

"TIME"
The Sheridan Tapes - B-Side 04
Recording Draft - December 10, 2020

Written by

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Based on story and characters from
"Homestead on the Corner"
By Trevor Van Winkle

CLICK

A stormy night heard through the sides of a converted camper-van. The wind is muffled, but occasionally a strong gust shakes the van on its axles.

ANNA IS PANTING SLIGHTLY, gripped in the lingering aftershocks of a nightmare. She fumbles slightly with her recorder and struggles to speak with her usual clarity.

ANNA SHERIDAN
(breathless, struggling to
focus)
God, I'm sorry, I... Fuck, hold on.

She sets the recorder down on the kitchen counter, grabs her pillow, AND SCREAMS INTO IT FOR A LONG MOMENT.

After she's done, she sets the pillow back down, picks up the recorder, AND TAKES A DEEP, CALMING BREATH.

ANNA SHERIDAN (CONT'D)
(rapidly regaining
control)
Okay... That's better. Sort of. I'm still shaking, but I think that's just the cold. I should turn on the heater, but I need to get this recorded before I forget it. Again.
(beat, then almost mantra-like)
Amy. Amy Sterling. My friend. The one I almost thought I imagined. She was real. She existed. She was pulled out of time by something that lived in the well behind our school. And I'm not just saying that because I wrote it down and gave myself a false memory. It happened. It was real. And I know it's real because... Because everything I am started on that day. My life doesn't make sense if she didn't disappear. If I didn't try to find her and failed, over and over again. If I haven't been trying to live up to a memory I didn't even know I had. Maybe she didn't exist in anyone else's life, but she was a part of mine. Not just a part of my memory, but a part of who I am, even now.
(beat, then a little frustrated)
(MORE)

ANNA SHERIDAN (CONT'D)

Even if it makes no sense. Even if it breaks every law of physics and twists space and time into impossible tangles, just to make it fit. I'm sure Ren would shake their head and point to Occam's razor: The simplest solution is usually correct. But this...

Anna pauses, THEN GROANS IN ANNOYANCE. A deep hum rises on the tape.

ANNA SHERIDAN (CONT'D)

(frustrated, combative)

No, no, don't slip away now. I know this. It happened. This is my life, and I'm not going to let you take it away from me. I don't care if it didn't really happen, it happened to me, and I *will* remember it.

The hum fades, and Anna sits back slightly.

ANNA SHERIDAN (CONT'D)

That's better. Now: Amy. I've already written down most of what I can remember -- everything up to the day we looked into the well. But what happened after that is... A bit fuzzier. There are images, but they're disconnected... And where I can still remember moments, like that time at prom with Samantha, they're like still photos cut into the middle of another movie -- flashing up on screen just long enough to seem like they're part of the scene, but still disconnected. When I'm working with Maria, she'll sometimes overlay a couple of different clips and play them at the same time to compare them. It honestly gives me a headache whenever she does that, but it's the same feeling I get when I try to remember Amy... slightly different versions of the same moment blended together. Where they overlap I can see patterns -- people, objects, places, sounds, ideas, feelings... And a faint outline of Amy. She's still there... But at the same time, she's not.

(MORE)

ANNA SHERIDAN (CONT'D)

(beat)

I don't see any of that when I'm awake, of course... But when I'm asleep? When I start to dream and the images all rush in at once? That's when I can see the truth... Though it has a nasty habit of slipping away the moment I open my eyes.

(beat)

I'm sure most people assume I have nightmares all the time. But I really don't. I dream a lot, sure, but I can't remember most of them, and I can count on two hands the number of times I've had genuine nightmares as an adult. I had more as a kid, but... Now? Maybe I'm just desensitized, but most of the time they feel like any other dream.

(beat, then a little somber)

But not this time. Not this dream.

(beat as she collects her thoughts, then begins the story)

I realized what was happening to Amy almost as soon as it started. I always assumed I didn't notice until after high school, but now I can remember... There were a lot of days when she just didn't turn up to class. No doctor's note, no explanation, just... Not there. Most of the time, she would just show up for class the next day and give me an odd look whenever I asked where she'd been yesterday. I stopped asking pretty quickly.

(beat)

It was easy to ignore at first. Even with what I saw in the well, a few scattered absences was hardly something to worry about -- right? That was just -- normal. But as the years went by, the absences became longer and more frequent. Sometimes, whole weeks would go by without her. One time, I asked our teacher if Amy was sick or on a trip with her family.

(MORE)

ANNA SHERIDAN (CONT'D)

His face scrunched up as if he was trying to remember something, before he shook his head and asked who I was talking about. I told him that Amy Sterling, one of *his students*, hadn't been in class all week. I pointed to her empty desk, and his face scrunched up again, like he was trying to grasp at something that kept darting away from him... Or like he had a headache. I thought I could feel one coming on as well, though I didn't think much of it. Then he opened his mouth as if to answer, and... Well... Here's where the memory gets fuzzy. The image I have of Mr. Philips begins to darken around the edges, and my memory of what he says grows thick and muffled, like he's speaking through wool. And then... The memory ends. The next I can remember, Amy's back in class, seemingly unaware that she'd been missing.

