

"THAT STILL HOUR"
The Sheridan Tapes - Season 01, Episode 08
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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. SAM BAILEY'S HOME - KITCHEN - DAY

BEEP. In the background, a pot of water bubbles and boils.

SAM BAILEY

(distractedly)

Testing one two, testing, one two
three... Huh. Weird.

BEEP. The recording changes, the boiling pot of water louder
and closer now.

SAM BAILEY (CONT'D)

Okay, it works. The LED's probably
just broken.

(mock seriousness)

This is detective Samuel Bailey,
Oslo County Police Department,
homicide division. Recording live
at the scene of a murder most
fowl... namely, this perfectly good
chicken breast I'm absolutely
ruining. Forgot to take it out the
freezer this morning, so -- lazy
boiled chicken for Bailey tonight.
Wonderful.

(beat)

This is all your fault, you know.
Yes, I'm talking to you, you smug
little peice of plastic. Spent all
morning rooting around the attic
looking for you. Should've just
grabbed a recorder from the
station, but I was in a rush.
Anyways, thought I'd at least have
some fun with it, so -- welcome to
baking with Bailey, the hot new
cooking show featuring everyone's
favorite law enforcing master chef.
On tonight's special episode...

Sam cuts off, unable to finish the sentence -- LAUGHING. It's
an odd sound, as though he hasn't really laughed all week.

SAM BAILEY (CONT'D)

(RECOVERING FROM
LAUGHTERS)

God... Sorry. Couldn't say that
with a straight face. "Everybody's
favorite?" Who the hell's
"everybody?"

(CHUCKLING -- it feels
good to laugh)

Oh, god.

The water bubbles for a moment, then Sam resumes.

SAM BAILEY (CONT'D)

Man, I can see why Sheridan got so talky when she was recording -- especially when she was high. It's kind of inviting, you know? I used to get pretty chatty myself back in Agate Shore, after they put that monster tape deck in my office. Probably burned through a few hundred cassettes before...

He cuts off, suddenly remembering why he isn't chatty in real life.

SAM BAILEY (CONT'D)

(trying to change subject)

Anyway. Um. Yeah. The little wheels turning -- they kind of draw you in. Makes it feel alive -- Less sterile, you know? And you never really knew what you were going to get out of these older machines... If a digital recorder messes up, you get a corrupted file that you can't even open, but I remember running super-magnets over tapes as a kid just to see what noises they made when...

Suddenly, the water hisses and sputters.

SAM BAILEY (CONT'D)

(distracted by the kettle)

Ah hell, it's boiling over.

BEEP. A moment of silence, then...

BEEP. A quieter room, with the faint ticking of a clock and the occasional clatter of fork against plate.

SAM BAILEY (CONT'D)

(mouth full)

Alright, everything's ready to cross-record. So... Verdict on frozen chicken *a la bailey* -- yeah, about what you'd expect. Hey, nobody's trying to be a gourmet in this house. It gets the job done.

HE SWALLOWS, then goes for another bite.

SAM BAILEY (CONT'D)

(disinterested)

Figure I can listen to another tape while I eat. Let's see what we've got... Number 1-9-8-3-3? Why not. Who knows... Maybe Sheridan made another podcast out of this one. Dinner and a show, I guess.

CLACK. A moment of silence, and then...

A quiet room -- dead of night, the faint sounds of wind, birds, and the occasional car on wet pavement.

ANNA SHERIDAN

(slowly, reading off something she's already written)

I had a friend named Amy Sterling. That much I know. Her name is written on the inside cover of every yearbook since second grade. Amy. Sterling. For the first few years, the handwriting is shaky, the letters big and clumsy. The letters get steadier and smaller, until by the end of high school it's a curling sweep of beautiful cursive. Amy. Sterling.

(beat)

I remember she was my friend. I remember flashes, images that seem frozen in time. A playground slide. An old apple tree. A big, empty house with long, empty halls. Someone smiling and laughing when I was around. *Someone* holding my hand on the night grandpa died. My friend. Amy.

(beat)

What I can't remember is a face, a voice. I've torn these yearbooks to shreds, looking for her. A class picture, or a group photo of one of the clubs we were both part of. Even just her name, printed in solid, assuring block type somewhere in the list of students. Something, anything, just to assure me she was real.

(beat)

I open my fourth grade yearbook.

