

"IN THE DISTANT OBSCURITY"
The Sheridan Tapes - Season 01, Episode 07
Recording Draft - May 27, 2020

Written by

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Based on story and characters from
"Homestead on the Corner"
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EXT. ARROWHEAD, NV - GALLOWAY MESA - NIGHT

A quiet, windy night on top of the plateau. A coyote howls a little ways off, but there are no sounds of civilization.

Booted footsteps crunch across the gravel. They stop, and someone pulls out a metal tripod, setting it down on the stone.

ANNA SHERIDAN
(talking herself through
her plan)
Okay, just check... Good. No cell
signal. Nothing but a bit of AM
radio. Nobody awake down there. All
quiet on the western front. Good.
Good.

Anna flicks a few switches on the device in front of her.

ANNA SHERIDAN (CONT'D)
Alright... Beginning frequency
sweep.

The device begins to pulse, sweeping back and forth as it scans the airwaves. A few weak snippets of music are heard through the speaker.

ANNA SHERIDAN (CONT'D)
(whispering)
Come on... I know you're out there.

For a moment, something seems to be coming through, then...

CLICK. The recording cuts off.

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.

A tape is already running, crackling in the background. The sound of a car driving are heard in the background.

ANNA SHERIDAN
(distractedly putting
lines together)
...And far away, at the horizon's
edge, he saw the flash of sails,
the curve of a hull, and the sweep
of a tall, proud bow -- yet it
sailed, keel above foremast, upon
the air.

(MORE)

ANNA SHERIDAN (CONT'D)

He knew, with a chill in his heart,
that he beheld the *Fata Morgana*:
that ghostly ship sent to lure poor
sailors to their doom.

(beat)

"About and to port, master
Wilkins," he said, raising his
spyglass towards that frail and
tenuous image, praying only that he
could keep it in his sights this
time...

(beat, then correcting
herself)

Wait, no -- He wouldn't have said
Port. He'd say larboard. *About and
to Larboard*, mister Wilkins," he
said, extending his spyglass
towards that image, praying only
that he could keep it in his sights
before it slipped over the world's
edge and disappeared once more.

CLICK. Sam stops the recording and SIGHS HEAVILY.

SAM BAILEY

(annoyed)

She's been on like this for twenty
minutes now. I thought I'd start
checking the tapes before
digitizing them, and Sheridan has
not disappointed. More early drafts
of *Below the Silent Deep*. Real
exciting stuff -- for anyone but
me.

(beat)

I was about to toss this one out,
but the chief came in and caught me
scrubbing through. Let's just say
he didn't approve. At all. So let's
do this properly: Detective Samuel
Bailey, Oslo County Police
Department, Homicide Division.
Recording on April Twelfth, 2019 at
5:15 pm. Tape number -- damnit,
it's still in the player.

CLACK. Sam ejects it and pulls it from the tape deck.

SAM BAILEY (CONT'D)

3-1-10-6-6.

(beat)

Going to tell me what the numbers
mean anytime soon, Sheridan?

Sam slips the cassette back into the player. Anna picks up where she left off.

ANNA SHERIDAN

(continuing to spitball)

The bright gleam of the late evening sun shone in his eyes, burning as he stared, unblinking, at the mirage. He could see its rigging shivering in a wind no living soul could feel. Wilkins spoke in his ear, nearly shouting, but the captain did not listen: only kept his burning eye held fast upon his quarry. He felt a rough hand on his shoulder and shook it off, advancing further down the quarter deck. The ship, suspended in the air, was turning about -- whither which way he did not know, but it seemed for a moment to be facing him. He caught a glimpse of the weathered and splintered figurehead on the bow, carved in the shape of a woman in white. As he watched, it seemed to raise its hand and silently beckon him forward. Someone cried his name, and he turned to look just as the deck disappeared below his feet. The cold waters of the mid-Atlantic embraced him with the cold, wet kiss every sailor knows as death. And then... Then...

Anna thinks for a moment.