(beat)

Admittedly, all of my childhood memories are a little hazy, so I don't know if those two memories are a day apart, or a week, or the same day. I don't even know if either of them really happened... Or how many times they happened. But I do remember a persistent unease that haunted me all through high school. Maybe that was just the fear of being a deeply closeted teenager in a deeply conservative town, but... I think it was more than that. A feeling like -- the world I lived in wasn't entirely solid. Like certain days just kept happening over and over again... Or entire weeks. Or entire years. Like I was stuck in loops, going round and round but never getting anywhere I wanted to go. And then finally... There was a day I couldn't remember, no matter how hard I tried. A day that just came back to me as I was trying to sleep.

(beat)

(MORE)

ANNA SHERIDAN (CONT'D)

It was the morning before Christmas break, Junior Year. It was freezing and snowy outside, but not quite enough to cancel school. I got to class early that day: dad insisted on taking me the moment the snowplow cleared the road in front of our house. I sat in my desk in the back corner of the classroom, watching the ice crystalizing in the corners of the huge, single pane windows. It split and branched into hypnotic, spiraling patterns of brilliant white that held me transfixed, and I was so focused on trying to follow their shape that when the bell finally rang, I looked up and was surprised to see the entire classroom full of students... With one notable exception.

(beat)

At that point, Amy had been absent for nearly a month now, so I wasn't surprised to see her seat empty. I was, however, frustrated that Ms. Offerman didn't even seem to notice. So naturally, I stood up, marched up to her desk, and demanded to know where Amy was. She looked up at me, perplexed, and asked who I was talking about. I repeated Amy's name, saying that she was a student in her class, that she sat in the desk next to mine, and that she'd been missing for weeks at this point. Ms. Offerman's brow folded into that all-too-familiar expression of confusion, and for a moment I thought she might remember... And then she sighed and said she had no idea who I was talking about.

(beat, annoyed)

She then asked if I was feeling alright, and I just about lost it. Before I could, however, I noticed one of the worksheets in the pile on her desk was poking out in just the right way for me to see the name on it. Before she realized what I was doing, I pulled it loose, spilling the rest of the assignments across the floor.

(MORE)

ANNA SHERIDAN (CONT'D)

Ms. Offerman demanded to know what I was doing, but I just held the worksheet up triumphantly and pointed: Amy's name, written in her distinctive, beautiful handwriting. She was real. She was in this class. And now I had proof.

(beat)

Offerman frowned when she saw it, grabbing the test out of my hand and looking closer. Then she pulled out her attendance book and scanned the list of names... Once, twice, three times. Her frown deepened, and she held the book up for my inspection. The list was alphabetical, and my eye was immediately drawn to my own name, near the bottom of the list: Sheridan, Anna. Amy's name should have been printed right below it. But instead of Sheridan, Anna and Sterling, Amy, there was my name, an obvious blank, and then Travis, Michael. It almost looked like a printing error... There was a faint smudge just below my name, as if someone had tried to erase something and instead just smeared the ink across the page. Curious, I turned the sheet over, looking down the length of it in the direction of the blur. The moment I did, Amy's name leapt off the page, stretched out and slightly faded like a forced perspective illusion finally seen in the right way.

(beat)

I look up at Ms. Offerman, and saw the same look of confusion on her face as I'm sure was on mine. She opened her mouth to say something, but all I could hear was that same muffled, distant noise I'd heard with Mr. Philips years ago. And then the memory seems to fade... Or perhaps the world did. I remember feeling dizzy and sick as that overwhelming feeling of wrongness and unreality washed over me... And then I was staring at the ice in the corners of the window.

(beat)

(MORE)

ANNA SHERIDAN (CONT'D)

I looked around, the feeling of déjà vu so strong I could almost taste it. The bell rang. Amy wasn't there. Close to panic, I stood up and stormed over to Ms. Offerman's desk, told her Amy was missing, and pulled the worksheet from the stack, just like before. She checked the attendance list. I saw Amy's name stretched out and faded on the page, and watched the world go black before I found myself back at the window. Again. Ice. Desk. Bell. Aisle. Worksheet. List. Confusion. Black. Ice, Desk, bell, aisle, worksheet, list... Was her name fainter now? Confusion. Black. Ice. Bell. Aisle. Worksheet... Where was it? Oh, there it is. List. Confusion. Black. Ice... Over and over again. Small details changed each time... Ms. Offerman reacted slightly differently, or Amy's name grew fainter on the page, or I tried to tell her that we'd done this all before. I have no idea how many times I went through that loop. I just know that the attempts eventually started to blur together, and I began to feel a headache setting in.

