

"THE IMPENDING SHADES"  
*The Sheridan Tapes - Season 01, Episode 02*  
Draft 02 - April 8 2020

Written by

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Based on story and characters from  
"Homestead on the Corner"  
By Trevor Van Winkle

INT. OSLOW COUNTY PD - DETECTIVE'S OFFICE - DAY

BEEP. A small, quiet office, with only the sound of the A/C fan and the hum of conversation through the door.

SAM BAILEY

Detective Samuel Bailey, Oslow  
County Police Department --  
Homicide Division. Recording on  
April Third, 2019 at 3:31 pm.

(beat)

I didn't digitize a tape yesterday.  
Well, I did, but it was barely  
worth it. As far as I could tell,  
it was just Sheridan recording some  
kind of... Free-association poetry.  
If you could even call it poetry.  
Not that I'd know.

(beat)

Still, nothing relevant to the  
case. I tuned it out after a few  
minutes, did some digging instead.  
Sheridan mentioned wanting to write  
a western on the first tape, so I  
looked up her bibliography, and it  
turns out she did write a western --  
just not a very good one. *Falling  
West*. Reviewers absolutely grilled  
it: said it was a nonsensical rip  
off of *The Dark Tower*, whatever  
that means. Seems to have a lot of  
fans though -- weird ones too. A  
lot of the fan art I found was just  
paintings of a night sky full of  
stars, curving into a smile.

(beat)

It was published in November of  
2012, so that places tape... What  
was it again?

Sam picks a cassette up off his desk.

SAM BAILEY (CONT'D)

Tape 1-6-87-8-4 sometime between  
late 2009 and November 2012. Hmm.  
Not exactly helpful. At least I  
know Sheridan's interest in space  
began at least six years before she  
disappeared. Still need to talk to  
Doctor Park. His assistant didn't  
seem to notice when I said I was  
police -- she just said "Doctor  
Park isn't taking any calls at the  
moment" and hung up.

(MORE)

SAM BAILEY (CONT'D)

I thought pulling out the bad cop routine, but since I really just had a hunch and my job here is kind of... Shaky at the moment, I figured I shouldn't throw my weight around. At least not until I have more to go on.

Sam pulls out another tape.

SAM BAILEY (CONT'D)

(sarcastic, bitter)

Let's see what's behind door number 1-4-10-2-23... Actual answers? Or more inane ramblings from the late great Anna Sheridan?

CLICK. The tape begins.

ANNA SHERIDAN

(recounting the story for the recorder)

One of the most disappointing things about living in America is the lack of genuinely haunted houses. Oh, there are plenty that claim to be haunted -- especially if you drop your nickel in the hat. Some of them are pretty effective, if you're more than a little credulous. But out of all the supposed haunts I've visited, *maybe* one in ten seems like the real deal. The apparitions are almost always harmless, and if they do have an honest to god poltergeist, it's usually pretty benign: all show and no real threat.

(beat)

It's fairly obvious why: haunted houses have to make money. If your average "ghost tourists" saw half the things I've seen... Well, let's just say a middle aged man-child running out panicked and tearing at his eyes would hardly be a marketable image.

(beat, reconsiders)

Well, it might get me there, but I'm hardly the mass market, am I?

(beat, back on track)

(MORE)

ANNA SHERIDAN (CONT'D)

All that to say, there is at least one "commercial" haunted house that's worth the price of admission -- but only if you can book a tour on a stormy night with a full moon overhead. I don't know if it's actually haunted -- they wouldn't let me bring my equipment in -- but if not, then it was sure as hell convincing. It was late autumn, 2005. The beginning of the housing crisis. Since I was living out of my van and touring for *Anathema*, it didn't affect me too much... Except that I did end up having to pay off my parent's mortgage, so any plans I had to travel abroad went up in smoke. I wasn't too broken up about it, though. The states still had some hot spots I hadn't visited yet, so I spent the better part of the year exploring them. Nothing quite compared to The Mirror House, though.

(beat)

One small silver lining to the recession -- at least, for me -- was the number of new haunted houses that started to appear online. Like I said, most of them were fakes -- but one or two were the real McCoy: places too disturbing to normally be open to the public. But now, they were too expensive to keep off the market without the help of paying customers.

