We're Not Our Skin Of Grime

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We're Not Our Skin Of Grime

by versaphile

Summary

For a moment, for one blissful moment, David thinks he's freed himself from his disease. The truth is hard to take, but he doesn't have to deal with it alone.

Missing scene for episode s01e07 "Chapter Seven."

Notes

The title comes from Alan Ginsberg's Sunflower Sutra, which is the sunflower poem that Oliver recites in the episode. www.boppin.com/sunflower.html

He's free.

It's the first thought in his head from the moment he opens his eyes, from the moment the fantasy of Clockworks fades away and he reclaims his body.

It all comes back to him at once: Lenny using him to bring Amy to his old bedroom; Syd and the others finding them; Syd shielding him, holding him tight, desperate to save him from the bullets
streaking towards them.

He can't let her die for him, but he's not going to die either. He's never felt so alive.

It's so easy now: so, so easy to turn and reach out his hand and make the bullets fall feather-soft into his palm. They're no threat to him, just an arrangement of matter and energy that bends to his will. Like Lenny showed him.

Lenny.

The parasite is gone. He doesn't know how but it's gone, and for the first time in his wretched life he's in full control of his own mind and body. Of his powers. His powers.

He was sick but he's not sick anymore.

"David." Syd gasps his name and he brings his hand around, shows her the bullets. They're used up, finished. They can't hurt anyone anymore. Lenny won't hurt anyone anymore either. Did he destroy her when he broke free of her prison? Was it that easy all along?

Syd hasn't let him go yet, and it feels so good to hold her, to feel how alive they both are. They both want to kiss each other so badly that she has to put a gloved hand over his mouth, hush him and shake her head.

He doesn't care. He would be happy to spend the rest of his life just staring into her eyes. Then Amy's scream turns his head.

He looks around, takes in the room, the house. His senses feel limitless, so much bigger than the boundaries of his body. He sees Walter's mangled, folded corpse on the floor, but also Rudy's body downstairs, already cooling. Their victory didn't come without a cost.

There's something on his head. It's metal, electric, buzzing softly. What?

It doesn't matter. He's ready to get out of here, to leave this room and every bad thing in it behind. He raises his arms, letting his power course through him clean and pure and incredibly strong. He'd had a taste of it when Lenny had shared and then taken over his body, but now he's alone in his head.

Now he can do anything.

He reaches through the fabric of the world and it's just matter and energy bending to his will. He pulls all of them along with him, even Rudy, and then they're back in the forest, back beside the glass memory room. The air is sweet with oxygen, rich with the smell of wet soil, of the living, breathing world.

He hadn't realized how noisy his head truly was and now all the noise has stopped. The breeze rustling the leaves in the trees, the twittering of birdsong: they're incredibly clear and sharp, unfiltered. The calm of it sends him reeling, but he's not upset. There's no shouting in his head, no undercurrent of fear, no overwhelming anxiety edging him towards panic.

The thing on his head hums. It's warm against his scalp.

Ptonomy is kneeling over Rudy's body, head bowed. Cary and Kerry are laying a stretcher down beside him. He remembers being knocked out after his first memory walk; they must keep a stretcher in the glass room for their patients.

Their patient. Is that still all he is to them? Or are they going to use him now that he's whole?
He can hear their thoughts leaking out of them, but it's not a mental assault he has to brace himself against. He can observe them without being carried along, and so he listens as they come at him in waves: their shock at being transported, their grief over Rudy, their relief at escaping the hospital fantasy and Lenny's torments.

Melanie's thoughts are a held-breath chant of alive alive alive please be alive. Kerry and Cary think only of each other, but she's pushing him away. Ptonomy blames David for Rudy's death and thinks they never should have rescued him from Division 3.

His grief is the worst. David hadn't realized how close they were. But then he barely knows them at all.

Amy is sorry. She's so, so sorry for lying to him his whole life. For letting Lenny use her to torture him. She's afraid of him and she always has been. But she loves him, too.

"David." Syd's voice tugs him back. "Come on, let's get inside."