ANNA SHERIDAN (CONT'D)

Then nothing. That's about all I've got. Pretty good though. I'm trying to get better at putting these passages on tape when they come to me... Which is usually when I'm on the road. I don't know exactly where that one will end up, but Captain Barrett will definitely hunt a ghost ship at some point. Just need to figure out where.

(beat)

I really wish I had room in the van for one of those outline-boards Maria keeps talking about. It would really make writing these things go faster.

(MORE)

ANNA SHERIDAN (CONT'D)

Not that I can actually, you know, write anything while I'm driving, which is when I get my best ideas anyway. It always has been. Maybe that's why I spend so much time out here.

(beat)

Well, that and other reasons.

Anna takes a long pause.

ANNA SHERIDAN (CONT'D)

(musing to herself)

You ever stop to think how strange highways like this are? I've certainly spent enough of my life around them to notice. It's no wonder there are so many urban legends about them: we all know that roads shouldn't be here, not in places like this. They're just... Rivers of stone, running through mountains and forests wherever we decide to put them. Strands of asphalt linking people together across hundreds of miles. They're almost like... Connective tissue. Veins. A living thing, growing around and through forests just like this one. It spent thousands of years alone, only seeing a few dozen humans every year. Now there's a ragged wound cut through the middle of it, with hundreds of noisy, dirty cars rushing past on their way to somewhere else. And it's worse at night. Whenever I'm out here, it feels like I've crossed some boundary that shouldn't have been messed with.

(beat)

I mean, just look at those trees. Undisturbed by the ages, just watching as the tiny humans rush by in their little tin cans. They don't look angry at us though, or even afraid -- they just stay silent, knowing they'll outlast us all. I used to stare at them as they flew past whenever we took a family road trip... at least, whenever I wasn't annoying Kate.

(MORE)

ANNA SHERIDAN (CONT'D)

I knew about parallax long before I knew there was a name for it: Close up, the world rushed by in a blur, but in the distance, everything was almost perfectly still. Motionless. Timeless. And if I stared at it for too long, sometimes I started to see things. I'm pretty sure it was just some kind of optical illusion: the branches blurring out and making patterns that weren't there. But sometimes, when I looked out the window and the sun was going down, I imagined I could see something running alongside the car.

(beat)

It looked like a wolf, I remember. Some kind of dog, at least. Four legs. Dark fur. Long, hungry snout and deep, dark red eyes. Thinking back on it, it always seemed misshapen somehow. Its legs... Its front legs were too long for its body. I used to think that it would be hard for it to run like that. Sometimes I wondered if it was actually humanoid, but ran on all fours like a gorilla. But whenever I thought I was getting a good look at it, the car passed a clearing without any trees, and it disappeared. So I convinced myself it was only my imagination. That was the simplest explanation, after all. Although... Knowing what I know now, I...

CLACK. The tape ends and spits from the player.

SAM BAILEY

(tired relief)

Oh thank God, it's over.

Sam begins to pick up his stuff, gathering his coat before...

The door swings open.

SAM BAILEY (CONT'D)

(under his breath)

Oh christ...

BILL TYLER
(cheery as ever)
Hey Sam, you getting out of here
anytime soon?

SAM BAILEY
(muttering slightly)
Actually, I was just about to...

BILL TYLER
(doesn't let him finish)
Great! Just wanted to make sure
you're still good?

SAM BAILEY
(confused)
Good for what?

BILL TYLER
(gently annoyed)
Karaoke night! I know, I know: You
hate karaoke, but you promised
you'd come, so I wanted to make
sure...

SAM BAILEY
(cutting him off,
incredulous)
When?

BILL TYLER
(making it clear that this
is not a request)
When Robert bought coffee for the
office last week. He told you it
was his birthday today and asked
you to come.

SAM BAILEY
(kicking himself)
Oh. Right.
(beat)
And I said yes?

BILL TYLER
('don't make me drag you
there')
Yes, Sam. You did.

SAM BAILEY
(lying)
Oh yeah, I did. Of course. Uh, go
ahead without me, I just need to
wrap up a few things here.

