

IN ABSENTIA

The Sheridan Tapes - Season 01, Episode 20
Recording Draft - August 26, 2020

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Based on story and characters from
"Homestead on the Corner"
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INT. AGATE SHORE POLICE DEPARTMENT - LATE EVENING

A completely empty office -- not empty like OCPD after dark, with lights buzzing and the murmur of air conditioning, but empty, dark, and lifeless. Only the wind and a light rain, dripping through the windows.

After a moment, someone walks up to a keypad and punches in a code. A metal door with a heavy lock buzzes, then swings open. Someone walks into the room beyond.

Inside, they pick up a metallic, mechanical object that sounds an awful lot like a gun -- a fact that is confirmed a moment later, when they load and cock it.

That's not what they're here for, though. They set the gun aside and unlock a heavy sounding metal drawer, sliding it open carefully. They pull out two blocks of something that sounds soft yet heavy and place them on a nearby counter.

They pull a few more items out of the drawer, then carefully press something into the soft side of the blocks. Pressing a few buttons, something begins to beep, ticking off the seconds -- a countdown. Then...

SAM BAILEY

(tired, almost muttering)

Alright... That should do the trick.

He picks up the blocks and the gun, then marches out without closing the door behind him... He isn't planning to come back.

BEEP

The inside of Sam's office, in a station still silent and empty, but obviously alive compared to Agate Shore.

MARIA SOL

(bored, annoyed)

So... Sam left to get some fresh air about an hour ago, and still hasn't come back. I don't know what he's doing, but he did look pretty freaked out when he left. I don't know why -- I just mentioned Agate Shore, and he lost his shit. I mean, maybe it messed with people out here a little more than I thought, but still...

(beat)

(MORE)

MARIA SOL (CONT'D)

Anyways, I would've just left, but I get the feeling he'd arrest me if I did -- as if he wasn't already slowing me down enough. So I've just been sitting in here for the last hour, waiting for him to show up. But, since it doesn't look like he's coming back anytime soon, I figured I'd get started on some more tapes. I know he wanted us to listen together, but honestly, screw that. He shouldn't even have them in the first place, and he can listen to the recording later.

Maria turns and begins rummaging through the tapes in the case.

MARIA SOL (CONT'D)

Let's see, next one is... Huh.

(confused)

There's no number on this one.

(flips it over)

There's nothing on this one, actually... No label at all. Or maybe there was -- there's some sticker residue, but it looks like it's been torn off. That's helpful.

Maria takes it out and slips it into the recorder.

MARIA SOL (CONT'D)

Tape... Uh, zero, I guess. Keyword unknown, date unknown, digitized on April 30, 2019 at 0100 Pacific Standard Time by Maria Sol, Sam Bailey *in absentia*. Marker.

Maria claps, then rolls the tape.

CLICK

A markedly different burst of static from Sheridan's tapes, which resolves into a quiet office with a light rain falling outside. After a moment.

SAM BAILEY (RECORDED)

I don't even... I'm... Sorry. I should've written something down before I got started. I didn't think... I mean... God, where to even start?

MARIA SOL

(confused)

Is that... Sam?

SAM BAILEY (RECORDED)

(flipping through papers)

I've got a hundred pages of case notes here, but even I can't seem to put the damn things in order. I thought I knew what was going on, but I think I forgot something... Somewhere. Somehow.

(beat)

This was the ninth. Tenth if you count Richard Seaver, and I do. Most people don't, but I think...

(hears something that isn't audible on the tape)

No. No no no no no, it's not real, it's not real, it's not...

(cuts off)

Sorry. I... Sorry. Everything's just... With things like they are...

(beat)

Let's start from the beginning.

CLICK

Maria stops the recording.

MARIA SOL

(confused)

Okay... What the hell is this? Did Sam put one of his tapes in with Anna's? Doesn't sound like him, to be honest. In fact, it *really* doesn't sound like him... He sounds even more freaked out than usual. Maybe it's an old recording he made? But then why would it be in here with all of these? Maybe Anna... What, found it somewhere?

Maria pauses.

MARIA SOL (CONT'D)

(slightly worried)

I should probably... I mean, I probably shouldn't listen to this without...