(beat)

I kept an eye on the usual subreddits and forums. There was usually at least one new post every day. I had satellite internet in my van back then -- one of the few things I actually spent any money on in that rattling old death-trap -- and it was glacially slow. Remember, this was 2005. Thankfully, most websites were still built for dial up back then, which was only marginally faster than my connection. I'd usually read through everything of note on the page before the pictures finished loading.

(MORE)

ANNA SHERIDAN (CONT'D)

(beat)

I quickly eliminating any that posted photographs of their supposed "phenomena." As soon as I saw a blurry apparition or some kind of impossible geometry, I moved on to the next. There's a reason I record with audio rather than video -- most digital cameras break if you point them at a real ghost. Computers have never been very good at reconciling paradoxes. But if the page just featured an artful picture of the house, I added it to my list -- especially if it was taken on a moonlit night, or if it looked anything like the house from *Clue*. What can I say? I have a soft spot for Gothic architecture. Sue me.

(beat)

I thought the House of Mirrors was going to end up pretty low on my list. The post said it was in California, which at that point I still associated with palm trees and eternal sunshine -- the haunt of failed writers and literary agents, not ghosts. But the photos were nice and simple, and the descriptions on the website were fairly subdued. I've also found the more showy the text, the less impressive the actual phenomena. Guess that's showbiz.

(beat)

This one was almost lethargic in its descriptions though, as if the owners were afraid to be too enticing. I don't even remember if they mentioned who or what was supposed to be haunting the place. Besides, it was hardly my idea of a haunted house. The pictures showed a single story ranch-style house with a long, wraparound porch, a short, gravel driveway, and a two car garage with one door falling slightly off its track. It wasn't in the middle of a dark and desolate forest either, but on a small plot of open land covered with tall, green grass.

(MORE)

## ANNA SHERIDAN (CONT'D)

The only trees were a long way off, ringing the property to form a natural fence. It was never part of a carnival or circus, despite what I first thought. The designer of the house, Ezra Zilberschlag, was a silversmith who emigrated from Germany in 1939, a few months after his shop was destroyed during *Kristallnacht*. He found quite a lot of success as a mirror-maker in addition to his normal jewelry work, and after a few years he was able to build himself a small county house.

(beat)

All in all, it didn't look like the kind of place I would expect supernatural phenomena to occur. But there were two things that drew me towards it. The house had two large planter windows, one to either side of the front door. From where the pictures were taken, something about the angle and the lighting made them look like huge, gaping eye sockets. The other thing was the main attraction of the house -- Zilberschlag's personal touch, so to speak. In every room, at least one wall was completely covered with an enormous, floor to ceiling mirror.

(beat)

Most of the rooms just had one. That was normal enough, I suppose: a lot of people do that to make the house seem bigger. Others had two on the walls facing each other, mirroring each other into infinity. I'd seen that plenty of times too, in restrooms with opposing sinks. It always creeped me out a little, but not the point of being genuinely unnerving. But the further you went into the house, the website said, the more mirrors covered the walls. Four mirrored walls sounded disorienting enough: I imagined it would take a while to find your way out. But others had mirrored ceilings and floors...

(MORE)

ANNA SHERIDAN (CONT'D)  
 rooms you could only enter if you were wearing soft-soled shoes or socks. And finally, in the very center of the house was a small, octagonal room. I didn't know what it was originally supposed to be, but every face of it -- including the hinged wall that served as a door -- was perfectly mirrored.

(beat)

When I read about that room, I immediately called to book my tour. A phrase echoed in my mind as I spoke to a sweet old lady from the Mirror House: *Ad Infinitum*. She asked me when I'd like my tour. I didn't hesitate -- I told her "tonight." I knew I wouldn't be able to get those words out of my head until I was standing alone in that inner sanctum.

Anna falls silent for a moment.

ANNA SHERIDAN (CONT'D)  
 (as if waking up from a momentary nap)  
 I arrived at the house around midnight. I'd driven all the way from Washington, making only a couple of stops for bathroom breaks and cups of absolutely vile gas station coffee -- which unfortunately necessitated more pit stops the closer I got. It was raining on I-5, and though there weren't that many cars, their lights seemed to form endless steaks of red and white that reflected down into forever.

