

"THE SILENCE OF THE NIGHT"
The Sheridan Tapes - Season 01, Episode 11
Recording Draft - June 16, 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 - EVIDENCE STORAGE - LATE EVENING

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

SAM BAILEY

(rushed, as if he can't
wait to get to it)

Detective Samuel Bailey, Oslow County Police Department Homicide Division. Recording on April sixteenth, 2019 at 6:45 pm from the lobby of evidence storage. I figured it was about time I got down here and looked over what the original investigation managed to find. It isn't much -- they found Sheridan's van outside Oslow, but apparently it was scrubbed pretty much spotless... Which doesn't seem to match up with her... Well, everything about her, really. Still, whatever they did collect should be here... If they can ever find it. I convinced the chief to let me examine the evidence myself, but couldn't convince the Property Officer on duty to let me into lockup. Apparently they're pretty possessive around here. So, in the mean time...

Sam pulls out a cassette.

SAM BAILEY (CONT'D)

Figured I'd get another tape recorded. Next one in the case was labeled 1-6-88-1-2. I'm starting to think the codes might be some kind of book cypher, but I can't even begin to guess which book. Working back, I'm guessing the numbers would stand for word, line, paragraph, chapter, and then either section or volume number. None of Sheridan's novels have that last kind of division though, and I don't think even she would be arrogant enough to use one of her books for the key text.

(beat)

But that's not important right now. Tape 1-6-88-1-2... Here goes.

CLICK. The tape begins with a magnetic crackle.

ANNA SHERIDAN

(recounting an old story)

I don't think it will come as much of a surprise that I don't get out to concerts very much. Given my... Slightly obsessive nature, I have neither the time nor interest to make the trip. Even when bands I like are on tour at the same time as I am, our paths rarely cross, and when they do, I usually just park a little ways off and enjoy it from a distance rather than getting in the middle of a massive, sweaty crowd. It's just not my scene.

(beat)

On the other hand, I'm not really seen as "appropriate" for the more "subdued" variety of music venues. Chamber music halls and opera houses would probably throw me out if I tried to get in. I don't think I own a single piece of formal wear that wasn't recovered from the sight of a particularly nasty haunting. I've been reminded of that "professional shortcoming" by Anthony more than once, every time I show up at the premiere of the latest adaptation of my books in a T-shirt and leggings again.

(beat)

In any case, concerts were never my thing. I was either too scruffy to get in the door or too antisocial to enjoy them for myself. But in the summer of '07, I somehow found myself on the redeye flight to London with a night at the Royal Albert Hall on my itinerary. As it turned out, *The Endless Sky* did surprisingly well in England, and the British publishers, *Parson's*, decided to fly me out for a full book tour. I think they really just wanted to immerse me in British culture so I'd write a more "English" story next time. I don't think it really would have worked that way, no matter how many helpings of beans on toast I ate, but..

(MORE)

ANNA SHERIDAN (CONT'D)

I guess the trip did make an impression, just not the way they anticipated.

(beat)

I arrived at Heathrow on July 20th. It was a typical English Summer that year -- I think I actually saw the sun about three times while I was there. After losing 8 hours of my life somewhere over the mid-Atlantic, the last thing I wanted to see when I arrived was a bunch of reporters, but apparently nobody told that to *Parson's*. I actually ended up on the front page of *The Sun*, though I hardly looked like "The Mistress of All Evil" they described in the headline. I was still wearing the ridiculous pink neck-pillow I'd picked up at the duty free in LA. I stumbled through the crowd, found the nervous intern assigned to be my "handler" waiting for me, and finally made it to the car. By the time we got on the M4, I decided to chalk the trip up as a loss from the start. No way it could get any worse, I thought.