(beat)

(MORE)

MARIA SOL (CONT'D)

What the hell am I saying? It's not like he showed Anna the same courtesy.

She hits play.

CLICK

The sound of a tape being fed into a player on the other side of the recording, and then rewinding.

CLICK. The sound of a busy, bustling, and lively police precinct... Completely unlike any version of OCPD we've heard.

SAM BAILEY (RECORDED)

So, um... It's January -- six?
Yeah, January six, twenty... does this thing auto datestamp? I think... Let me look at the instructions here.

Sam flips loudly through a large book.

SAM BAILEY (RECORDED) (CONT'D)

J****S.

(beat)

You've gotta be f****ing kidding me. This thing has an auto-censor? Who the h**l decided that was a good idea -- oh, Mary H. Mother of C****t.

A LONG SIGH from an annoyed Bailey.

SAM BAILEY (CONT'D)

Okay. This is Detective Sam Bailey of the Agate Shore Police Department, recording for the first time with this d**n contraption because Jerry said, 'oh, it's easier than typing everything out,' and I guess that's right because that computer's just another d**n contraption I have to work with on this job, and I might as well save some time for all the other nothing I've got to do around here...

(SIGHS)

(MORE)

SAM BAILEY (CONT'D)

Look, I'm not just getting on this thing to hear the sound of my own voice, is what I'm saying. God knows I don't like it. But Oslow County's finally joining the 21st century and accepting audio logs in place of case files, so here we are. Here -- we -- are...

CLICK

Maria stops the recording again.

MARIA SOL

(stunned)

He was in Agate Shore. God, of course he was -- no wonder he was so upset about me mentioning it. But if he was there at the end... I mean, it definitely sounds like he was from the first bit. Maybe even after the last drowning. Huh. Wonder if I skip forward a bit...

Maria presses the fast forward button, then...

CLICK

Back in the busy office, at another time.

SAM BAILEY (RECORDED)

...and I swear to God if Alan doesn't stop stapling both copies of his reports together I'm going to take him out back and shoot him myself... it's an act of mercy.

Bailey takes a deep breath, clearly at the end of a long diatribe.

SAM BAILEY (RECORDED) (CONT'D)

Sorry, that's... that probably shouldn't be on this tape. "Official business only." God, they even wrote that on top of it in big red letters in case I forgot. But who else am I supposed to talk to about these things? I mean, is it really more professional to complain to a coworker than a machine?

(MORE)

SAM BAILEY (RECORDED) (CONT'D)

And I can't talk to anybody in town -- word travels too quick. I tell Jim about Alan, Jim tells Mary, Mary tells Abby, Abby tells Jerry and Jerry tells Alan. If this gets played in county court someday -- which I find unlikely -- nobody in Agate Shore will ever hear it. Probably.

Sam pauses.

SAM BAILEY (RECORDED) (CONT'D)

I'm -- I'm avoiding the issue. I guess. Just don't want to talk about it.

(pause)

One of the kids went missing at school today. The Martins boy, Pat. Good kid. Too shy for his own good, sure, but smart. Curious. Couple of the other kids saw him wander off into the lake bed... it was an Agate hunting trip. There were too many kids for Miss Maisey to keep track of, and the volunteer parent bailed at the last second. Saw him at Chuck's last night -- he's probably still hungover.

As he speaks, a siren has been getting louder outside. He notices it for the first time.

SAM BAILEY (RECORDED) (CONT'D)

That's -- that's an ambulance, not a patrol car. God, I hope that's not...

The office door BANGS OPEN.

ALAN

SAM!

CLICK

The tape fast forwards, and then comes back to...

The office, silent except for the creaking of crickets outside. It's late, and no one's around besides Bailey.

SAM BAILEY (RECORDED)

There's been another one. J***s. No -- another three.
(MORE)

SAM BAILEY (RECORDED) (CONT'D)

Couple of teenagers from Arrowhead, up for Spring break. They were car-camping out on the lake bed, smoking or drinking or... you know. Whatever kids do out there. And Alan went out when he saw their jeep parked out there. He...

Bailey has to collect his thoughts. He's having a hard time believing any of this.

SAM BAILEY (RECORDED) (CONT'D)

It was just like Pat. Just stone dead in the middle of the desert, with their lungs full of water. Salt water.