They walk two-by-two along the forest path, he and Syd leading. As they cross the bridge, the main building comes into view, but it's still a distance. The glass room had to be isolated, safely away from all that power and psychic noise. Maybe that's why it was the part of Summerland that he instinctively reached for.

Ptonomy and Cary pull ahead with Rudy's body. Ptonomy thinks that if David could teleport them hundreds of miles, he shouldn't have made them drag Rudy through the woods.

*You didn't ask*, David thinks, but only to himself.

They put Rudy down to rest their arms.

"You okay?" David asks Syd. She hasn't said much, hasn't even thought much that he could hear.

She nods. "You?"

He lets out a breath. "It's gone," he says, and admitting it aloud is... It's a lot. Lenny, the parasite, it's gone for good. He's suddenly aware that he's been in a sort of shock on the whole walk back. The thing on his head is getting warmer and he reaches up to take it off.

"No!" Cary calls, rushing over. "No! It's not gone."

David freezes, hands to either side of the metal band. Not gone?

"We've isolated it in your mind," Cary explains. "The monster with the device."

Oh. Oh no. "So leave it on?"

"Yes, please."

He's still their patient, then. Still trapped. It hurts more now that he's had a taste of freedom, however small.

"You okay?" he asks Amy, finally. He should have asked sooner.

"Yeah."

She's lying. She probably knows that he knows she's lying, but it doesn't matter. They've all endured so much. She's still his sister, despite everything, and he'll try his best to help her.
"David," Cary says, his concern growing. "We should-- I really think we should go to my lab. Tell him, Melanie."

But Melanie has already gone, run off to the main building, only one thing on her mind. Let her go. The last thing David wants is to go back to Cary's lab, to surrender himself as a lab rat yet again. But Cary is looking at the band like it might give out at any moment, and there's a hard knot of dread forming in David's stomach.

"It's not gone," he says to Cary, but it's really to himself. That thing is still inside him. His whole body is tensing up, readying for another fight.

"But you can get it out of him, right?" Syd asks, demands of Cary.

"Well, ah, probably," Cary stammers, and a dozen ideas are spilling out of him, a jumble of neurochemistry and technology that David can't even begin to understand. "Definitely."

They follow after Melanie, but Kerry and Ptonomy peel off to take Rudy's body somewhere private. David takes a deep breath as they descend into Cary's lab. He wishes he could hold Syd's hand right now. Sometimes it's really hard to not be able to hold her hand.

They go to their usual places, and David feels resigned to the familiarity of it all. Cary leans over him with some kind of device and starts prodding at the band.

"It's getting really warm," David mentions, hoping they can do something about that so he doesn't end up with it melted into his skull.

"We can't risk turning off the halo." Cary flashes a bright green light in his eyes. "But this should help stabilize the energy flow, keep Farouk contained."

"Farouk?"

"Amahl Farouk. The Shadow King. The, ah, the parasite in your head."

The light shines in his eyes again and David winces. The frantic noise of Cary's thoughts as he strains to find a solution; Amy's nervous anxiety buzzing in the background; the heat of the halo and the way the green light makes his scalp itch. The Summerland residents and the sheer noise of them, 40-something people cramming their thoughts into his head. It had been so overwhelming the first day he came here that he nearly passed out. It's too much again now, all of it.

He really wishes he could hold Syd's hand. He clenches his fists instead, tries to focus, to turn all the other noises down. That brief moment of clarity already feels so far away. Maybe it only seemed like clarity when it was nothing more than shock.

He hadn't freed himself after all.

He's still sick. No, not sick, infected. There's an actual living being inside him and it's been torturing him his whole life. He figured that out with his Rational Self but it's only really hitting him now what that means.

It's not just a thing, it's a person. A person with a name, Amahl Farouk, is living inside of him.

He always knew Lenny wasn't real, the Lenny in his head that first appeared to him in Amy's basement after he killed the real one. He knew the devil with the yellow eyes wasn't real. He knew the angriest boy in the world wasn't real. Everyone told him those things weren't real. He was just
sick, it was just his diseased brain making him see things, hear things. It was just his broken mind talking to itself. They were all just symptoms.

