

**SEDUM:**

*(In his normal voice)*

Let me paint you a picture, friend; I light matches around people, people like you, powerful people who could use a test of character- and I blow the matches *out*. Yes, the smoke and sulfur is annoying, though I rather like the smell, but no one gets hurt. But do you know what they always end up doing? They take my matchbook! And light themselves on fire. Isn't that *BAFFLING?! -I don't actually injure anyone- usually, sorry,*

again, about that- but they insist on doing it themselves... I don't touch your family, your friends, anyone else, I never have. It is OUR dance- The ability to face yourself through me- yet you pull others in! And I had such high expectations of you... You know you're not insane, that I am real. And yet your fingers are grasping, grasping at my matches-

**BECKER:**

I didn't know the rules- Shut up!

**SEDUM:**

Oh that, right there- right *there* is why I haven't left! The unyielding confidence barreling toward a cliff. Call me base, but I just can't look away when a train crashes... You're not a waste, Brick. But you're not *special*. Here's a tip, from a friend- a leg up: don't swear at your wife. You'll get higher marks.

He launches himself up and clatters on the fire escape.

**BECKER:**

*(Growing distant)*

Come back! You fucker-!

**SCENE 12 - INT. RALEIGH DOAA STATION - NIGHT**

The rippling pulsing again. The last memory.

**J:**

I've skimmed so much already, you should at least see the ending to this season of their lives. How are you feeling?

**SAM:**

I'm... I'm here.

**J:**

Fight against conflating your empathy and his pain. You'll need the strength.

Sedum skitters on tile, running through the space. Cheesy, terrible Christmas music croons out of the sound system into the empty hall.

**NARRATOR:**

A large shadow cut through the quiet hall- echoing, Sedum tore through, all mirages cast aside, his feathers ruffled out of place; young, wiry, in fact *unhealthily* thin, his yellow eyes wild as he searched frantically for something. He clutched his neck, a whimper tracing Sam's esophagus as he felt a trickle of warmth seeping from under his hand, a plastic something under his palm- no. No it wasn't his hand, none of it was his. Sam tried to center himself.

**SAM:**

J, what is this?

**J:**

Their chapter break, I suppose.

A door far away slams shut, and another is after him.

**BECKER:**

*(Distant, a yell)*

I'm under direct orders NOT to kill you, but I can't say I won't enjoy beating the shit outta you before the rest catch up.

**SEDUM:**

I don't know if you've gotten a good look yet, but I'm not a horse, so it might take a wee bit more than this damn *dart-*

He yanks out the dart, and let's it clatter to the floor.

*(Cont.)*

For you to get in a good swing. *(To himself, woozily)* Ahh...  
That's... some blood... eeugh...

**BECKER:**

I came prepared.

He loads in another dart, the gun clicking menacingly. Sedum gets back up, moving forward again.

**SEDUM:**

Roof access... somewhere... Ah, hah-

He bursts through a door, into a stairwell and starts up.

*(Cont.)*

Crashing the Christmas party wasn't my wisest decision... I'm not too proud to admit that... *(Trying to mask his fear)* Nnnngh, I really do hope I don't die tonight...

Below, the same door opens, slams shut again.

**BECKER:**

*(Down below)*

Give up and I swear I'll only make you hurt for a minute. I can be reasonable.

**SEDUM:**

What was it I saw... It was, yeeeah, it was Winnie, your, your wife, you're familiar with her? You've met once or twice- She was out with this girl... And you know what she said, Brick?

**BECKER:**

What, you've gotten bored of me, you're moving on to my wife, now?!

**SEDUM:**

Don't interrupt! What she said... *(Catching his breath)* Was, "He's sleeping at the office". Here, Brick?? You didn't say you let it get *THAT* bad!

Becker growls below, and takes the stairs faster.

**NARRATOR:**

There wasn't much space to maneuver in the tight stairwell, only enough for Sedum to perch himself on the railing and in one pop of his wings, scabble up the side to the next landing. Sam's stomach reeled with him, as he approached the next flight of stairs, hands clutching the railing in a desperate attempt to stay upright.

Becker gasps slightly at the sudden movement as Sedum lands in a heap, panting.

**BECKER:**

I knew it- just a glance- *(Laughs breathlessly)* you're a goddamn sin against nature.

**SEDUM:**

*(Showing wear)*

Keep up, we're almost to the roof..