(beat)

Then Alan tries to tell me that when he got to the car, it was flooded all the way to the windows, and the kids were floating in it, that when he opened the door it all spilled out and soaked into the ground before anyone else got there. I mean, god Alan, people are dying out there! The least you could do is stop cracking jokes about...

CLICK

The tape fast forwards, then returns to...

The sound of faint, ragged breath, as though someone has just stopped crying and is trying to recover.

SAM BAILEY (RECORDED) (CONT'D)

Alan's dead.

A long pause. SAM SWALLOWS BACK TEARS, then...

SAM BAILEY (RECORDED) (CONT'D)

He -- It was just like all the other others. Water, in his lungs. His skin colder than it should've been out on the lake bed in the sun. The coroner said the said thing as he did with the others: he drowned. On saltwater. In the middle of the desert.

Another long pause, before...

SAM BAILEY (RECORDED) (CONT'D)
I'm sorry, I -- I can't.

CLICK

The tape fast forwards, arriving at...

The morgue. Florescent lights buzz overhead, filling the space.

SAM BAILEY (RECORDED)
This is the first time I've recorded anything in a while. I couldn't just -- sit in my office. I couldn't -- I couldn't breath in there. It felt like, like I was...

He can't say it, but it lingers there.

SAM BAILEY (RECORDED) (CONT'D)
I don't know why I thought it'd be better here, of all places... But it is. I couldn't get away from them in the office. Oslow sent up a new team of investigators -- they think it's a serial killer. Someone with a fixation on the old lake. But I...

He breaks off again, shuffling in his seat.

SAM BAILEY (RECORDED) (CONT'D)
It took me a while to figure out how to move this thing. They had it mounted to my desk, but I did manage to get it off. But I couldn't take it home. Maybe it's quieter there, but -- I couldn't just tell it to the recorder. I had to -- I needed to...

Another silence.

SAM BAILEY (RECORDED) (CONT'D)
I'm sorry Alan. I should've know what this was right from the start. The signs were there -- the lake bed, the drownings, the weather -- h**l, even Ms. Miller's flooded basement. It's so, g*****n obvious even you could've figured it out, if only -- if only I told anyone.

Sam pauses, contemplating.

SAM BAILEY (RECORDED) (CONT'D)

I grew up here in Agate Shore. I know, I know, I play the big city cop dragged here against my will -- and that's also kind of true. When I went to school, I never wanted to end up back here. Nobody else would take me, though. Guess I was too bad with computers to actually fit in anywhere else. Or maybe it was Agate Shore, trying to...

(pause)

Back when I was a kid, there was actually a shore. There was actually a lake. You're too young to remember it -- h**l I'm almost too young myself. They build the dam when I was in third grade, and the lake was gone the next summer. But before that, I was always out there with my parents. My mom and dad would swim out on the lake early in the morning, then teach me to swim in the shallows. We went out there as often as they could, sometimes three or four times a week in the warm season. I was a pretty good swimmer by the time I started kindergarten, and I decided that I would do what my parents did -- swim out into the middle of the water and float in the sun. They would never let me go out that far -- my dad would jump in and pull me back to shore and tell me it wasn't safe out there. So one day, when my parents went back to the car to fetch the towels, I jumped into the lake and just started swimming.

(beat)

I was a good swimmer -- but not half as good as I thought I was. It was late February, and the lake was still cold. I made it about twenty yards before my arms started seizing up. I tried kicking to keep going, but my legs were already stiff, and I couldn't seem to stay afloat. And then my legs froze too. And then I was sinking.

(beat)

(MORE)

SAM BAILEY (RECORDED) (CONT'D)

You know how, when you're swimming in a lake, and you open your eyes? How there's that kind of grey-green glow all around you, and you can't tell which way is up? That's what it was like. Except I knew I was going deeper and deeper by the second. I tried to scream before I went under, but that just filled my lungs with water. I was drowning, and stupid as I was I knew that there was no one coming to save me. And then I heard it: the voice. I -- I don't know if it was the lake itself talking, or some creature or monster or what. For a long time I thought it was just my own imagination or that... Maybe it was God. I don't think so now.