Everyone was wrong.

*Amahl Farouk has been eating him alive.*

He wants it out of him now. He wants it out, oh god *he wants it out.*

"*David. David, it's okay, I'm right here.*"

Syd's projected thought cuts through the noise, and he clings to it, pulls himself back with it. When he opens his eyes, he realizes he's floating a few inches above the exam chair; that he's having a panic attack and half the lab is rattling; that Cary and Amy have retreated to the other side of the lab, behind the glass window; that Syd is standing as close to him as she dares.

He lands back on the chair and breathes, breathes. "Sorry," he manages, trying to shove his panic back down, to make the room stop rattling. He needs to be calm or he's going to break everything the way he always breaks everything.

"*I'm being eaten alive from the inside! How am I supposed to be calm?!*"

All of them flinch, and he realizes that he accidentally shouted his thoughts into their heads, possibly into the heads of everyone in a mile radius. Summerland's chattering minds go suddenly quiet, then flare up with anxiety. He forces himself to tune them out.

"Sorry," he says again, gripping the arms of the chair.

Cary is thinking about sedation and worries that David is going to destroy his lab again. Amy is terrified, guilty, terrified again; she's never been any good with bad situations, with his pain.

But Syd: Syd is calm. She's not afraid. He turns to face her and finally the lab equipment comes to rest.

He doesn't know what to say to her. She's seen him at his worst and she still loves him, and he can't ask for more than that.

"*I wish I could hold your hand,*" he thinks to her anyway.

She looks as frustrated as he feels, then walks out of the room. David stares after her, too stunned by her exit to process it, but before he can figure out if he should be upset she's on the other side of the glass.

"Give me your tie," she tells Cary.

"What?"

"Your tie." She holds out her hand.

"Uh, okay." Cary unknots it and hands it over.

Syd walks back to David and wraps one end of the tie around her hand, then dangles the other end out for him. David can't help but smile as he takes the fabric and wraps it around his own hand. She pulls until the tie is taut between them.

He loves her so much.
"We're ready now," she tells Cary.

Cary clears his throat. "Well," he says, looking down at some piece of equipment. He seems to brace himself, then looks at David directly. "Let's finish stabilizing that halo."

David slumps back in the chair, emotionally exhausted. The halo is getting uncomfortably hot. He sits still and endures, staying focused on Syd and their taut connection while Cary leans over him and works.

"The halo isolates the parasite, paralyzes it," Cary explains, distractedly. "It will stop Farouk from, ah, eating you alive."

David swallows. "That's good."

Long minutes pass, and then: "I think I've just about..." There's a click and a whine and then the hot metal around his head suddenly cools. "There we go." Cary steps back, satisfied.

David sits up, carefully touches the halo with his free hand. "It's stable?"

"Mostly. Just try and keep your head still. And don't overload it."

"Okay," David says, gripping the tie.

"How long will it hold?" Syd asks.

"Long enough, I hope," Cary says. "A day if we're lucky."

"And you can get it out of him in a day?" Syd presses.

David sees the ideas forming in Cary's mind; they're less jumbled than before, coalescing into something coherent, but he still doesn't actually understand any of it.

"I believe I can," Cary assures her, but he's not as confident as he wants to appear. Oliver was always better with this sort of thing, Cary thinks, the worry behind the thought making it loud.

"It's a good thing I'm here, then."

They all turn, and there's Oliver, standing casually in the doorway.

Cary gapes. "Oliver? Is that really you?" He rushes over to him, then pauses before hugging him. "My god, it's good to see you."

Oliver pats Cary on the arm, and it's clear that he doesn't actually remember whatever history he and Cary share. David doesn't know what happened to Oliver after he left him behind in his ice cube, but his miraculous resurrection hasn't restored his drifting mind.

"David," Oliver says. He walks over and there's genuine recognition in his eyes. "My boy. How is your unquiet mind?"

"Could be better," David admits. "I know about the monster now, thanks to this." He points at the halo.

David didn't save himself. Cary saved him with his halo, Syd saved him with her love. They all came to his rescue, walked willingly into Farouk's trap, put their lives on the line for him.