(beat)

Apparently it could. No one informed *Parson's Press* about the concept of jet lag, so they'd scheduled my first signing for later that evening. I was too tired to really get angry, but I did manage to glare some pretty sharp daggers at my handler when he told me that. Somehow I managed to muddle through. Thankfully I wasn't half as popular across the pond as they clearly wanted me to be. It's all a bit of a blur, but I don't think I saw more than ten people over the two hour signing. Even so, it drained whatever energy I had left, so I collapsed into bed the moment I reached my hotel room and slept for 10 hours straight.

(beat)

I've had some bad mornings, but that one has to be in the top ten. There are few hangovers that compare with jet lag and culture shock.

(MORE)

ANNA SHERIDAN (CONT'D)

We were running late by the time I woke up, so I practically inhaled breakfast before I was rushed out the door by my handler and into the back of another car. The rest of the day is pretty much a blur in my memory, but not an entirely unpleasant one. They tried to find bookstores that matched my reputation, and so I found myself doing signings in ancient booksellers and libraries thick with gothic styling. That, at least, put a smile on my face. All the different accents did too, though I tried to hide it as best I could -- I didn't want to come off as some goofy anglophile tourist. There was one guy who almost broke me though -- an old highland scot with an accent so thick he was nearly unintelligible. Craig Donald or Dumwell or something like that. Thank god my handwriting's mostly illegible -- otherwise he'd know how horribly I misspelled his name.

(beat)

In any case, that day wasn't half as bad as the one before, but my internal clock was still stuck somewhere over Greenland. So when my "handler" from *Parson's* reminded me that we were going to the Proms that evening, all I could do was blink a few times and say, "okay." I think he must have realized that the American didn't know what he was talking about, so he explained it on the drive over. The BBC puts on a series of chamber music concerts every year at the Royal Albert Hall. This year's was a celebration of the 150th birthday of Edward Elgar, which was apparently a big deal for my handler. I barely recognized the name -- Like I said, classical music has never been my scene.

(beat)

There were way too many people outside the hall when we arrived, including the paparazzi from the airport.

(MORE)

ANNA SHERIDAN (CONT'D)

As the car pulled up, I tried to tell my handler that I'd rather just watch the show from the hotel room, but he just opened the door and all but physically pushed me out of the car.

(beat)

I hate red carpets, and I wasn't in any state to deal with one then, so I just put my head down and bull-rushed the front door. Thankfully, the Proms are more of a nationwide party than the kind of stuffed-shirt event I'd expected, so I didn't stand out too much. I hung around the back of the gallery for a while, and by the time my handler found me, I'd decided it would be more trouble than it was worth to force my way out through the crowd again. I took my ticket from the flustered intern, climbed the stairs to the second story, and found my seat.

(beat)

All in all, I enjoyed myself way more than I thought I would. I was a little insulted when I looked at my program and saw that this was the "jamboree" show -- as though *Parson's* thought I was too uncultured to enjoy anything other than the "kiddy" program. The annoyance passed as soon as the band started playing and rich, playful music filled the hall. The *Harry Potter* interlude was a little weird, but I still hummed a long a bit. I'm sure my experience was helped by the fact that I recognized more than half the tunes, even if I couldn't name them.

(beat)

The evening was flying by, and then came the last big march. "Land of hope and glory." As soon as the orchestra began playing, the people standing in the middle of the hall -- the "prommers," as my handler called them -- started bobbing up and down in time with the music.

(MORE)

ANNA SHERIDAN (CONT'D)

It was actually kind of amusing:
this big bombastic march
accompanied by a hundred little
heads going up and down like whack-
a-moles. I couldn't keep the grin
off my face, despite my best
efforts.

(beat)

The march reached a crescendo, then
slowed into another phrase -- one I
recognized all too well. "Pomp and
Circumstance, Number 1," the
program called it, and the entire
hall began to sing along to words I
didn't know. I knew the music as
well, sure, but I'd always just
called it "the graduation song:"
the one that played when Kate
crossed the stage at AIB and
accepted her diploma. I wanted to
be happy for her, but it was
difficult to do when mom kept
pointing out the fact that I never
managed to do the same.