(MORE)

ANNA SHERIDAN (CONT'D)

I see myself in front of the generic, dappled background the school photographer put up, looking awkward and uncomfortable in my Sunday best. I see Kate, always a few years ahead of me, always a little more refined, a little more at ease. I flip through until I find the adventure club and see a dozen small faces crowded around an oversized map of the county. I see myself, looking ragged and wild-eyed, crammed in next to the other kids. To my left is Walter Fabel. I remember that I didn't want to stand next to him when the photographer came. He never quite got the idea that I wasn't interested in him through his head, and he took to calling me a lesbian when we got to high school, like it was some kind of insult. But in fourth grade, he was still an awkward kid trying to stand too close to all the girls in class. Today he decided to cram in next to me, and I couldn't do anything to stop him. I'd complained to the teacher once before, but she just laughed and said it meant that he liked me. I tried to explain that I didn't like *him*, but it was pretty clear that my opinion on the matter was irrelevant to her. I hated it, but at least I had Amy by my side. That was the only thing that made it bearable.

(beat)

Except Amy isn't there. Walter is on my left, close enough that I still remember how he smelled, like sidewalk chalk and grape jelly. Next down the line is Samantha Summers, Amy's childhood friend and high-school crush. But between Sam and I -- there's no one. I know Amy was there, I just know it... but even though it's hard to tell in the cramped, halftone-printed photo, there seems to be nothing but a person-sized gap between Samantha and I.

(beat)

I open my freshman yearbook.

(MORE)

ANNA SHERIDAN (CONT'D)

Amy's signature almost looks like a movie star's; just a big A and a bigger S with a few cursive scribbles between them. But I recognize it in a heartbeat. Amy's name. My *friend's* name. I turn the pages, remembering. Amy and I got our yearbooks mixed up on the last day of school that year -- whoever was handing them out got *Sterling* and *Sheridan* mixed up. It was the same year Amy started pining after Sam, and she drew a couple of hearts around her picture.

(beat)

Half of the messages on the inside cover are addressed to her... Or at least, they should be. I check both inside covers to be sure, then the autograph page in the middle. It's the same everywhere. There are notes I know were meant for Amy: messages of fawning adoration and the kind of high school double entendre that I only got from Walter. But they're all the same: On every message, Amy's name is gone, and I find my own in its place.

(beat)

Occasionally, that name matches the rest of the handwriting. Most of the time it doesn't. *Anna Sheridan* is scrawled in cursive below a printed message, or the other way around. The handwriting on one message is tight and restrained, except for where it reaches my name and loops wildly into the other letters. One looks like it was written with a typewriter -- mechanically stamped onto pages that should've been full of memory and life. I scratch at the letters, hoping to peel them away and find some indication that my friend was actually real. But the names stay on the page long after I've scratched away the rest of the message, as if to say *there was only ever you, Anna. You were always this alone.*

(beat)

(MORE)

ANNA SHERIDAN (CONT'D)

I throw the yearbook across the room, scrambling for the next, and the next, and the next until I'm graduating high school alone. Kate went off to college two years ago, and Mom busted me with weed for the first time last week. I was afraid of what the future might hold... But at least I wasn't alone. I had Amy. I remember that much. I remember her ditching her date at prom to find Sam, finally working up the courage to kiss her in a quiet corner of the gym. I remember that Sam first laughed at her, then ran off when Amy said it wasn't a joke. I remember sneaking off and getting high with her afterwards, holding her as she finally broke down. But somehow -- I remember being alone as well. I remember both nights: one with Amy and one by myself, alone in my room, like I've lived two different lives, and one of them is being pressed down on the other, smothering it. That life -- the one I shared with Amy -- already feels like it happened to somebody else, a long time ago.

(beat)

I grab my Penn State yearbook, but I know it's no use: even if Amy had ever existed, we didn't go to college together. We fell apart after graduation, and I can't remember her after that. That's the one point where both lives match: I never saw her again after that one failed year of college.

(beat)

I refuse to accept it. I run to my computer, searching everywhere I can think for some evidence of her existence. We grew up just before the internet, but I know I can find *some* trace of her online: An article from the local newspaper, an old scan of a yearbook photo, a mention of her name on a forum somewhere. If Amy was slipping out of existence, then I couldn't be the only one who'd noticed?

(MORE)

ANNA SHERIDAN (CONT'D)

I even log into facebook for the first time in years, searching our mutual friends for any sign of Amy. I go so far as to check Walter's profile, only to discover he'd come out as gay two years ago, and was now engaged. Who'd have guessed it?