(beat)

Like I said, despite feeling like I had to rush, I got there two hours before my tour time. The porch lights were on, but as far as I could tell there was no one around. An old grey sedan sat in the driveway, so I figured someone must be inside -- probably another tourist. It annoyed me that I'd have to wait, but it was probably for the best: I was simultaneously exhausted from the drive and absolutely wired from the coffee.

(MORE)

## ANNA SHERIDAN (CONT'D)

I parked on the soft shoulder opposite the house, cut the engine and turned off the headlights. My eyelids started feeling heavy as soon as it was dark, so I leaned back to try and get some rest. One good thing about my old Sienna was that the captain's chairs were actually pretty comfortable -- or really comfortable, if you were as tired as I was.

(beat)

I don't know how long I was actually asleep for, but I do know that it only felt like a minute before I was woken up by the front door of the Mirror House slamming against the wall. I sat up quickly and rubbed my eyes, trying to see who it was. I couldn't make out much in the rain -- whoever they were, they wore a long yellow coat with the hood up and thigh-high rubber rain boots. I almost laughed when I realized they were dressed like a seven year about to go puddle jumping, but then I saw how they were walking: moving quickly and taking nervous looks back over their shoulder every few seconds. They fumbled for their keys and opened the driver's side door of the car in the driveway, sliding inside without removing their wet coat.

(beat)

Something was clearly wrong, but before I could even guess what it was, that little car roared out of the driveway at a hundred miles an hour, skidding a little in the rain. I was worried they might hit my van in the dark, but thankfully they just managed to miss it. I tried to catch their license plate just in case, but my vision was still a little blurry from sleep, and I'd just been flashed with their headlights. All I could make out was their bright blue disabled sticker.

(beat)

(MORE)



## ANNA SHERIDAN (CONT'D)

After a moment, I looked back at the house and jumped in my seat, accidentally banging my head on the roof. Standing at the door, in what looked like a tartan bathrobe, was an old man. He was tall, thin, and entirely bald on the top of his head. That seemed to be the only place he was bald: the rest of his face was hidden behind a wiry beard, which went around his head in a thick crown of white hair that stopped just above his temples. His arms, legs, and chest were likewise covered in thick white hair in the places his robe didn't cover. And he was staring straight at me.

(beat)

Like I said, my car was completely dark. Maybe he saw it when the sedan hit me with its lights, but even so -- he seemed to be staring right into my eyes, despite the fact that there was no way he could see them.

(beat)

I checked my watch. 2 AM -- give or take a few minutes. Strange as this all was, I'd driven more than 8 hours and drunk enough bad coffee to give an elephant heart palpitations. I was sure as hell going to get my money's worth.

(beat)

I walked straight up to him. There were a few moments when I had to take my eyes off him as I got out of the van, but I'm sure he never took his eyes off me. He had this odd little smile on his face when I walked up. I'd almost call it the customer service smile -- you know, the one that says "thank you for shopping with us, please die now." Except that kind of smile doesn't normally show that many teeth.

(beat)

He didn't say anything to me as I reached the porch, and it was pretty clear he wouldn't, so I asked him if he was the owner.

(MORE)

## ANNA SHERIDAN (CONT'D)

There was a sharp, bright sound from the back of his throat that sounded like a chuckle, and he said no -- he just worked there. His voice was higher than I expected, and he clipped his words sharply despite his long, British vowels. I don't know why it made me nervous -- he sounded nothing if not polite and friendly. Everything about him felt just a quarter turn off normal, but maybe that was just the fact that it was 2 in the morning and my brain was running mostly on caffeine.

(beat)

I asked if he had a reservation for Anna Sheridan. He replied that he did -- though he phrased it kind of strangely. Something like "Your place is waiting for you," though I might have just misheard him. He smiled wider as he said it, further exposing his teeth. It may have been a trick of the light, but his teeth seemed *longer* than they should have been. Not sharper or anything, I don't think he was a werewolf: there was a full moon out that night, and even a mild case of lycanthropy would have been much more noticeable. It just seemed like... where there should have been gums, there was just more teeth.