(beat)

The prommers pulled out small flags
and began to wave them -- even my
handler produced one from the
bright velvet coat he'd clearly
borrowed from his grandfather. The
music began to swell, and I
suddenly felt like I might be ill.
I don't know if it was the memory
or how little I'd eaten that day,
but I made some excuse and shuffled
out past the other people in my
row, getting a few curses as I
jostled them. In a few minutes I
was out and into the empty hallway
that runs along the edge of the
building, looking for a bathroom.

(beat)

Royal Albert Hall is an egg. That's
the simplest way to describe the
shape of it. It's a giant, egg-
shaped building with the concert
hall in the middle and a gallery
running around it, mostly taken up
by a long, round corridor on each
level. They aren't all that wide,
really -- not any wider than the
halls at most movie theaters these
days. But it was odd, standing in
the middle of one by myself.

(MORE)

ANNA SHERIDAN (CONT'D)

The hall curved away from me pretty quickly in both directions, and I couldn't see more than a few yards either way. Still, I turned right and began walking, looking either for an open restroom or the way out. I remembered that there was signage for the exit when I came in, but for some reason I couldn't seem to find it. The music stayed on my right, leaking through the wooden double doors that led back into the hall. It never seemed to get louder or softer as I moved, though at some point I realized I should have passed the choir seats and been directly above the orchestra. I was on the grand tier just above the ground floor, and the gallery ran all the way around the building. But there should have been bars and restaurants somewhere off the main hall on that level -- or at least bathrooms and elevators. But it was just doors: the doors back into the hall on my right, and the closed doors on my left which, when I tried them, were all locked.

(beat)

I could still hear the orchestra playing "Pomp and Circumstance" through the walls. As anyone who's ever sat through a graduation ceremony knows, that song can be looped over and over again until the heat death of the universe. Even so, it seemed like it had been playing for far too long, and the words being sung, though muffled, started to sound strange -- like they weren't really English anymore, or even noises that a human being should be able to make.

(beat)

After about ten minutes without finding anything, I started to run down the hall. I didn't know what else to do, so I just started sprinting up the hallway as fast as I could.

(MORE)

ANNA SHERIDAN (CONT'D)

It made no difference: the doors remained the same on both sides, the music never changed volume, and the paintings on the wall... Well let's just say they were definitely not BBC-approved. I made note of one as I passed: a portrait of a thin, pale man with eyes so sunken and dark that he looked like a skull in a frock coat. It only took about a minute of running before I saw it again, appearing ahead of me in the corridor.

(beat)

I stopped, breathless. The music was shifting again, becoming less of a melody and more of a slow, discordant chant. I couldn't make out any words -- it sounded more like roaring waves or howling wind than speech by then. I watched the program back on the BBC iPlayer later. There were about a hundred cameras in the hall filming the performance, the crowd, and the seats the entire time. I'm sure at least one of them would have noticed if the Royal Albert Hall had been transformed into a choir of the damned, but nothing seemed to be out of the ordinary on the recording. Whatever I heard, it didn't come from inside that hall.

(beat)

As I stood there in the corridor trying to catch my breath, I finally heard something else beside the demonic melody. I might have been relieved, if it had been anything but what it was. The door on my left rattled and shook on its hinges. As it did, the sound of the inhuman chorus behind me grew louder, then softer, and then louder in time with the movement. I backed up against the opposite wall, pressing my fingers into the plaster and paint to try and find some reassurance that this was actually real. For some reason, feeling something solid beneath my fingers left me more relaxed than I'd been in hours.

(beat)

(MORE)

ANNA SHERIDAN (CONT'D)

And then... I felt the wall shift. As the door rattled and shook on the opposite side of the corridor, the wall did the same, shaking and quivering like half-melted jello. I leapt away from it in disgust, looking at my hands to see them stained the same off-white as the wall. I tried to wipe them on my jeans, but nothing happened -- the pale color sank into my skin, making my fingers look like they'd been bleached.