(beat)

I find a few school photos, including the picture of the old adventure club. My heart sinks when I see it: me, Walter, Sam, and the empty space where Amy should have been. I download the image and send it to Maria, asking her to check if it had been altered in any way. She gets back to me a few minutes later, saying that it probably wasn't... But it's hard to tell with such a low-quality scan, and the original photo could have been photoshopped.

(beat)

It's nearly midnight, and the room is completely dark beside the glow of my screen. Even so, I message Samantha after scrolling through her timeline a bit. Turns out she's happily divorced from the quarterback she married right out of high school. I don't expect a reply, but my "hello?" gets an enthusiastic "Anna!" in about 10 seconds. She spells it with three n's and an h, and the rest of her replies are about the same. Still, after more than a few variations on "sorry I've been out of touch," I ask her if she remembers Amy. There's a long pause then, and I see the dots dancing in the messenger for a while as she types and retypes her answer. After about two minutes, a single "No" comes through. Capital N, lowercase o, period. I'm about to ask her if she's sure, but then I see her log off without so much as a TTFN.

(beat)

I think about calling Kate and asking her, but she wanted little to do with me when we were in school, and even less to do with my friends.

(MORE)

ANNA SHERIDAN (CONT'D)

I even think about messaging Walter, but... Well, he seemed happy. I didn't want to ruin that with any unpleasant memories.

(beat)

I rub my eyes. Midnight isn't late for me, but I feel exhausted. I stagger to my feet, cross the bedroom, and shamble down the hall. I don't turn on any lights as I go - - there's a dull ache behind my eyes, and I know light would just make it worse. In the dark, I enter the bathroom, turn on the sink, and splash cold water on my face. It wakes me up a little, and I grab a towel to dry off. Then I freeze. My gaze locks on the sink, as the icy water circles the drain, gurgling as it disappears into the dark. *The Well.*

Anna stops fully, then picks up her remembrance.

ANNA SHERIDAN (CONT'D)

I still remember my elementary school. Remember it so vividly that sometimes, when I'm alone, it will come to me so suddenly and so completely that it feels like I'm still there. There's a theory about the way we perceive time. When we're young, a year feels like forever, because it takes up more of our life. When we're five, a year is a full fifth of all the time we've spent on this planet. When we're 35, it's less than 3 percent. So by the time I was in 4th grade, I'd spent nearly half my life at that school, and it felt like the most important place in the entire world. Like I'd spend the rest of my life there, growing older but never really changing.

(beat)

So I explored as much of it as I could, learning it's secrets the only way a fourth grader can: in bits and pieces gleaned from sanctioned and decidedly unsanctioned expeditions across campus.

(MORE)

ANNA SHERIDAN (CONT'D)

The place felt huge and sprawling, full of hidden nooks and secret passages... But then again, everything feels huge and important at that age. I was just as stubborn and foolhardy as I am now, but back then I had a companion I could count on whenever I ventured into the unknown.

(beat)

The school used to be an old family farm, like pretty much everything else in town. Almost all of the original structures were gone by the time I arrived on the scene, but the well was still there. It was capped and plugged a long time ago, of course: the insurance company would never let them get away with an open pit on campus, even if it was tucked away in the furthest corner of the school, at the back of a lumpy, uneven field that was only ever mowed once a year. But the builders ran out of money and time, and decided not to knock it down: they just put a cap on it and left what looked like the perfect wishing well sitting out in the middle of an open field. What on earth was a girl supposed to do, just... Leave it alone?

Anna stops -- she's getting to the heart of her story.

ANNA SHERIDAN (CONT'D)

One day near the end of the school year, Amy and I were out in the parking lot, waiting to be picked up. It was about 80 degrees and muggy as hell, especially for that time of year. We were pretty much on our own: there was only one overworked crossing guard on duty that day, trying to keep one eye on the parking lot and the other on the road. Mom and Dad had been arguing again, so I knew they'd be late. I didn't know why Amy's mom was running behind, but... I didn't want to ask. So we just sat together on the concrete steps outside school as we waited.

(MORE)

ANNA SHERIDAN (CONT'D)

It was busy and hectic at first, but the crowd slowly dwindled until it was pretty much just us. That was when I got the bright idea to sneak off and finally go see the well myself. Of course Amy agreed to come along too, so we both slipped back through the main doors when no one was looking.