(pause)

"What would you do to save yourself?" it asked. "Anything," I thought. "What would you give to save yourself?" it asked. "Anything," I said. "Who would you give to save yourself?" I wasn't thinking clearly -- my brain couldn't get the oxygen. And I was afraid... So, so afraid. "Anyone," I managed before I blacked out.

SAM TAKES A DEEP, SHUDDERING BREATH.

SAM BAILEY (RECORDED) (CONT'D)

When I woke up, I was in the hospital with my parents watching over me. I never got a straight answer out of them about what happened. They said I made it out of the water just in time, but they never said how I got out or who pulled me out. But I could still hear the sound of waves in my head -- I still hear them now, every once in a while.

(beat)

For years I thought one of them swam in and saved me, but didn't want to say it... That they didn't want to scare me. Now I'm not so sure. I never got the chance to really ask them. The lake took them both back a few months later.

(pause)

(MORE)

SAM BAILEY (RECORDED) (CONT'D)
 Restore. Restore. Restore.
 Anything. Anything. Anyone.

CLICK

Maria stops the tape.

MARIA SOL
 (muttering to herself)
 What the hell...
 (thinking this through)
 Those questions... They're the same
 one Anna heard in Tahoe and
 Kingstown. God, no wonder Sam was
 so quick to point out they were in
 Agate Shore as well.
 (beat, then confused)
 But then why did he... Why was he
 so skeptical about all this? I
 mean, if he had an encounter with
 this thing when he was a kid, then
 why would he think Anna was making
 it all up?
 (long pause)
 And I don't know what that
 "restore" thing was about... The
 questions, sure, but... Restore
 what?

Maria pauses. She doesn't have an answer.

MARIA SOL (CONT'D)
 Screw it, I'm skipping to the end.

Maria presses the fast forward button. The tape whines before she stops it and presses play again.

CLICK

Back in Sam's old office, with a quiet fan running.

SAM BAILEY (RECORDED)
 It's finally stopped raining.
 Finally. Took Russel out for a walk
 for the first time in weeks
 yesterday night. I just couldn't
 sleep, and then the rain stopped,
 so I...

He pauses, then continues.

SAM BAILEY (RECORDED) (CONT'D)

The gutters were still flooded. Nothing drains properly here -- guess it's cause we live in the desert, despite what the weather wanted us to think. I had my boots on, and Russel was having a blast with all the puddles. He was going to make a mess of the carpet when we got back, but I didn't care. I'm not trying to impress anyone, not anyway. There wasn't much to look at except the streetlights. I could smell the water, though. I know it's impossible, but -- it smelled like the ocean. Like salt. I was hypnotized by it -- by the streetlights and the smell and something... something at the back of my mind. The sound of waves.

(beat)

And then the lights went out again.

He BREATHES IN WITH A SHUDDER.

SAM BAILEY (RECORDED) (CONT'D)

Russel started barking right away. I noticed it too. I couldn't see anything, but -- I felt someone watching. Waiting. Considering me. There wasn't a moon last night, and what was left of the rain clouds was hiding the stars. But it wasn't dark. Not like it should've been.

He pauses, trying to think of how to put this.

SAM BAILEY (RECORDED) (CONT'D)

You know how, when you're swimming in a lake, and you open your eyes? How there's that kind of grey-green glow all around you? It was like that, except if you were at the very bottom of the deepest lake you could think of, and there was barely any of that light, but it was still all around you -- no up, no down, and no real source you could see. And you look up to try and find the sun, the way back to the surface, and -- it's gone. And it's... It's gone.

(MORE)

SAM BAILEY (RECORDED) (CONT'D)

And then I felt like there was water in my lungs, and I was coughing and choking on the ground, trying to breath...

He CHOKES UP, as though feeling the same way now. After a moment, he SWALLOWS and starts again.

SAM BAILEY (RECORDED) (CONT'D)

Russel saved me. He was barking at the shadows behind one of the dead streetlights. Then I thought I saw something moving there -- something tall and pale, but I only saw it for a second. My eyes were watering -- I was crying. And then Russel was licking my face, snapping me out of -- whatever it was. Then I was crying again. Jesus. Crying over the fact I was alive

(beat)

Oh yeah. By the way, the profanity filter's broken. I haven't tried to fix it. The filter, the lights, the generators -- everything keeps breaking down. Everything except the cars. Those are still working. They have to be... people just keep leaving.

