

"THITHER TO BURN"
The Sheridan Tapes - Season 01, Episode 03
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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 Tenth, 2019 at 4:43 PM.

(beat, then, very tired)

I've been listening to these tapes
for the last two weeks now. Mostly
right before I go home. The
county's really just trying to keep
me busy until they decide what to
do with me, so I have to try and
work some actual cases the rest of
the time. You know, cases that
might have some answers I can find.
I want to keep going with the
tapes, but damn if Sheridan doesn't
make it difficult. I've sat through
about ten recordings of random
street noise, rambling versions of
the first chapter of *Below the
Silent Deep*, and one tape that was
just '80's pop songs played at half
speed backwards. I have no idea
what a writer's "process" usually
looks like, but I'm pretty sure
it's not this. The strangest thing
is the blank tapes...

The door to the office swings open suddenly.

BILL TYLER

(relieved)

Oh good, you're still here!

SAM BAILEY

(SIGHS HEAVILY)

What do you want, Bill?

BILL TYLER

(confused, then brightly)

Want? No, I just wanted to tell you
a couple of us are headed out to
Marvin's for drinks if you want to
come.

SAM BAILEY

(almost angry)

No thank you.

BILL TYLER
(really trying to sell him
on this)
It's really is just a few of us.
Maybe me and Robert and one or two
other tagalongs...

SAM BAILEY
(curt refusal)
I said no.

BILL TYLER
(disheartened)
Oh. Right.

SAM BAILEY
(curtly)
Could you shut the door on your way
out, please?

After a moment, Bill does so.

SAM BAILEY (CONT'D)
(SIGHS, frustrated)
Like I was saying, the strangest
tapes are the blank ones. There
have only been a few, but I had to
listen all the way through both
sides to make sure they were
actually empty. For some reason,
Sheridan left blank cassettes mixed
in with her recordings. Maybe there
used to be something on them.
They're all labeled like the rest,
so I'm guessing that whatever was
recorded on them was somehow
deleted. Still can't shake the
feeling that...
(beat)
No, I need to get out of here --
it's been a long day. So: tape 1-10-
2-1-8. What have you got for me
today, Sheridan?

CLICK. The recording begins, scratchy and distorted. A small
wood fire crackles, just louder than the analog noise. A
phone rings, set to speaker. In a moment...

KATE SHERIDAN
(over phone)
Hello, Kate Sheridan speaking?

ANNA SHERIDAN
(bright, fake phone voice)
Hey! Kate? It's Anna?

KATE SHERIDAN
(trying to seem happy)
Anna! Hi! How are you?

ANNA SHERIDAN
(awkwardly, obviously not
used to small talk)
I'm -- Good, I'm good, how are you?

KATE SHERIDAN
(a little passive
aggressive)
Same, yeah -- good! Great! Wasn't
expecting to hear from you so soon.

ANNA SHERIDAN
(trying to ignore it)
Yeah, well -- just wanted to make
sure you're okay, you know?

KATE SHERIDAN
(not fine, but hiding it)
Yeah, I'm all good. Great. Hanging
in there, you know? One day at a
time.

ANNA SHERIDAN
(leaving it be)
Yeah? Yeah. Good. Great.

An awkward silence.

KATE SHERIDAN
(trying to make small talk
because her sister won't)
How's um... How's Oregon?

ANNA SHERIDAN
(happy to change subject)
Cold, damp, and dark as night.

KATE SHERIDAN
(making a joke to distract
herself)
Glad to hear you're enjoying
yourself, then.

ANNA SHERIDAN
(bantering back,
comfortable)
In my element, at least.

KATE SHERIDAN
Where are you staying again?
Langleeze, or something?

ANNA SHERIDAN
Langlois. Little town near Bandon.
Very little. Nice little min-
market, and that's about it.

KATE SHERIDAN
(sounds like a nightmare
to her)
Sounds... Peaceful. Not many
distractions, then?