(beat)

It only took us a few minutes to sneak across campus. It was all open back then, just a bunch of covered walkways between the classrooms. That made it easy to spot other people, so we were able to hide whenever we saw a teacher or janitor coming our way. You'd think that would also make it easier for them to spot us, but we knew that school better than they ever would. After all, we'd spent half our lives there.

(beat)

The sun was low in the sky by the time we cleared the last row of classrooms and finally saw the well. The weeds were up to our knees as we raced across the lumpy ground, but we somehow managed not to trip. We didn't dare to look back. We just knew that if we did, a teacher or janitor would round the corner at that very moment and notice us. We couldn't risk that -- not when we were so close.

(beat)

We made it to the well undetected. It was right up against a chainlink fence that ran all the way around the school, nestled in a corner that was overgrown with a towering plant I always suspected to be poison ivy. It hung over the well, hiding that corner of the field in a strangely foreboding patch of shadow. As we got closer, I suddenly began to feel a little nervous. Something didn't feel right -- and it wasn't the feeling I usually got when I was doing something wrong. Trust me, I'd learned to ignore that a long time ago.

(MORE)

ANNA SHERIDAN (CONT'D)

I wasn't afraid of getting in trouble. Somehow, I knew that something much worse was about to happen.

(beat)

Of course, at age 10, I could hardly think of anything worse than being caught by an adult, and Amy didn't seem to be worried... Or at least, she didn't want to show it. She just pushed on through the thick weeds and brambles towards the outer edge of the well. I put on my bravest face and followed her in. Close up, the well was bigger than I thought it would be: its edge was a few inches above my head, and it was a little wider than I was tall. Then again -- everything feels huge at that age.

(beat)

As much as we'd rushed across the field, Amy and I both stopped a few feet from the well. I don't know if was because we were scared, or if we just wanted to make that moment last. If that was the reason, then it worked. That's the only time with her I can still remember -- really remember, like it actually happened to me: her standing by my side in a place that neither of us should've been as the sun went down behind us. And even in that moment, I still can't remember her face.

(beat)

I went first, I think. Or at least, I started walking towards the well first, but Amy was always faster than me. She reached the well before I did, put her hands on the side, and peered over. I don't know what she expected to see: the well was capped long before we were even born, and we both knew it. But as I watched, it was like an electric shock went through her: her fingers clamped onto the stony side of the well, and she turned so pale I was worried she might faint. She stood frozen like that for almost a minute before she staggered back, turned, and looked me straight in the eyes.

(MORE)

ANNA SHERIDAN (CONT'D)

(beat)

I've seen people standing on the edges of cliffs, afraid for their lives. I've sat next to people in hospital beds, their eyes full of fear at what comes next. That look doesn't come anywhere close to the one I saw in Amy's eyes. I don't even remember what color her eyes were, but I'll never forget the look of terror I saw in them.

(beat)

She mouthed something to me, but no sound came from her lips -- and then she turned and ran as fast as she could down the field. I didn't know what she said, but I thought it was "*Don't Look.*" So of course I did. I was even worse at making decisions back then, but I needed to know what had scared my friend so much. I went up to the well, grabbed the edge, and stood up on my toes. Amy was a few inches taller than me and she still had to stretch to look inside, so it was much harder for me to get a good look. I craned my neck and finally got over the edge, still fully expecting to see a plastic or metal cover a few feet down. Instead, I saw a deep shaft of wet, dark earth ending in a slick black pool of oily water. And in that water, I saw...

Anna stops, almost too frightened to continue... but she does.

ANNA SHERIDAN (CONT'D)

(changing focus)

I ran after Amy. By the time I got back to the parking lot, she was already gone and Mom was waiting for me. We drove home in silence. I knew I couldn't tell anyone about what I'd seen: Mom and Dad wouldn't believe it and neither of them were in the mood, and Kate was sleeping over at a friend's house that night. Besides, she was already too cool for ghost stories back then.

(MORE)

ANNA SHERIDAN (CONT'D)

Within a few years, it turned into one of those terrible childhood memories: the ones you're never quite sure were real, or if they were only nightmares. But if it was a nightmare, it was one I had over and over again for years.