Becker shoots, and another dart pings off the railing. Sedum hisses.

*(Cont., Actually angry)*

No shooting with my back turned! Do you have no dignity?!

**BECKER:**

I tried to convince Moyes we could get all the information we need out of a cadaver, but lucky for you, she seems to want you alive.. I'd settle for having you stuffed-

Becker runs up a few more stairs.

*(Cont., vicious bark)*

Stop hiding! Let me get a good look at you..

**SEDUM:**

Your persistence.. is flattering, you know.. Just buttering me up, hoping I'll go.. easy on you..

Becker is far closer now.

**NARRATOR:**

A shape darted into his peripheries- Becker claiming the landing. There, Sam saw a ferality in the young man's face, a seething, roiling fever as he stared him down, a shock of ice in Sam's stomach- no, Sedum stomach;

**BECKER:**

*(Seeing him, inhaling)*  
Jesus... This is you?

**NARRATOR:**

Sedum turned slightly- entirely against Sam's wishes- still holding himself up by the railing with frantic strength.

**SEDUM:**

Mmmh... Disappointed? I've never been... too impressed... *(Snickers)*  
We're so similar!

**BECKER:**

What the fuck are you.

He adjusts his gun and shoots. Sedum is hit with another dart, and exclaims, and falls.

**NARRATOR:**

Sedum's knees buckled, and he crumpled on the stairs, a new dart embedded under his ribs.

**SEDUM:**

Brick... I'm asking as a friend- Stop before I overdose... please...?

Becker finishes climbing up after him, and stops.

**BECKER:**

I never understood why we call you Aberrations. I still don't.  
You're just a monster.

**NARRATOR:**

Becker stared at the heap of feathers, obscured by a suit spotted with blood, the four yellow eyes clouded in barbiturates, black beak open in a wavering grimace. The tranq gun spun in his hand and smacked the Bird across the face. Sam covered his own jaw, an explosion of pain erupting over his teeth. Becker leaned with the rifle, one hand resting in his pocket, and loomed over Sedum.

Sedum gasps in pain. Sam hisses out a breath.

**SAM:**

God...!

**BECKER:**

What's your name. If I have to see you breathe.

**SEDUM:**

Phillip, for all you care.

**BECKER:**

No!

Becker gets close, leaning over him.

*(Cont.)*

No, because I *do* care. I need to hear your name, your nicknames, anything anyone has ever called you. You know why? I'll tell you- Because they're *mine* now, alright? Everything you've held close and what makes you YOU is now MINE.

**SEDUM:**

*(Laughing nervously, in pain)*

I think I really broke you.

**BECKER:**

*(Smiling)*

Then it's only fair I get to use your bones as *splints*. Now... ready?

**NARRATOR:**

Becker stood back up, straight. He lifted his foot, set the toe of his shoe against the embedded dart in Sedum's side... and gently pressed- Sedum's breath caught in his throat; Becker pressed down, harder, his face almost serene, coolly watching- Everything stopped in service to the pushing, ripping *pain* digging in, Sedum's limbs too heavy- The pressure tore viciously slow at his skin, burrowing into the tissue, liquid heat spilling out- Sam seized, breath strangled in his throat.

Sedum cries out, choking.

**BECKER:**

*(Lightly, only a hint of effort)*

I told you, I was going to make you hurt... Your name?

**SEDUM:**

Ah, S-s-s-s-STOP, stop!!

Sam, in sync, chokes in pain, stifling it.

**J:**

Let go, Sam.

**BECKER:**

*(Raising his voice)*

Name, please!??

**NARRATOR:**

The toe of his shoe ground down. What would be left to bruise if all the tissue was crushed and torn away, if all the blood continued to push out like a festering hematoma-

**SEDUM:**

*(Panting, under horrendous stress)*

It's Sedum, it's Sedum, I'm Sedum...

**NARRATOR:**

Becker's leg froze, then relaxed. Dark red bloomed over the white of Sedum's shirt, flesh and fabric now raw rags. Becker wiped the slick sole of his shoe along the row of buttons.

**BECKER:**

I just want you to know... that your life from here on out? Alllll depends on me. You tracking with me, Sedum? I'll simplify it-  
You know the concept of penance, right?

A door, several flights below, opens and shuts.

**JORDANA:**

*(Below)*

Becker, where are you?!