(beat)

My heart was hammering in my chest, though that might just have been the coffee. It had only been a minute, but I was already done with talking to this strange man in his bathrobe. I asked if I could start the tour. "Of course," he said: "Welcome to the Mirror House." He stood to the side and gestured theatrically to the open door, and I hurried through. All I wanted to do at that point was get away from him, and I didn't care if it was back to my car or further into the house. The house was closer.

(beat)

The entryway was dimly lit.

(MORE)

ANNA SHERIDAN (CONT'D)

I glanced up at the faux crystal chandelier above the door, seeing the bulbs flickering slightly. I figured the owners just under-powered their lightbulbs, like so many other haunted houses I'd visited. The old man shuffled in behind me and closed the door, then ducked into a small room off the main hall that was brightly illuminated by a couple of floor lamps. It almost looked like a closet, though I could see that it too was covered with mirrors -- a hundred tiny, individual mirrors held in ornate frames. Hand mirrors and vanities of every shape and size lined the closet with barely an inch of space between them. Looking back on it now, I'm not sure if I actually saw the old man reflected in any of them... Or if they just reflected one another over and over, *ad Infin...*

She stops, collects her thoughts, and resumes.

ANNA SHERIDAN (CONT'D)

Then he shut the door, hiding them from my view and leaving me alone in the hall. My "tour" was self-guided, so it was really just me wandering through the house on my own. The rooms were darker than I'd expected. All the lights seemed to be running at less than half their recommended voltage, and there were fewer and fewer of them the further I went into the house. That wouldn't normally have been a problem, but combined with the mirrors and my groggy, caffeinated state, it put me more on edge than I liked. It was hard to tell where the rooms stopped and the reflections began -- both were just as dark, and my own reflection seemed to emerge out of the shadows in startling, surprising ways. I scared myself more than once when I moved too suddenly and saw my own face appear out of the darkness.

(beat)

(MORE)

## ANNA SHERIDAN (CONT'D)

It only got worse as the number of mirrored walls increased: in the rooms with two, my silhouette multiplied endlessly, forming great, snaking patterns that seemed to wriggle back and forth as they vanished into the infinite distance. I moved quickly out of those rooms, my heart pounding at my ribs. Much as it unnerved me, I knew what I had come to see, and I wouldn't leave until I got there.

(beat)

When the mirrors covered three walls, the room itself seemed to disappear into an endless black void. I couldn't see the doorway, so I ran my hand along the far wall, staring at the dim reflection of my face. I looked like hell, hair sticking up every which way and deep bags under my eyes. I remember wondering how long it had been since I'd had a good night's sleep at that point. It must have been a few weeks, at least.

(beat)

Eventually, I found the open doorway: the next hallway was completely dark, making it just an invisible hole in the shadows. I pulled out my phone to try and light the way, but of course it was dead -- I'd forgotten to charge it. Again. I swore at myself, then started feeling my way forward. The walls were absolutely bare, and the carpet muffled my footsteps almost completely. It was only then that I really realized how oppressive the silence in that house was.

(beat)

Eventually, I found an edge to the wall, and turned a 90 degree corner into another hallway. I almost screamed when I saw the tall, gaunt figure washed in dull red light standing in front of me. Instead, I froze. So did the figure. I tried to back away. It did the same. I breathed a sigh of relief. It was just me, reflected in a head-to-toe mirror standing in the middle of the hallway.

(MORE)

ANNA SHERIDAN (CONT'D)

The wall behind me was painted black and disappeared in the reflection, and a single red lightbulb, like the ones used in darkrooms, hung on a string overhead. Needless to say I swore at myself again, along with whoever set this little jump scare up.

(beat)

I began to walk towards it -- then froze again. It was only for a moment, but I could've sworn I saw something move behind me, just a little slower than I had. I turned around. There was nothing there. I was directly under the light then, and even though it was dark there was nowhere to hide in that narrow hall. I managed to shrug it off, faking more confidence than I felt, and began down the hall again.

(beat)

There wasn't much to talk about in the remaining rooms. Somehow the four mirrored walls almost seemed to cancel each other out, and the fully-mirrored rooms were too big and dimly lit for the infinity effect to actually work. Maybe when Zilberschlag first built the house he actually lit it properly, but the bad lighting only made it hard to see. I rushed though, partly because I was growing unimpressed with the place, and partly because I knew that the next room was the one I'd come to see: the holiest of holies, so to speak, of this mid-century temple to light and shadow.