(beat)

I peer over the edge of the well. I feel the cold, rough stone under my fingers, leeching the heat away from my body. I look down into the dark, and I see something down there: something I don't want to see, and something I want to accept even less. Something I can't fully remember when I wake up -- which is how I know for certain that I saw Amy's face, staring up at me from the bottom of that well. If I could remember, or even half-remember what I saw, then I'd know it wasn't her. That it wasn't my friend, Amy Sterling, struggling to stay afloat in the dark, freezing water, silently calling out my name while another version of her somehow ran back towards the parking lot.

Anna stops, CATCHING HER BREATH as she tries to get her thoughts in order.

ANNA SHERIDAN (CONT'D)

(slowly, determined)

I had a friend named Amy Sterling. That much I know. The name is written on the inside cover of every yearbook since second grade. Amy. Sterling. I remember she was my friend. I remember flashes, images that seem frozen in time. An elementary school parking lot on the hottest day in May. Running through an open field overgrown and neglected by time. A well. A look. A friend.

(beat)

What I can't remember is a face, a voice. I've torn these memories to shreds, looking for her. The shape of her face, the sound of her voice, the way it felt to be around her when the whole world felt like it was falling apart.

(MORE)

ANNA SHERIDAN (CONT'D)

Anything, just to assure me she was real.

(beat)

But this is all I have. Fragments. Impressions. And a few signatures on the inside covers of my yearbooks: the only place she now exists outside my head and this one insufficient tape. There's so much more I know I knew. So much more I wish I could remember. But the harder I look, the more it fades away, like the details of a long-forgotten dream. When I started writing this, I remembered more than I do now... I know I did. Now, I can't tell the difference between what I actually remember and what I've written down.

(beat)

For a little while, I could remember two versions of my life: one with Amy, and one without. Now I can only remember her on those days I really want to. I can take these pages out, read them to myself or to my recorder, and remember a version of my friend who never was. But its sanitized. Quantified. Solid and certain and easy to digest. God, I've even started to imagine a face for her, despite my best efforts not to. But when I think about her now, she just looks a lot like me -- a little taller, a little blonder, and a lot happier.

(beat)

I hate myself for it. That person isn't her. I know it's not her. But I can't remember that person anymore... If she ever really existed. I mean... Come on. It must have occurred to you by now. Amy. Anna. Sterling. Sheridan. I've spent a lot of time considering the possibility that she was my just my imaginary friend -- that I wrote her name in my yearbook because I was lonely and just wanted someone to sign it. But it just doesn't sit right, much as I try to make it.

(MORE)

ANNA SHERIDAN (CONT'D)

I know that, once upon a time, there was a girl named Amy Sterling who listened to her friend and paid the price for that friend's foolishness. A girl who fell through the cracks in the world. A girl who was unmade moment by moment until her foolish friend could barely remember she ever existed -- because she didn't. Yet she still left her mark on the world, however small: a few untouched signatures in her friend's yearbooks, and a friend who, every year, still says her name out loud so she doesn't forget it.

CLACK. The tape stops. SAM BREATHES OUT, as though he was holding it.

SAM BAILEY

(trying to be critical)

Well... That was...

(giving up)

Okay. It might not have anything to do with Sheridan's disappearance but -- these tapes. They're something else. There are people I know I knew, but no one else seems to remember. Things that I'm sure happened, but can't find any evidence for. Do things sometimes just -- fall through the cracks like that? Do people?

(beat)

I don't know, maybe it's just bits out of her books, but... I can't shake the feeling it's more than that. And god, do I want to shake that feeling more than anything.

(long pause)

Ah hell, my dinner's gone cold.

BEEP. The recording ends.

INT. SAM BAILEY'S HOME - BEDROOM - NIGHT

Beep. It's late at night, almost silent except for SAM'S BREATHING.

SAM BAILEY

(whispering)

I think there's someone on the stairs outside. It's about -- 10 past midnight, give or take. I already tried to take a look through the window, but there wasn't anything there. I went back to bed, but then...

Over the silence of the night, clear footsteps are heard -- loud and heavy on a set of metal stairs.

SAM BAILEY (CONT'D)

(urgent whisper)

There is someone out there.

Sam reaches over towards his nightstand, opens the drawer, and pulls out a pistol. As quietly as he can he loads it, then pulls back the slide. CHA-CHUNK.

At that moment, the sound on the stairs stops -- then the footsteps back away, getting quieter and quieter until it vanishes.

SAM SIGHS WITH RELIEF, then sets the gun down, then -- BEEP. The recording stops.

END THEME AND
CREDITS