**SEDUM:**

*(Barely conscious)*

Remorse?

**BECKER:**

No. *Penance* is when you hurt yourself, over and over, for what you did to *me*. Were you paying attention, just now? Cause that's all you from here on out. Unless you fuck up, of course. I'm sure I can arrange for a refresher course. Though you'll have to wait your turn. We have a pretty classy team of sawbones who are... *(Whistles, low)* *itching* to get their hands on you. You get to stay in center stage for just a while more.

The world is fading out, from the drugs.

**SEDUM:**

*(Slipping)*

But how can *you*... can *you* manage without the attention...?

**JORDANA:**

*(Watery, becoming worse)*

Oh my God... *Look* at that thing... God Almighty...

**NICHOLAS:**

(*Very far away*)  
Brick, are you alright...

The rushing pulse pulls them out.

**SCENE 13 - MEMORY LANE**

The rushing is flitting with whispers and bursts of moments, life.

**SAM:**

Augh, Everything's so fast- my head..

**J:**

Come along, you're almost out.

**AL VO:**

Get *BACK!*

**SAM:**

That-that was Al!

**NARRATOR:**

Samson's attention swiveled into the cacophony.

**J:**

Sam, stay with-

Sam gasps and is pulled in-

**NARRATOR:**

He felt an odd sensation, caught halfway between two states of being, as though he was submerged, struggling to keep his mouth above the waves.

The sounds become muffled, as though underwater. Quiet, then-

**SCENE 14 - EXT. FOREST - NIGHT**

It is a heavy downpour all around.

**SAM:**

It's 2011. 7 years ago- It's... I'm in Harbor...

A shriek sounds from behind.

**AL:**

Mia, just stop! Stop, please-

**MIA:**

*(Pained)*

She's-she's lost because of you... They TOOK HER. You let them take her, Al-

**AL:**

*(Hiss)*

Get *BACK*-

**MIA:**

You *KILLED* her!

Thunder rolls- Someone is running up behind, fast.

Rushing back-

#### **SCENE 15 - MEMORY LANE**

**J:**

*(Distant)*

Sam let go, you have to let go- I can't extract you-

Back under water- a sudden CRACK of thunder-

#### **SCENE 16 - EXT FOREST - NIGHT**

**AL:**

*(Through a broken nose)*

Ah, ugh, fuck-

**MIA:**

*(Panting, groaning in pain)*

You got something, didn't you? Those monsters bought you out!!  
For a *child*?! For my *sister*?! You disgusting-

**AL:**

No, no, no, I didn't *do* anything to her!

Mia laughs in a breathless, pained groan, she's heard this before.

**MIA:**

You're pathetic, I *have* you- Own it!-

**AL:**

-It hurts, I know but we'll find her; She's not gone.-

**NARRATOR:**

Sam felt a wet thickness seeping down over his lips- her lips, tasting rust- her nose pulsing with pain, airway blocked; raw edges of flesh stinging in the rain- Her hand seared as well, throbbing- Al bled over her mouth as she glanced wildly for something- there. Her crossbow not three feet behind in the dark, pointed back at Mia heaving, one hand over her face as she sobbed, flashes of lightning illuminating the streaks of red up her arm, holding a glistening rock, the distinctly unnatural shape of a bolt protruding from her thigh-

**MIA:**

Liar... LIAR! You're sick- playing like this.

**AL:**

We-we can go to a hospital... Let's go to the hospital. Mia. I won't tell. I won't. Let's forget this.

Mia moves forward a step.

**MIA:**

*(Panting, a laugh)*

Only when you're dead, Greer.

Mia is running at her.

**AL:**

Mia *please*-!

**NARRATOR:**

She plowed into Al, knocking the breath from her lungs- Al twisted onto her stomach, scrounging for her crossbow- Nails tore at her shirt and skin-

**MIA:**

STAY STILL-

**NARRATOR:**

Al's hands found the handle of the crossbow, she craned her spine around- Mia straddled her skewed back. The sea surged in her ears as she saw the sharp stone raised high- Al's finger on the trigger- the stirrup and barrel shoved into Mia's abdomen, slipping in the rain- The rock came down. The crossbow slid up, underneath Mia's jaw.

Click.

**SCENE 17 - MEMORY LANE**

**J:**

*(Gentler but more intense)*

Let her go Samson.