(beat)

Finally, something changed. The world reappeared around me, and I found myself staring at the ice on the window yet again. I didn't wait for the bell, but stormed over to Ms. Offerman's desk while the classroom was still mostly empty and grabbed the attendance list myself. I intended to show her the blank space where Amy's name should have been before class started, to try and convince her before whatever this was had a chance to reset us... And then I froze dead. The space was gone. Michael Travis' name was now directly below mine. I tried to look for Amy's worksheet, but the moment I did Ms. Offerman walked through the door and saw me going through her desk. Rather than try to explain myself, I turned and ran out into the hall.

(MORE)

ANNA SHERIDAN (CONT'D)

She yelled after me, but I didn't listen. I finally realized, after all these years, what was happening to Amy... And I remembered where it all started.

(beat)

It wasn't fun running down the snow-covered sidewalks to my old elementary school, but desperation and fear outweighed the numbing cold seeping through my boots. By the time I reached the field, I could barely feel my fingers or toes, but I ignored what I knew all-too-well as an early sign of hypothermia and rushed to the side of the well. It looked smaller than I remembered it... Less perfect and terrifying and more mundane, like the leftover heap of stones it really was. I don't know what I was planning to do, or if I even had a plan. I just knew that this was where Amy had first started disappearing out of my life all those years ago. If there was anywhere I could find answers, it would be here.

(beat)

I nearly went over the side of the well in my hurry. It came up to about my waist now, and I ran square into it before I could stop myself. But I caught myself before I could fall, overcompensating and throwing myself backwards into the soft snow. Or... Mostly soft. It still drove the breath out of my lungs, and for a moment the edges of my vision grew dark and fuzzy. I fought back unconsciousness, somehow sure that if I blacked out now, whatever was causing this would never allow me to return to the well. So I forced myself to take a deep breath of frigid air, then slowly got back to my feet. My whole body hurt and I felt the edges of a migraine pressing in on the front of my skull. Even so, I walked carefully to the edge of the well, looked down, and saw two things.

(beat)

(MORE)

ANNA SHERIDAN (CONT'D)

Not two different things that were both in the well. No. That would have been too easy. I saw two different versions of the same well. I could see the dark, raw earth that I'd seen all those years ago, stretching down for what seemed like miles before terminating in a pool of black, icy water. But at the same time, I also saw a simple, unadorned plastic cap set just above ground level, hiding the shaft from view. The two overlaid one another, shifting and fading as though my eyes were unsure what version of reality I was supposed to be seeing at that moment. It was like... Looking at a magic eye picture after you've figured out the hidden image. Your brain knows what it's supposed to see, but it also tries to interpret what's actually there at the same time, so the two images swim in and out of one another as you try to focus on just one. The headache grew stronger, and I saw flashes of color that weren't really there. And then... I fell.

(beat)

I have no idea if someone or something came up behind me and pushed me in, or if I just lost my balance without warning. But no matter which it was, I fell... Fell for what seemed like miles. My stomach turned and lurched as I watched the damp sides of the well fly past me, the icy water getting closer and closer until... I found myself sitting back in Ms. Offerman's chemistry class, staring at the patterns of ice on the window.

Anna pauses, thinking that through.

ANNA SHERIDAN (CONT'D)

I didn't try to go back to the well again. When I turned around, Amy was sitting across the aisle from me with a concerned look on her face, asking if I was alright.

(MORE)

ANNA SHERIDAN (CONT'D)

Apparently I'd dozed off and was making noises in my sleep. For a moment I thought about telling her what just happened... But I just said that I was fine -- I just had a bit of a headache.

(beat)

I tried not to think about it, and within a few hours I genuinely did forget about the well, like I always did. I didn't remember it until just now, and that's only because my subconscious somehow managed to turn that memory into a nightmare. And even as I'm recording this, I can feel it slipping away again. Whatever's in that well -- whatever rewrote history around me just to delete Amy from existence -- I guess it doesn't like loose ends. Ren once told me that "the universe abhors a paradox." I guess you can't get much more paradoxical than remembering something that both did, and didn't, happen.

Anna pauses, thinking.

ANNA SHERIDAN (CONT'D)

(with growing worry)

The thing I just can't figure out is *why*. Why did Amy disappear? Why did the well even take her in the first place? And why the hell can I even remember any of it? If history changed, then my memories should have done the same -- right? I've spent so long just trying to remember *what* happened that I've never taken the time to consider *why* it happened. Why this thing looped time and space around me just to keep me from learning the truth. Why it decided to rewrite my life and start me down this path, all those years ago. Or... Maybe the better question is -- where did it think this path would lead?

CLACK. The recording ends.

ROLL END THEME
AND CREDITS