ANNA SHERIDAN
(suddenly uncomfortable)
Um... Yeah, not really.

KATE SHERIDAN
(hearing her tone)
What's wrong?

ANNA SHERIDAN
(before she can stop
herself, angrily)
Why do you always think something's
wrong?

KATE SHERIDAN
(trying to diffuse
conflict)
I don't really, it's just -- the
way you said it.

ANNA SHERIDAN
(catching herself)
Sorry, I just... Yeah. It's quiet
here. *Really* quiet.

KATE SHERIDAN
(trying to get to what she
was saying)
So -- have you...?

ANNA SHERIDAN
(SIGHS HEAVILY)
No. I haven't done any writing.

KATE SHERIDAN
(disappointed)
Oh.
(worried)
You haven't been... You know...

ANNA SHERIDAN
(anger resurfacing)
Which one?

KATE SHERIDAN
Both. Either. I worry about you
Anna, you know that...

ANNA SHERIDAN
(cutting her off)
Well you'll be happy to hear I
haven't been having fun. No weed,
no ghosts -- just *not* writing.

KATE SHERIDAN
(her turn to get angry)
I *do* want you to have fun, Anna, I
just don't want you to get yourself
killed doing it.

ANNA SHERIDAN
(immediately changing
subject)
How's mom holding up?

KATE SHERIDAN
Jesus Christ Anna.

ANNA SHERIDAN
(indignant)
What?

KATE SHERIDAN
(DEEP BREATH, through
teeth)
Mom's fine. I'm fine. We're *all*
fine.

ANNA SHERIDAN
(bitter)
So it's just me who drives you up
the wall, then?

KATE SHERIDAN
(exasperated)
Anna, I *really* don't want to have
this conversation right now...

ANNA SHERIDAN
(throwing her words in her
face)
Oh sorry, am I bothering you now?
What happened to "call anytime you
want Anna," or "you're always
welcome here, Anna?"

KATE SHERIDAN
(exasperated)
That's just what people say, Anna.
It doesn't mean you can call me out
of the blue at 10pm on a Sunday
night.

ANNA SHERIDAN
(bitter)
Well, sorry if I wanted to have a
nice talk with my sister for a
change.

KATE SHERIDAN
(concerned)
Are you sure you haven't been
smoking?

ANNA SHERIDAN
(bitter)
Are you calling me a liar?

KATE SHERIDAN
(with a little smugness)
It wouldn't be the first time.

BEEP. Anna hangs up -- then throws her phone across the
table.

ANNA SHERIDAN
(exasperated)
See what I have to deal with?
God... Sisters, am I right?
(long beat as she
processes)
I don't really care that I didn't
get any writing done today. I mean,
obviously I do care, writing's the
whole reason I made this trip. To
get away from the noise and focus.
Anthony insisted I needed to stop
running around, sit down, and
write. God, you'd think he was my
mother, not my agent.
(beat)
(MORE)

ANNA SHERIDAN (CONT'D)

I tried, when I was back home for the funeral. Absolutely nothing. Mom let me stay at her place, but that lasted about as long as you'd expect. So I told Anthony that I needed to get out, to get inspired - but *Poultice Press* is breathing down his neck for a Q4 release, and they're pretty much over funding my little *expeditions*. So I asked him to lie. I'm not proud of it, but given how good an agent he is, I know it's not the first time he's done it. I told him to tell the publishers I was almost done, but I just needed a change of scenery to get through the last few chapters. They agreed, and I found a nice little cabin here on the Oregon coast. I even checked to make sure there were no reported hauntings nearby. I was being very good, for once. I just knew that I wouldn't get any writing done if there was even the slightest chance of being distracted.

(beat)

I almost feel guilty saying that. Yeah, I'm a writer -- and a damned good one too, despite what certain critics say. But I'm a good *Horror* writer, and that's only because of what I do when I'm not writing. *The work*. The books pay for it, sure, but still... It feels like a betrayal, putting the writing first. Especially when I felt like I was getting so close to...