(beat)

The door behind me shook again, as though something was now slamming into it, trying to escape. I backed away, being careful not to touch any of the walls. I noticed that the painting of the skeletal lord was hanging on one side of the shaking door, along with another painting I didn't recognize. It was of a woman in black, pale and painfully thin with bleary, dark eyes in wide, sunken sockets. She was emaciated and sickly, and I might not have recognized her if not for the fact that I'd seen her face in the mirror on more than one bad night.

(beat)

I'll admit that I lost it a bit at that point, turning and running the other way up the corridor. After a few seconds I stopped, then looked back, confused. The corridor curved away to my right as it always had, with the doors to the concert hall on the inside wall. I turned and looked the other way, but the corridor still curved off to the right. I looked back and forth a few times before I could begin to make any sense of what I was seeing... If sense is the right word for it. The gallery had somehow been twisted around itself in such a way that no matter which way I turned, it was exactly the same: concert hall on my right, outside wall on my left, and the hallway always turning right.

(MORE)

ANNA SHERIDAN (CONT'D)

My brain tried to tell me that I was standing in an S-Bend, but I knew that wasn't true. If I ran in either direction, I would end up exactly where I'd started without making a single turn. No matter which way I went, I'd either be running down the same infinite hallway, into the wall that wasn't a wall -- or through one of the unlocked doors.

(beat, then CHUCKLES)

I know, great set of options. But given the choice between being trapped, being eaten by a bit of plaster, or taking my chances with the doors, I eventually turned, grabbed the nearest handle, and pulled. For a moment, nothing happened, and I worried that these doors might be locked as well. Then it came loose, opening with far more resistance than it should have. It was like pulling against wet earth, and the wall rippled and shook as I struggled against it. The chanting became more high pitched, and for a moment it sounded almost like a cry of pain. I thought I might actually be hurting this place somehow by doing this... A thought that brought me no small measure of satisfaction.

(beat)

But then the resistance gave way and the door flew open with a sickening sound, like the tearing of wet meat, and what was on the other side was definitely not the Royal Albert Hall. It wasn't even pretending to be. I couldn't see much -- the only light came from the open door, and it only shone a few feet into the dark. The deep red of the carpet continued into that room, climbing up the walls and low ceiling of what looked like another long corridor. It was lower and narrower, but it looked as real and solid as the one I was standing in... Except that I could see it quivering and vibrating every time the chant rose and fell.

(MORE)

ANNA SHERIDAN (CONT'D)

A blast of stale, warm air rolled down the tunnel, and I nearly threw up from the smell of putrefaction and decay it carried.

(beat)

I slammed the door -- or rather, I slowly pushed against it until it more or less closed. The hinges -- if that's what they really were -- resisted the whole way, and the door almost seemed to sink into the frame rather than stop. I jumped away and desperately wiped my hands on my jeans again, skin crawling. Whatever was really behind that door, the resemblance to an enormous throat was too close for comfort.

(beat)

Having exhausted my three options, I began to panic a bit. I wondered if I might be able to break free if I ran for long enough, but dismissed the idea pretty quickly. Sooner or later I'd tire or begin to get thirsty or hungry, and that door would begin to look more and more tempting. Then I'd be forced to try it... And it would all be over.

(beat)

The door behind me rattled again, shaking on its hinges. Before I could stop myself, I spun around and pounded on it, screaming at the top of my lungs. I don't know what I was thinking: my nerves felt like razor wire, and it didn't take much to set them off. The shaking stopped immediately. I was surprised, but pretty happy about this turn of events. I was about to walk away when I realized that door hadn't felt like the other one. It felt solid and secure, like it was actually attached to a wall rather than being embedded in a wet, fleshy *something* pretending to be a wall. Curious, I grabbed the handle and twisted. It was still locked, of course, but as I pulled, there was a faint knocking. I let go in surprise, and the knocking stopped.