CLICK.

The tape fast forwards, arriving at...

Somewhere in the distance, a car drives off, fading slowly into the silence. At last...

SAM BAILEY (RECORDED) (CONT'D)

Jerry found the guy. The guy from the bar that night last January. The pale one, with black hair and blue eyes and nice clothes singing in another language. He was murdered behind the supermarket. He was... He'd been dead four days before anyone noticed the smell. There was no one taking out the garbage anymore.

(beat)

There wasn't any water in his lungs this time. The autopsy said he died of shock, completely unrelated to the other deaths. Could be.

(MORE)

SAM BAILEY (RECORDED) (CONT'D)

He was older than I thought he'd be -- 67, if his ID was legit. And he did have some this time -- just an expired driver's license from Montana. Maybe it wasn't another drowning... But he'd been out in the sun for days. It could've evaporated, or drained out, or -- something. Anything. I don't know.

A long pause.

SAM BAILEY (RECORDED) (CONT'D)

His name was Richard Seaver.

CLICK

Sam in his office, now utterly alone.

SAM BAILEY (RECORDED) (CONT'D)

It's over. They're all gone. Everyone. They were already leaving, and this was just the last straw.

(pause)

Jim was out on the lake. Nobody knows what he was doing out there. He worked a full night at Chuck's he should have just gone home, to Mary, and...

(beat)

But someone on the highway saw him wandering out there alone -- alone on the salt flat.. They couldn't tell if he was moving away from town or running towards it, but they pulled off and drove over to him. By the time they got to where they thought they'd seen him...

Sam pauses.

SAM BAILEY (RECORDED) (CONT'D)

It was just like all the others. Almost. But he had a note in his hand. It was pretty well crushed and soaked almost all the way through -- it pretty much fell apart the moment I pulled it out of his hand, but... There was only one word on it, written over and over again. Restore. Restore. Restore...

CLACK

The tape ends. Maria sits back in her chair, stunned.

MARIA SOL

Restore? Restore -- what? The town?
The lake? Was the lake trying to...
Bring itself back, somehow? Is that
why people started drowning? Is
that why it all started...

She stops, uncertain.

MARIA SOL (CONT'D)

How did he... If Sam only found
that note right before the dam
broke, then -- how did he know
about it back in the morgue?

(sudden horrified
realization)

God, if he made some kind of deal
with this thing and that's why this
all happened -- then how much did
he know about it? How much of it
did he have a part in? Was he...

The door suddenly opens behind Maria. She jumps in her seat.

MARIA SOL (CONT'D)

(nervous)

Sam! What the hell are you...?

(notices something)

Jesus Sam, you're bleeding!

SAM BAILEY

(slightly out of it)

Am I?

(touches the back of his
head)

Oh... I guess I am. De Witt must
have hit me...

MARIA SOL

(confused)

De Witt? I thought you said he was
dead?

SAM BAILEY

(CHUCKLES DARKLY)

It's a long, loooong story.

MARIA SOL

Is everything okay?

SAM BAILEY
 (sounding slightly
 unhinged)
 No... No, everything is not okay.
 You were right: It's the echo. It
 replaced Anna. And it's growing.

MARIA SOL
 (worried -- both about
 him, and what he's
 saying)
 What do you mean... Growing?

SAM BAILEY
 (paranoid rambling)
 Exactly what I said. It's using
 Anna's face to get people to trust
 it. It's learning. It's trying to
 make more duplicates. I don't know
 how many it's already made, but
 we... We need to...

Sam takes a step forward... Then collapses in a heap. Maria
 jumps up from her seat.

MARIA SOL
 Sam? Sam, are you okay?

SAM BAILEY
 (muttering, half
 unconscious)
 Have to stop it... Have to stop
 it... Not again... Can't let it
 happen again...

MARIA SOL
 (worried)
 Let what happen again?

It's too late. SAM SNORES SLIGHTLY on the floor.

MARIA SOL (CONT'D)
 Shit... I need to get him out of
 here.