Rushing back- Water, water-

**SCENE 18 - INT. APARTMENT - NIGHT**

Silence. It's quiet, a diffusion, a held breath. Suddenly, close.

**AL:**

*(Swallows, hushed, worn)*

I'm a murderer.

**SEDUM:**

You aren't. Look at me, look at me, Spirit, you're not a murderer. You were defending yourself-

**AL:**

*(Thickly, numb, there is nothing of the normal Al here)*  
She wouldn't stop. She kept hurting me- I hurt-

**NARRATOR:**

Sam felt himself pulled tight against another body as he sat in the haze of soft light, his own limp and numb- but it wasn't his. It was her's, it was Al. A clawed hand clutched her head, another strained against her back as though she'd seep through the fingers unless they held her together. She felt nothing... except... a distant howl, a roar kept out of sight.

**SEDUM:**

*(Whispering, soothing)*

It's ok, it's ok, you're safe, you're here. Al, Alelia, there's no more pain... I'll keep you safe... I'll keep you safe...

**NARRATOR:**

Al's shoulders trembled- Then began to shake.

**SAM:**

*(Feeling sick, soft)*

I wanna go.

**J:**

*(Bursting through)*

Finally!

The water overtakes, rushing out.

**SCENE 19 - EXT. SAM'S ROOM/LEAH'S CONDO - NIGHT**

The night is quiet again, wavering back into existence.

**J:**

*(Coming back)*

Sam... ? Sam, can you hear me?

Sam groans.

**NARRATOR:**

Sam's eyes flickered behind his lids- they flew open, feral, and saw, for the first time, the creature holding him. Something between Human and Not, silver thread dripping over his antlers, gleaming black eyes wide in shock, with white pupils like pinpricks, a long snout-ish sort of face- A Deer, a Human, a Cryptid- whatever he was, he was bipedal, gray as a winter storm, clothed in his own shaggy fur, taller than the roof Sam sat on.

J yelps, Sam gasps.

*(Cont.)*

The hand slipped out from under Sam's head and he fell back, hitting the roof hard.

Sam smacks the roof and reacts.

**J:**

Oh! No! Are you hurt?

**SAM:**

*(Freaking out)*

Oh my God... Oh my God- *(He dissolves into tears, a mixture of adrenaline, mourning, and revulsion)*

**J:**

Oh your delicate skull-

**SAM:**

I'm DONE- I'm DONE, I don't wanna see anymore!! Stop... Stop it...

**NARRATOR:**

J's light caught the foliage again. Sam dug his fists into his eyes, overheated in the muggy night air, the tears spilling. Soft pats of cold rain dribbled over him.

**J:**

... How is your head?

Sam is a complete wreck. (*He is entirely void of energy til the end, sleep walking when he isn't berating himself.*)

(*Cont. Sighs*)

... You have such depth... Poor soul.

**SAM:**

(*Whispered*)

I'm dirt. I'm filth.

**J:**

Are you in pain?

**SAM:**

I asked to see that... all of that! That wasn't mine to see. That- All of them- was all... *brutal* and personal and- Oh, God, *Al*... And, *you*? I- even you- I've fucked this all up- I'm sick.

**J:**

The Bird agreed to share those memories with me. Beyond that choice, he cannot dictate where that story goes- As for *Al*'s memories... that was accidental. The tie between you is tremendous. Do not condemn yourself. ... And it was my fault you saw me.

**SAM:**

(*Quietly*)

... I'm disgusting...

**J:**

It was a mistake, Sam. Just a mistake.

**SAM:**

(*Calming down*)

I shouldn't have drug you into this... I'm sorry.

**J:**

Samson... *I am deeply sorry if you regret this... But it was what you needed to know. (A moment) You should be getting inside- soon enough those atrociously... unique Window Lickers will be about. Before I leave you, I have a request. I know it's much to ask, but as my friend, perhaps you'll assist me, now... ?*

**SAM:**

What is it?

**J:**

If you could keep this night private. As you have seen... Even the most dignified Cryptids have been... unstable, to phrase it delicately. I prefer not to agitate them.

**SAM:**

... I understand. I won't say.

**J:**

Thank you. I am sorry.

**SAM:**

*(Smiling)*

It's ok... J? You shouldn't be afraid to show people your face. You're stunning.

**J:**

*(A little strained)*

Good night, Sam.

**END**