BILL TYLER
 (not buying his bullshit)
 Aren't you done with your one
 cassette for the day?

SAM BAILEY
 (spinning his wheels)
 Sheridan cut off mid-sentence on
 this one -- I think there might be
 a B-side.

BILL TYLER
 (reluctantly)
 Fine. We'll save you a seat, but
 don't take too long or you'll miss
Bohemian Rhapsody.

SAM BAILEY
 (as much sarcasm as he can
 get away with)
 Wouldn't miss it for the world.

Bill leaves, shutting the door behind him. Sam drops his coat
 back onto his chair.

SAM BAILEY (CONT'D)
 Goddamnit.
 (beat)
 Huh. Maybe this thing does have a B-
 side. Might as well check... I need
 to kill some time to get rid of
 Bill, anyways...

Sam flips over the tape, slips it into the player, and starts
 it. CLICK.

Anna's voice doesn't begin right away. Instead, there's a
 long, haunting howl of a dog, echoing through the trees.
 Something about it is definitely off.

ANNA SHERIDAN
 (quiet, tense)
 I don't know if the mic is picking
 that up, but... I pulled off at a
 rest area near the PCT trailhead a
 few minutes ago. I was starting to
 get tired, so I set up the camping
 stove and started boiling water for
 coffee while I checked the map. I
 figured I'm about halfway to
 Klamath, give or take a few miles.
 I was about to start the van again
 when everything went completely
 silent.

(MORE)

ANNA SHERIDAN (CONT'D)
For a minute I thought the stove
had gone out, but then I looked
closer and saw the flame was still
on. The water was still boiling,
but... it wasn't making any noise.
Then I heard...

The dog HOWLS again.

ANNA SHERIDAN (CONT'D)
(growing unnerved)
That. I heard that. Look, I know
there are wolves out here, okay?
Coyotes too. And I know what they
sound like. I've had more than a
few run in's with both. But
whatever's out there, it's not any
animal I know -- and it's getting
closer.

As if to prove this point -- HOOOOOWL. Like a bloodhound on
the scent. Then -- HOOOOOWL! Another beast joins it.

ANNA SHERIDAN (CONT'D)
(petrified, trying to
move)
Come on, Sheridan. Move. Go.

Anna unfreezes, scrambles back into the front seat, and puts
her keys in the ignition. The van roars to life, skidding in
the gravel a little.

ANNA SHERIDAN (CONT'D)
(relaxing a little)
Okay. Just put a little distance
between me and... Whatever that
was. No shame in not wanting to
deal with hell-hounds in the middle
of nowhere. Discretion is the
better part of valor, or so I've
always been told...

BAM. Something strikes the van, and the tires screech.

ANNA SHERIDAN (CONT'D)
(trying to keep the wheel
steady)
Gah! Keep it steady, Sheridan, keep
it...

HOOOOOOWL! The baying of both hounds, loud enough to
overpower the van's engine.

ANNA SHERIDAN (CONT'D)
 (focused on the road)
 Oh god... They're just outside,
 trying to run me off the road.
 Whatever they are, I can see them
 in the corner of my eye. Come on
 Sheridan, just keep driving and...

BAM. Again. Anna tries to maintain control.

ANNA SHERIDAN (CONT'D)
 (terrified)
 Shit. Okay, Lake of the woods is a
 little ways up the road. Maybe I
 can get over the water and lose
 them. They're still dogs, right?
 They need my scent to...

In the far distance, an UNEARTHLY HORN BLOWS. Halfway between
 music and a cry of rage. Static rises and covers the
 recording until -- CLICK. The recording cuts out.

CLICK. The tape starts again. The sounds of a quiet Oregon
 night. ANNA IS BREATHING HEAVILY, as though she's been
 running. Then -- SHE LAUGHS.