Maria starts to cross the room, then pauses. She pulls the
 tape out of the player.

MARIA SOL (CONT'D)
 Sorry, it just... It looks like
 there's something on the other side
 of the tape. I just...
 (beat, then, determined)
 Sorry Sam. I need to know.

She puts the tape back in the player and hits play.

CLICK

The static resolves into a silent, dead police office -- the same on from the opening.

After a moment, someone we now know is Sam walks up to a keypad and punches in a code. A metal door with a heavy lock buzzes, then swings open loudly.

Sam walks into the room beyond. Inside, he picks up a gun, loads it, and cocks it.

That's not what he's here for, though. He sets the gun aside and unlock a heavy sounding metal drawer, sliding it open carefully to pull out two blocks of something that sounds soft yet heavy and places them on a nearby counter.

He pull a few more items out of the drawer, then carefully press something into the soft side of the blocks. Pressing a few buttons on another item, something begins to beep, ticking off the seconds -- a countdown. Then...

SAM BAILEY (RECORDED)
(tired, almost muttering)
Alright... That should do the
trick.

He picks up the blocks and the gun, then marches out without closing the door behind him... He isn't planning to come back.

CLICK

A few hours later. Sam pulls up to the end of a long gravel driveway in the pouring rain. He kills the engine, pauses for a moment, then reaches over to the passenger seat.

Unzipping a bag, he pulls out the gun, which he cocks before climbing out of the car. The recorder keeps running inside the car, as his footsteps recede into the distance. After a moment...

TWO THUNDEROUS BOOMS, a few seconds apart. Sam's footsteps are heard as he runs back towards the car, climbing inside. PANTING HEAVILY, he turns the key and guns the engine.

After a few moments, SAM BEGINS TO COUGH VIOLENTLY, as though he's drowning. The tires squeal, and a semi-truck's horn blares.

He tries to turn, but he skids out in the rain, sliding into the roadside barrier. The car flips over, and the recorder bounces around before....

CLICK

A few minutes later. The car is burning. Sam grabs the recorder before kicking at the windshield, GRUNTING with the impact. After a moment it shatters, and he stumbles out.

He scrambles away from the car as the rain continues to pour. In the distance, sirens can be heard, but he moves away from them and off the road.

CLICK

A few hours later. Sam is marching along the dry, deserted landscape alone. In the distance, a coyote begins to howl, and a train whistle blows.

Sam pauses, then cocks his gun again before marching on. But before he gets much farther, he stumbles slightly over a loose rock and falls with a FAINT GRUNT.

There's a long moment of silence, the train still audible in the distance. But eventually...

A pair of heavy, booted footsteps approach Sam's unconscious body. They pause, then run over when they spot him.

BILL TYLER

(into radio)

5-540 to dispatch, I have an unconscious male just off Kaiser Boulevard, near the Myers intersection -- looks like an Agate Shore police officer.

DISPATCH

10-4 5-540: EMTs are en route.

BILL TYLER

(into radio)

10-4 dispatch.

(notices tape recorder)

What is that?

He picks it up, turns it over in his hands, and accidentally hits the stop button.

CLICK

A few hours later, in the emergency ward of Oslow Community Hospital. Silent and still for a moment, before someone shifts in their seat.

CHIEF

It's remarkably lucky that you're alive right now. I do hope you know that, in whatever way you can. That you know just how fortunate it is that you survived your little... Encounter. For both of us.

(pause)

I do wonder how much of it you'll remember, though. Really remember, that is. Experiences like this... They tend to recede into the realm of the half-remembered. Of dreams and nightmares. And if the doctors are right about the extent of your injuries... Then it might be gone completely.

(pause)

I do hope it's only the memory that's lost. We need the rest of you here: your abilities, your obsession, your drive. If any of this is going to work, then we need all that you have to offer us.

(beat, then CHUCKLES)

I suppose we'll just have to wait and see, won't we. Yes... Wait and see what comes out of all this.

(beat, then leans in)

Make it a good one, yes? For your sake, if no one else's.

CLACK

The tape ends. Maria sits back, then looks at the still unconscious Sam.

MARIA SOL

(horrified realization)

Holy shit.

BEEP. The recording ends.

ROLL END THEME
AND CREDITS