Anne trails off, wondering if this is really the best place to talk about it. She continues...

ANNA SHERIDAN (CONT'D)

(depressed)

So here I am, wrapped up in a blanket, staring at my little fireplace, so bored I actually decided to call my sister for once. I did try to write. I got up before the sunrise, made coffee, took out my pen and... Nothing. Not a single idea worth writing down, no itch I needed to scratch or question I needed to answer.

(MORE)

ANNA SHERIDAN (CONT'D)

I tried everything: prompts off the internet that all sounded stupid, free association, meditation, a few too many cups of coffee... Anything just to try and shock myself back into writing. By the time it started getting dark again I realized I hadn't eaten, moved, or written anything all day. I looked through what I'd tossed in the bin, but most of it was completely unintelligible, even to me. The best I got out of it was some extra kindling for the fire.

(beat)

This isn't writer's block. I know what that feels like. There's always a pressure in my head, like there's some kind of story I'm trying to get out, but just can't get on the page. It's frustrating as all hell, but this?

(beat)

It feels like there's nothing. Whatever I try to put on the page doesn't have any real substance, any life. I thought it would pass quickly. I was sure it was just a hiccup, a bump in the road after dad...

(unable to finish the sentence, changing subject)

I used to spend months on the road, writing in the mornings and finishing a manuscript by the time I got home. Now? Now, I sit inside and stare at the blank page for twelve hours and get nothing out of it.

(beat)

This is starting to get ridiculous. It's not even that I'm having bad ideas -- I'm not having any at all. And it isn't like I've written about everything I've experienced either, it's just -- The fire's gone out.

After a long, defeated silence -- CLICK. The recording stops.
After a moment -- CLICK.

ANNA SHERIDAN (CONT'D)
 (whispered, terrified)
 There's someone in the cabin with me. I fell asleep on the couch, and I just woke up to footsteps in the kitchen. I don't know who, or what, but there's someone in here with me!

She cuts off. Above the noise of the tape, we can barely hear a long, chilling creak of the floorboards.

ANNA SHERIDAN (CONT'D)
 (whispered, even more scared)
 I can't see anyone in there. The fire's out, but there's light coming in from outside the kitchen window. I'm -- I'm going to leave this running and try to find my scanner. If anyone finds this, this is Anna Sheridan, I'm in a cabin off Highway 101 in Langlois, Oregon. Please call my agent, Anthony Perdue, and tell him... Tell him he shouldn't have been such a good liar.
 (beat)
 And tell my sister I'm sorry.

Anna shifts off the couch, the blanket loud as it bumps against the microphone. Soft footsteps pad across the carpet, and a bag slowly unzips. She pulls out her scanner, then presses the button.

Silence. Somehow more unnerving than an actual supernatural phenomena. She pads back over quickly.

ANNA SHERIDAN (CONT'D)
 (whispered, urgent)
 Whatever it is, it's not giving off any of the usual readings. My eyes are adjusting, and I can see more clearly now, but -- the kitchen is empty.

CREAK. Louder. Unmistakably a footstep.

ANNA SHERIDAN (CONT'D)
 (whispered, trying to keep from panicking)
 Okay. I'm moving to the floor lamp now.

(MORE)

ANNA SHERIDAN (CONT'D)
There's a switch at the base, so I
can turn it on without it seeing
me. Here goes.

CLICK. The bull hums slightly.

ANNA SHERIDAN (CONT'D)
(surprised)
There's...
(beat)
There's no one here. The room is
just... Empty. Not even a shadow or
a distortion in the air, just...

CREAK. Louder still. Anna freezes, then...

ANNA SHERIDAN (CONT'D)
(angrily)
Okay, if someone is messing with
me, they are going to be very
sorry, very quickly.