(beat)

The old man was waiting for me when I got there. I still don't know how he got there without me noticing. Maybe there were secret passages behind the mirrored walls and corridors, or a back door he snuck around to. In any case, as I rounded the last corner of the final hallway, I saw him standing in a small pool of light beside a mirrored door.

(MORE)

## ANNA SHERIDAN (CONT'D)

It was so much of a horror movie cliché I almost laughed: the creepy old man at the end of a long, dark corridor, blocking the exit. I half expected to see an axe in his hand. But no: he was just standing there patiently, waiting for me. The only thing that kept me from laughing was the fact that his eyes still seemed to be locked on mine: even as I rounded that corner, his eyes seemed to be following mine before he could possibly have seen them.

(beat)

When I reached him, he asked how I was enjoying my tour. I lied and said I was enjoying it fine. He then explained that this was Ezra Zilberschlag's favorite room: the one he used as a study whenever he had time for his *real* work. He didn't explain what he meant by that, but the way he said it made me wonder if the old silversmith and I had more in common than I initially thought. Before I could ask, he pulled the door open. He explained that it would be impossible for me to figure out which wall was the exit once I was inside, so I would need to call for him when I was ready to leave. When I said it wouldn't be too hard to figure out with only eight walls to try, he winced visibly and muttered something about "getting fingerprints on the glass." Then he looked away. I think that was the first time he'd broken eye contact with me all evening, and somehow that was even more disturbing.

(beat)

I slipped into the room. It was even darker than the rest of the house, and I was about to say something when the door clicked shut behind me and the lights flashed on. After so long in half-dark rooms and hallways it was almost blinding, and I screwed my eyes shut against the glare. When I finally did open them, a million other eyes did the same.

(beat)

(MORE)

ANNA SHERIDAN (CONT'D)

I don't know quite where the light was coming from, thinking back on it. The mirrors on the walls were all but flush against one another, the ceiling, and the floor, and there were no bulbs mounted anywhere I could see. I didn't notice it at the time, though. My mind was spinning faster than before as I tried to process what I was seeing: a bright, endless landscape of infinitely repeating shapes, lines, and figures. The small gaps between the mirrors created fractal patterns, repeating into the endless distance until they were swallowed by the far away dark. I looked up. Another version of me looked down, staring out of a tunnel made by the repeating octagon of the mirrored floor. The effect made me feel dizzy, so I looked at my feet. From where I stood, it seemed like I was balancing on another person's soles -- and that was the only thing keeping me from falling forever into that endless space.

(beat)

I tasted gas station coffee at the back of my throat, so I closed my eyes, trying to breathe. I'd been in infinity rooms before, when I was a kid. From what I could remember, they usually included something to help visitors orient themselves: a solid platform on the floor, hanging lights, or even small sculpture pieces to help give the viewer a sense of up and down. Here, it seemed Zilberschlag's obsession with infinity had pushed him past those concerns. I almost felt sick again, thinking of spending more than a few minutes working in that room. This, more than anything else, convinced me that Ezra Zilberschlag was also engaged in the study of the impossible in his free time.

(beat)

I opened my eyes slowly.

(MORE)

ANNA SHERIDAN (CONT'D)

The repeated versions of myself  
were far enough away that I didn't  
feel claustrophobic or cramped by  
them, but maybe that's just because  
I'm used to keeping my own company.

(beat)

As unusual as the effect was, there  
wasn't really much else to see:  
everything was, by definition, a  
repeat -- smaller and fainter, but  
the same in every direction for as  
far as I could see. I could have  
stayed longer, but I was getting  
dizzy again and didn't want to be  
sick on the old man's precious  
mirrors. I turned to call and ask  
him to open the door, but then I  
saw something move in the corner of  
my eye.