ANNA SHERIDAN (CONT'D)
 (through laughter, relief)
 God, what a rush! Haha... Whoo.
 Man, my hand's still shaking. You
 must have heard that horn. You must
 have! I mean, it was loud enough to
 shake the windows, so it must have
 been picked up by...
 (pause, then a SIGH)
 Okay. I'll start from the
 beginning. I didn't put two and two
 together until I heard the horn.
 Then it all clicked. There's this
 motif in a lot of European
 folklore... A common theme shared
 by a bunch of stories from all over
 the continent. Grant's always
 trying to teach me more about
 mythology, so I probably read about
 it in one of his books... And
 probably against my will. I should
 give him a call and thank him for
 that.
 (thinks about it for a
 moment)
 Nah. Not a good idea. He already
 has a big enough head.
 (gets back to her story)
 (MORE)

ANNA SHERIDAN (CONT'D)

It's called the wild host, or the wild hunt. There are hundreds of stories all across Scandinavia, Germany, and Britain about the same thing: a hunting party made up of the souls of the dead, chasing some poor unfortunate soul for prey. Guess that's me, in this case. It was usually led by Odin or King Arthur or whatever the local equivalent was, but not always. Sometimes it was led by a warrior goddess, or the devil, or a dead lord... Really, there are as many variations as there are stories. The wild hunt is really just a name scholars came up with for the trend. But in almost all of the stories, the party was led by hunting hounds. *Hell-hounds*. I wonder... Was that what I saw when I was a kid? Was I being chased all the way back then? Or did I just have an overactive imagination? I mean, I did, but... You know what I mean.

(beat)

Wasn't imagining them now, though. Wish I was. I was doing almost 90 on the straightaways, but they were keeping up with me easily. I skidded out a bit each time they hit the car, but I just managed to stay in control. Barely. The trees on either side of the road seemed to get closer on either side as I drove, closing in around me. I tried to take a closer look, but then I remembered my last accident and kept my eyes locked on the road. I didn't dare to look in the rearview mirror, either. I'm not sure what I really would've seen, but I'm sure it wouldn't have helped.

(beat)

I started seeing signs for Lake of the Woods, so I tried to speed up. Looking back on it, my plan was kind of ridiculous -- the wild hunt, if that's what it really was, rides the storm clouds, high in the air.

(MORE)

ANNA SHERIDAN (CONT'D)

Maybe their dogs ran on the ground, but ghosts and gods certainly don't. Whatever those hounds were leading -- whatever had chosen me for prey -- it wouldn't have been stopped by a little bit of water. Not that I had much choice but to run. Most of the stories said that those who ran were hunted to the ends of the Earth, but surrendering to the hunt usually ended worse. I'd rather not end up dead or any more cursed than I already am.

(beat)

So I kept driving, going as fast as I possibly could. Or rather, faster than I could. This van is not built for high speed chases, that's for sure. And I forgot to top off my radiator before I left. It probably ran dry somewhere on the grade up, and I've been running on luck ever since. The engine started to hiss, and smoke began to pour out of the air vents. I tried to keep going, but thankfully it broke down completely before I asphyxiated on the fumes.

(beat)

I tried to pull over, but I barely got out of the middle of the road before the van lurched to a stop. I jumped out as soon as it did and ran as fast as I could down the road. I don't know what I was thinking -- the dogs kept up with me when I was going 90. But once again, what other option did I have?

(beat)

There are absolutely no streetlights out here. Maybe one or two at the occasional intersection or rest area, but besides that -- nothing. When it's night, it's really, really night, and you can't see anything at all. The trees block most of the moonlight, and my headlights went out when the engine failed. I could just barely make out where the road was by the stars overhead. The hounds were still there, one on either side of the highway.

(MORE)

ANNA SHERIDAN (CONT'D)

I heard them moving through the trees, but I couldn't see them. One of them growled low in its throat and I just -- froze. Dead in my tracks. I turned towards the sound, trying to figure out where it was coming from. A sliver of moonlight broke through the trees, but all I could see was a patch of pale, hairless skin and the faint glint of the creature's eyes as it watched me.