(MORE)

ANNA SHERIDAN (CONT'D)

Curious, I leaned in and put my ear against the wood. I almost broke out in tears when I heard a muffled version of "Pomp and Circumstance," carrying through the door.

(beat)

Whoever was on the other side knocked again -- a little louder this time. Unsure what else to do, I knocked back, matching their timing. They hesitated, then knocked again -- two knocks together, a pause, then two knocks again. I matched it, then stepped back to wait for the next pattern -- and then the doors burst open. The sound hit me like a wave. It wasn't unearthly chanting, but cheering, singing, and clapping as the conductor brought the orchestra to a final crescendo. No one noticed me as I rushed desperately back into the hall, except for an old man who I nearly ran over in my hurry. I turned to see who he was, but he'd already slipped out into the corridor behind me. I thought about trying to warn him, but when I looked through the open door behind me, I didn't see the nightmarish realm I'd just left. The walls were the same color, but the paintings hanging from them were of a tall-masted ship and a fat lord in a top hat. I could even see an emergency exit sign hanging a little ways down the hall.

(beat)

I quickly found my "handler" and apologized for how long I'd been gone. He just looked at me with confusion, then realized he was missing his cue to applaud. I realized that I could only have been gone for a few minutes -- not even the full length of the song.

(beat)

I'm still not sure how long I was in that place. Trying to pin down any individual moment in there is like looking up and down those corridors: time seems to curl around itself so tightly that all sense of direction is lost.

(MORE)

ANNA SHERIDAN (CONT'D)

(beat)

I sat through the last song in the concert completely lost in my own thoughts. I vaguely recognized it from some old kid's show, but it felt rather out of place after what I'd just gone through -- or maybe I felt out of place. After the concert I cut through the crowd even faster than I normally would and sheltered in the car until my handler caught up. We didn't talk on the way back to the hotel, despite his best efforts.

(beat, then CHUCKLES)

You know the most surprising thing about the whole night? The fact that I actually slept really well. I don't even think I had any dreams. Huh. Jet lag is one hell of a drug.

CLACK. The tape ends and spits out of the player. Sam leans back in his chair and SIGHS.

SAM BAILEY

Another tape, and another trap Sheridan wandered into. Another creature or... Something trying to capture her. Trying to take her away, somehow. I don't know if this one's real or not, but... I mean, after De Witt, I'm not sure I can dismiss...

A door opens across the room.

PROPERTY OFFICER

(apologetic)

Sorry about the wait, Detective Bailey.

SAM BAILEY

(wondering what the problem was)

Was there a problem with the evidence?

PROPERTY OFFICER

(dismissive)

No, someone just moved it to the wrong shelf. Just took a while to find.

The officer sets down a suspiciously light sounding cardboard box.

SAM BAILEY
(confused)
Is that all of it?

PROPERTY OFFICER
(friendly)
That's everything.
(beat, checks watch)
Hey listen, I need to get out of
here. You mind locking up when
you're done?

SAM BAILEY
(distracted)
Huh? Oh, yeah -- sure.

PROPERTY OFFICER
(friendly)
Night, Bailey.

The property officer walks out, and Sam opens the box after a moment.

SAM BAILEY
(confused)
What the hell... Officer? Officer,
what is this...

He's gone. Sam pulls out a single piece of paper, reading it.

SAM BAILEY (CONT'D)
(reading, confused)
"The last will and testament of
Anna Sheridan, concerning..."
(beat, uncertain)
"Concerning the future."

Sam unfolds the paper... Then turns it over.

SAM BAILEY (CONT'D)
(completely lost)
This... This can't be right. It
says...
(beat)
"Listen." It just says... "Listen."

BEEP. The recording ends

END THEME AND
CREDITS