(beat, trying to put this  
in words)

You know how in an infinity mirror,  
your reflection alternates  
direction? It's usually hard to  
notice when your face blocks the  
mirrors, but here, it was easier to  
see. In one of the walls, I saw my  
reflection flip flopping back and  
forth: like a long line of Annas  
standing back to front to back...  
except one of them wasn't. It was  
just where the reflection began to  
fade into the dark: I could see the  
reflection in front of it facing  
me, barely visible behind the  
others -- *but the one behind it was  
looking towards me too.*

(beat)

Somehow, it seemed to be standing  
off from the rest, like it was  
peeking over their shoulders to  
look straight at me. Obviously all  
of them were looking me in the  
eye, that's how mirrors work,  
but... There was an intensity to  
this one's gaze. I could feel it  
staring into my eyes, just as sure  
as I felt it when the old man  
stared at me. And then it moved  
again.

(beat)

I'm sure *I* didn't move: I was  
frozen stiff.

(MORE)



ANNA SHERIDAN (CONT'D)

But as I stared back at it, trying to make sense of what I was seeing, it shifted, ever so slightly, out of line with the others. It moved slowly, almost imperceptibly -- but it did move. It... It stepped out from behind the long line of reflections and, then began to walk towards me. The reflections in front of it and the few I could see behind stayed right where they were: just optical illusions with no will of their own, like this one should have been. For a while, it reflected my look of surprise and shock. Then it smiled: a toothy, chilling grin of hunger and excitement... And it's teeth were all too long. I was just about to scream that a hand clamped around my mouth and pulled me backwards.

Anna stops, CATCHING HER BREATH.

ANNA SHERIDAN (CONT'D)

(collecting herself)

It was the old man. He let go of me as soon as he pulled me through the open door, then shut it behind me. I saw the lights go out just before it closed, and my reflection vanished into the darkness.

(beat)

I'm ashamed to say I yelled at him, asking what the hell happened in there. He seemed to be just as perturbed as I was, and muttered something about "my time being up." Or maybe he said it wasn't up. I was too angry, scared, and tired to pay much attention either way. I left in a huff and stormed out the way I came, ignoring the mirrors as best I could. The old man didn't follow me, and I reached the front door without any trouble. I was about to leave when I noticed the door to the little side room was cracked open. I considered ignoring this too, but... Curiosity got the better of me, as usual.

(beat)

I peered through the crack.

(MORE)

ANNA SHERIDAN (CONT'D)

The lamps were off inside, so all I could see was the small sliver of light from the open doorway. It fell across one of the mirrors, a relatively newer one that had a simple black frame and an untarnished square of silver in the middle. All I could see reflected in it was my own face, peering through the door. At least, that's what I thought it was. Just as I was about to leave, it turned it's head slightly to one side and smiled a wicked, long-toothed smile.

(beat)

I don't remember getting in my van, putting the key in the ignition, or speeding away from that house with everything the old thing had, but I must have. The next thing I did remember was the flash of headlights in the rain, the wailing of a semi-truck's horn, and the sudden jolt of a high-speed impact.

(beat)

My infamous accident. It almost killed me, but in the end it settled for putting me in PT for a year while I figured out how to use my hands again. It was about then that I started using a recorder to do my first drafts -- my old digital one, not this tape deck. Wrote most of my next book that way. I thought about calling it *Ad Infinitum*, but that seemed like tempting fate a little more than even I could justify. *The Endless Sky* was a better title anyway.

CLICK. CLACK. The tape ends and ejects from the player. SAM GIVES A HEAVY SIGH.

SAM BAILEY

Jesus, Sheridan. You're not making this easy, are you?

(beat)

Did a quick Google search while she was talking. Can't find anything about a "Mirror House" that isn't just part of a circus, and nothing in northern California seems to match her description.

(MORE)

SAM BAILEY (CONT'D)

I checked the subreddit she mentioned, but it was deleted and reset around 2010, so not much help there. Unless I'm prepared to accept that she was murdered by something that crawled out of a fun house mirror, this tape isn't much help with this case, either. At least she gave the date of her supposed -- incident. Though it would've been easy to figure out based on her accident.

(beat, then, less  
confidently)

Even so, that doesn't quite seem to line up. The accident happened in the early hours of December 1st, 2005. Maybe she's just being generous and calling the end of November late Autumn, or maybe she just can't remember the date right. A crash like that does funny things to your head.

Sam pauses, then leans forward. BEEP. The recording ends.

END THEME AND  
CREDITS