Anna picks up the tape recorder and marches across the room,
entering the kitchen. She kicks the floor three times.

ANNA SHERIDAN (CONT'D)
(shouting at some unseen
prankster)
I mean it! Trust me, I've had a
hell of a day, and you do not want
to mess with a pissed off...

WHOOSH. The fireplace reignites across the cabin.

ANNA SHERIDAN (CONT'D)
(taken aback)
What the hell?

Slowly, she crosses back to the fire.

ANNA SHERIDAN (CONT'D)
(unnerved, trying to
rationalize)
So, um... The fire that I said went
out? Yeah, it just -- started
burning again. Maybe the coals just
caught an unburned bit of wood, or
maybe there was a draft in the
chimney that reignited...

WHOOSH. The fire goes out again.

ANNA SHERIDAN (CONT'D)
(heart pounding)
Okay. Fire's out again. I... I
don't know what's going on. The
scanner's still not reading any EM
disturbance. It's cold, but that's
just because it's cold outside. I
think. I hope...

CREAK. The floorboard moves again. *CREAK. CREAK. CREEEAK.*

ANNA SHERIDAN (CONT'D)
(faking courage, voice
shaking)
You know that's only scary the
first few times you do it?

The creaking stops. ANNA SIGHS WITH RELIEF.

ANNA SHERIDAN (CONT'D)
Much better. Now...

BUZZ. BUZZ-ZZ.

ANNA SHERIDAN (CONT'D)
Oh no. The, um -- the lamp's going
out now.

The scanner begins beeping like crazy. *BUZZ - BUZZ - BUZZZZZ-POP!* The buzzing and the beeping stop all at once.

ANNA SHERIDAN (CONT'D)
(BREATHES RAGGEDLY)
Who the hell are you?

Silence.

ANNA SHERIDAN (CONT'D)
(suddenly shivering)
Oh god, it's cold.

She grabs the blanket from the couch wrapping herself up in it.

ANNA SHERIDAN (CONT'D)
(starting to calm down)
That's much better. Now, with all
that...
(as if touching a hot pan)
AH!

Anna drops the recorder. *CLICK.* The recording stops. After a long moment...

CLICK. Flames crackle and snap. The room is on fire. The mic bumps and clatters against the floor.

ANNA SHERIDAN (CONT'D)
(COUGHING HEAVILY IN THE
SMOKE)
Where is the --

CLICK. The recording cuts out.

CLICK. Flames again, and the crash of breaking glass. *WHOOSH*. The fire seems almost to be roaring at her.

CLICK. The recording cuts out. It's silent for another long moment.

CLICK. A nighttime breeze plays through the trees, and sirens blare a little way off.

ANNA SHERIDAN (CONT'D)
(waving off paramedics)
No, no, I'm fine, I'm fine, just...
Go bother someone else.
(SIGHS, THEN COUGHS)
Well, I know I've had worst nights.
I just can't think of any right
now. That's the last time I take a
trip anywhere just to write. Can't
get away from the work, no matter
what I do. Makes you wonder... Do
these things follow me because I
chase them, or were they always
following me? What makes me so
lucky, I wonder.
(beat)
I guess the recorder cut out when I
dropped it, so I'll fill in the
details. As soon as I put on the
blanket, I felt warmer... A lot
warmer. Burning hot, in fact. I
didn't notice at first, but after a
second it felt like I was wrapped
in burning metal: like I was
touching a hot pan with every inch
of my body. I dropped the blanket --
I think I must have screamed. As
soon as I did, it caught fire. I
was about to get water and put it
out, but it burned to ash before I
could even move. If I'd had it on
any longer than I did...
(beat)
The fireplace caught again, flames
roaring all the way up the chimney.
(MORE)

ANNA SHERIDAN (CONT'D)

The kitchen floor started creaking too, over and over again. That was when I realized what it was: the wood warping and creaking with the change in temperature. My scanner was going crazy. I tried to pick it up to check the readings, but dropped it right away. It was burning hot too.