(beat)

I stopped breathing. Fight or flight were both out of the question, so I just... Froze. I guess I was just hoping... No. I wasn't hoping anything. I wasn't thinking. I was just reacting.

(beat)

That's probably why it took me so long to realize the hound wasn't moving either. It just stayed exactly where it was. I could tell it was staring at me though, and when the hairs on the back of my neck stood up, I knew the other one was doing the same. But neither of them moved. Instead, they just stood where they were -- waiting for me to run. And then I heard the horn again.

(beat)

I don't know why I call it a horn: it didn't really sound like one. It was more like -- a pure frequency. Like the ones Maria sometimes sends me when she's messing around with the edits, warbling and rising and falling except... Well, this one didn't sound like a digital noise. It was like... pure sound. A pure musical note, like what every instrument in history has been trying to reproduce. If that's so, then none of them have come anywhere close.

(beat)

The dogs whined when they heard it, almost sounding like they were disappointed before they turned and ran back down the highway.

(MORE)

ANNA SHERIDAN (CONT'D)

I stayed exactly where I was for what felt like an hour before I dared to even look. I was sorely disappointed. There was nothing there: no dogs, no hunting party floating through the clouds, not even the headlights of another car. It was just me, alone in the middle of the road.

(beat)

I ran back to my van and locked myself in anyways. By then I was more awake than I wanted to be, so I didn't need coffee anymore. The whole back of the van is a total mess, and my laptop's probably ruined for good: the kettle was still boiling when it fell over and poured scalding water all over everything. Thankfully I had everything backed up, but I'll have to ask Maria what I can do with a boiled CPU.

Anna looks up at the night sky and TAKES A DEEP SIGH.

ANNA SHERIDAN (CONT'D)

I'm not making it to Crater Lake tonight. Probably not at all, at this rate. Still... Worse places to be stranded, I guess. It seems like I'm safe now -- though to be honest, I don't know for sure. Those old stories are full of ways that people escaped or outsmarted the hunt, but it's impossible to say which ones are real and which ones are made up. If any of them are actually real.

(beat)

I'm still trying to figure out why they let me go. Maybe the hounds wanted a good chase, and I couldn't give it to them anymore. Lord knows I've spent enough of my life chasing things I didn't really want to catch. Or maybe it's like I said -- this road isn't supposed to be here. It's a liminal space: not in one city or the next, not totally civilized or completely wild. Just a river of stone.

(MORE)

ANNA SHERIDAN (CONT'D)

A ribbon of civilization passing through forests older than the human race itself. Places like this... sometimes they're more than just unnerving. Sometimes, the barriers between the world we know and the ones we don't dare to imagine get thin enough to let something through.

CLACK. The recording ends and the tape ejects from the player.

SAM BAILEY

(muttering)

What am I supposed to do with you, Sheridan?

(beat)

This is the second time she's talked about being chased by *something*... Though if these tapes are to be believed, "the wild hunt" doesn't sound anything like the... *Phenomena* she encountered in Langlois. And I can't exactly put them down as suspects without being laughed out of the department. Though maybe she knew someone was chasing her, just not *who*. Made her paranoid.

(beat)

Maybe I shouldn't be taking the tapes so seriously. Half the time I don't even know if *she* takes them seriously. I mean, those sounds definitely didn't come from any kind of dog or horn I know, but she also mentioned Maria Sol a few times. She probably did a bit of work on this recording, like she did with the one on Donner Pass. Still... It seems kind of odd that Sheridan would mention her if Sol was producing this. Seems kind of arrogant. Or maybe it's meta, whatever that means.

(beat)

I should try and track down Miss Sol for an interview -- but that's for next week. If ever. Right now I need to see if I can sneak out of here without Bill noticing.

Sam stands to go, then stops. He quietly grabs a tape out of the case and puts it in his pocket.

SAM BAILEY (CONT'D)

Might as well take a tape for the road. God knows I won't have anything better to do this weekend.

(beat)

Maybe 2. Just to be safe.

BEEP. The recording ends.

END THEME AND
CREDITS