Maybe he's more to them than just another patient.
"Yes, Farouk," Oliver says, squinting thoughtfully at him. "That troublesome tick has burrowed deep into your mind. It's not going to be easy to pull him out."

Cary raises a finger. "I do have a few ideas. A sort of psychic vacuum, in combination with--"

Oliver waves his hand. "All in good time. We can't do science on an empty stomach, and I don't think I've eaten in a couple of decades. David, what do you think about eggs?"

David looks to Syd, but she's as bewildered by all this as he is. "Um, I like them?"

Oliver claps his hands and rubs them together. "Delightful! Eggs for everyone. Come along!"

He heads back upstairs, and after a pause Cary follows him. David stands to follow Syd, but as they reach the hallway Amy stops him.

"David, could we, uh..." Amy looks at the tie, at the tight grip both he and Syd are keeping on it. "We just need a minute," Amy says to Syd.

"Sure," Syd says. Her voice is casual but she gives the tie one last pull before unwinding it from her hand and letting go. "I'll wait for you."

She doesn't go far, just up one floor and then she waits beside the elevator. He brushes her mind in thanks before turning his attention to Amy.

"Isn't she..." Amy begins, her brow furrowed.

He'd know what she's thinking even if he couldn't read her mind. "From the hospital, yeah." He grips the free end of the tie and pulls, and with her closeby he can almost pretend she's still holding his hand.

He thinks of another time the two of them talked about his girlfriend. Sitting in his living room, trying to pretend that he was normal, that he could have normal things, all while Farouk was busy dripping poison into his mind, happily watching his host suffer while he gorged himself.

David and Syd were together for a year in Clockworks, and every time Amy visited him during that last year, Syd was all he wanted to talk about. How amazing she was, how beautiful and smart, and how it didn't matter that they couldn't hold each other or kiss or sit too close. He'd finally found some small measure of happiness for himself, a tiny diamond in a garbage dump.

Farouk used that happiness against him in the false Clockworks. He twisted it up with a convenient story and tricked him into embracing his life as a prisoner, as a victim. Farouk made him give up and he used his love for Syd to do it. That might be what hurts the most out of all of this.

"I treated both of you so badly in that place," Amy says.

"It wasn't your fault," David protests. He doesn't blame her for any of it. "We were just puppets in there. None of it was real."

"It felt real. It felt--" She looks down in shame.

He can hear her thoughts: they're a jumble of emotions, of childhood upset and adult frustration, of her exhaustion from the burden of his suffering. It's nothing he hasn't heard a thousand times before, but now he knows they're not just his diseased mind torturing him. They're really what she thinks.

What's new is her relief: Relief that her brother isn't actually crazy, relief that he has someone else he
can depend on, relief that maybe at last she can be free of all of this madness. She wants them both to be happy, but she's so tired.

"She's good for you," Amy says, mustering a smile. "Sydney. I'm really glad."

"She is," David says; it's not hard to smile back when he thinks about Syd. "She gets me."

"Maybe the two of you will have a family someday," Amy says, hopeful.

David doesn't know what to say to that. He and Syd will never be able to hold hands. He's not even sure he'll survive to see another sunrise. He's never been able to imagine himself in any kind of traditional life, but that's the only kind of life that Amy can imagine for him.

They're such different people. She's supported him his whole life. She visited him at least once a month in Clockworks for six long years, but now... Now he doesn't know what they are to each other, if they fit at all into each other's lives.

He pulls her into a hug anyway, grateful that he can hold her. That they both survived.

They meet Syd outside the elevator, and he offers her the other end of the tie. She wraps it back around her hand, and for a moment he flashes back to Clockworks: walking down the hall with her, tied together and wrapped in their shared happiness. In the past and in the present, he tugs his end and she tugs back, and they both smile.

Oliver is waiting for them in the dining hall, and he's already serving his eggs. They smell delicious.

"How do you feel about beat poetry?" Oliver asks, as he fills their plates. "Deliver my sermon to my soul. And Jack's soul, too. And anyone who'll listen."

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