(beat)

Smoke started to pour out of the fireplace. I know the flue was open, but the room was quickly filling with smoke. I dropped low, grabbed the recorder, and crawled towards the door. I was nearly twenty feet from the fireplace and facing away from it, so I shouldn't have felt the heat... But my face was still burning, my skin cracking and blistering until it felt like my blood was boiling. And in the roar of the fire, I swear I heard a voice. Not a human voice -- not even one speaking words, I don't think. Just emotions -- strong, blinding emotions that overpowered everything.

(beat)

Hatred. Anger. Rage -- just pure, absolute rage. Whatever it was, it hated me: hated what I do, and more than that hated who I am. A hate that burned so hot that it... Well, it almost burned me alive.

(beat)

I got lucky. Or maybe I was just fast enough to escape. I didn't look back, but from the sound of the flames I knew they were already climbing up the wall behind me. The entire cabin was on fire. I'm not sure when the creaking in the kitchen stopped and the fire started, but when I looked back, the old wooden cabinets were lost behind the flames. I reached the front door and tried to grab the handle, but it scalded my hand, like world outside was burning too.

(beat)

(MORE)

ANNA SHERIDAN (CONT'D)

I looked around, trying to find a way out -- and then I saw the empty waste paper bin, sitting next to the door. I hesitated before I grabbed it, but it wasn't hot. In fact, it almost felt cool to the touch. It must have been far enough from the fire to avoid the heat. I turned and threw it as hard as I could through the front window. The glass exploded, and the night air rushed in. The flames leapt higher, roaring louder than before. I saw them clawing across the floor towards me, like some kind of hungry animal.

(beat)

I turned and jumped out the window, cutting my hands on the glass, but thankfully not bad enough to need stitches. By the time I got off the porch and away from the cabin, I could already hear the sirens. One of the neighbors must have called 911. I gasped for air and tried to think of a way to explain this to the fire department, when suddenly... I heard another sound.

(beat as she thinks about it)

No -- not quite a sound. Another burst of emotion, radiating from the fire. I couldn't name it if I tried, but somehow, I recognized it. It wasn't an emotion I'd ever felt, but one that reached into me, towards something forgotten. Ancient. Primal. I'd escaped, but I knew that whatever was in that house had just marked me as prey.

CLACK. The tape ends, and spits out of the player.

SAM BAILEY

(disinterested)

Looking at her file now, I guess Sheridan was involved in a house fire that destroyed a small cabin in Langlois, Oregon in 2009. She was treated for smoke inhalation and minor lacerations on site.

(MORE)

SAM BAILEY (CONT'D)

She might have walked away from it entirely, if the police hadn't administered a Duquenois test and found elevated levels of THC in her saliva. She was quickly arrested and charged with suspected arson, but the evidence was circumstantial and the judge dismissed the case. The family who owned the cabin sued her for violation of her rental agreement though, and ended up winning a pretty handy settlement, so -- make of that what you will.

(beat)

I know authors can do some crazy things to get out of writer's block, but I've never heard of one resorting to arson. Seems a little excessive, even for Sheridan.

(beat)

Apparently the press had a lot of questions too: there are a lot of articles from around that time about Sheridan's drug habit and manic behavior being responsible for the fire. She was right about her agent: Anthony Perdue lied his ass off to save her's. He had some great lines about "atmospheric conditions being ideal for spontaneous combustion" and "electrical wiring shortcuts" in the cabin itself. Something tells me *this* tape wasn't played in court.

(beat)

If Sheridan was trying to shake her writer's block, I guess it worked. It took her less than two months to write and publish *Inferno Within*. It was one of her best sellers, too. Guess there really is no such thing as bad press.

(beat)

God, it's been a long day.

BEEP. The recording ends.

END THEME AND
CREDITS