Excerpts from
"THAT LONG DAMN DARK"
and
"YOU ARE THE BLOOD"

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EXCERPT FROM “THAT LONG DAMN DARK”

Written by Ashley Rose Wellman

THAT LONG DAMN DARK SYNOPSIS: Purgatory is a storage unit in rural Alabama for Ed and Lorraine, the gunshot-ridden corpses of a murdered married couple. Leah and Todd, their teenaged murderers, flee the state to Arkansas, haunted by memories and the unearthly talking dead. When Mara and Ethan, two recent transplants from New York City, take the young adults into their now home, the disturbing unfolding reality of the situation threatens to destroy the lives (and afterlives) of all involved.

THAT LONG DAMN DARK - SCENE 1

Lights up on the inside of a storage unit in Addison, Alabama.

Most of the unit is full of junk—faded boxes with labels scrawled on them, old appliances and furniture. Cobwebs and dust cover almost everything, and there is a sickly fluorescent light cast over everything.

LEAH, seventeen, is dragging the corpse of LORRAINE, mid-forties, into the storage unit. TODD, eighteen, is dragging the corpse of ED, also mid-forties.

Ed and Lorraine both have huge, bloody gunshot wounds ripping through the chests, and their clothes are soaked with blood.

Todd and Leah are both breathing hard with a kind of frantic exhaustion, and when the corpses are dropped in the center of the storage unit, Todd goes to pull the door of the unit down the rest of the way.

LEAH

How long you think we have?
TODD
Before what?

LEAH
Before they start to rot.

TODD
Few weeks, maybe?

LEAH
Pretty cold in here. Think that’ll refrigerate ‘em?

TODD
Dunno. Do bodies rot different in different places?

LEAH
Probably. Thinka animals. Like roadkill. Some dry up like husks and some turn into mush. Think Ed and Lorraine’ll turn into husks or mush?

TODD
Husks, I guess.

LEAH
Maybe that’ll give us more time. Figure out what we gotta do.

TODD
What we gotta do is get the fuck outta Addison, Leah.

LEAH
I don’t know about that, okay?

TODD
They’ll start lookin’ for ‘em when Ed and Lorraine don’t go to work tomorrow.

LEAH
Last time Ed skipped outta work his boss came knockin’ on the front door before noon, even. But maybe we can tell ‘em... I don’t know. Something.

TODD
You’re gonna be the first one the sheriff’ll question if we stay ‘round here. We gotta go, and now.

LEAH
Well, not now. First we gotta— shit, how’re we gonna get the bloodstains out of the carpet?
TODD
Um. Oh! Bakin’ soda! I hear that works good. That’s what my mama uses to get blood stains outta the knees of my baseball shorts.

LEAH
You really think it’s okay to just leave the bodies here? And not... do anything else with ‘em? Put ‘em in bags? Weigh ‘em down with rocks? Throw ‘em in the river?

TODD
We'd have to cut 'em up first.

LEAH
I don’t wanna do that.

TODD
I know you don’t. We don’t gotta do nothing to ‘em, we just gotta make sure the storage unit's locked tight. Real tight.

LEAH
Think bugs can get in?

TODD
I dunno. Little ones maybe.

LEAH
I think that makes the mush happen faster. The bugs.

TODD
Even little ones?

LEAH
Even little ones, yeah.

They both look at the bodies in front of them.

TODD
He does look like a bastard.

LEAH
He is. Was.

TODD
She looks like one, too.
LEAH
Bastard?

TODD
Yeah. Woman-bastard.

LEAH
Woman-bastard.

Leah stares, transfixed, into the hole in Lorraine’s chest. She subconsciously touches her own chest.

TODD
How d’you feel?

LEAH
Fine.

TODD
You feel bad?

LEAH
No.

TODD
Not bad at all?

LEAH
No. Not really. I thought I might. But those two big round bloody carved out places in their chests look okay to me. Like a movie kinda. Not real.

TODD
It’s real.

A pause.

LEAH
We really gotta leave town?

TODD
When they don’t come into work, police’ll check the house, they’ll check the yard to make sure there ain’t fresh graves, and they’ll check the river, probably.
They’ll never think to check this storage unit. Hell, they probably won’t even know it’s around, long as we take the key. They’ll just think they went missin’.

LEAH
Us, too, Todd. They’ll notice we’re not there, too.

TODD
We’ll find a way to make a life somewhere else. Far away. We could be two states over by nighttime tomorrow. We could change our names. Get married.

LEAH
You proposin’ to me?

TODD
It’s a thought.

LEAH
(Laughing:)
Keep thinkin’.

TODD
Either way, it'll be you and me. Forever and ever.

LEAH
You and me, yeah.

TODD
You know, we could get married. For real. For real real. I'm a man. Eighteen. I'll find a way to take care of you. I won't let no one touch you ever again. Or even look at you funny. Won't let it happen.

LEAH
I’ll think about it.

TODD
I love you.

A long pause.

LEAH
Well, come on. Let’s get the house and their car scrubbed. Let’s seal this place up.

They move toward the exit. Leah turns back.
LEAH (CONT’D)

Wait.

Leah leans down and spits in the face of Ed, the male corpse on the ground. She stands and moves toward the exit again.

She pulls Todd close to her and kisses him hard.

LEAH (CONT’D)

Come on, Todd. Let’s go.

Leah and Todd roll up the storage unit door, exit, and close and lock the storage unit from the outside. The light inside the storage unit flickers and turns off.

The light flickers back on, and the two corpses, Ed and Lorraine, are standing, each with bloody gunshot wounds through their chests.

Ed wipes Leah’s spit off of his face.

Lorraine looks down at the wound that rips through her chest. She tries to wipe some of the blood off as if it were a couple crumbs that fell onto her shirt.

It doesn’t work.

LORRAINE

Well, this blouse is ruined.

Ed looks over at her.

ED

Mmm-hmm.

Lorraine covers her chest with her hands.

LORRAINE

Well don’t look! I’m not decent! Giant hole in my blouse like this, you can practically see my you-know-whats.
ED
I wouldn’t mind seein’ your you-know-whats.

LORRAINE
Is that so? Damn it, I really liked this blouse, too. Now it’s shot to hell, just like all my fuckin’ guts.

Ed feels around his gunshot wound. Pokes around inside his chest cavity.

ED
I don’t think there’s a whole lot left of my heart.

LORRAINE
(Snorts:)
That’s not news.

ED
Hey now.

Lorraine examines her own wound.

LORRAINE
I think mine hit my lungs, too. One of ‘em, at least. Think I can still smoke with only one lung?

ED
Don’t see why not.

LORRAINE
I sure as hell hope so. Need something to take the edge off. Of bein’ dead.

ED
You said it. Everything woulda been fine if it weren’t for that Todd kid. Bargain’ into our house like he owned the place.

LORRAINE
He ruined everything.

ED
Fuckin’ around with shit he didn't know nothing about.

LORRAINE
Nothing at all about!
ED
Disrespectin’ me in my own home. And Leah! Woulda expected better from her, I really woulda.

LORRAINE
We took her in when no one else would take her!

ED
Mom dead, dad in prison, we were saints to take her in.

LORRAINE
It was our good Christian values, I tell you that.

ED
Just a scruffy young kid, looked more like a little boy than a girl.

LORRAINE
But then she got older. And I know you think time did her real good.

ED
I don’t know about that.

LORRAINE
I saw the way you looked at her! Like you looked at me when I looked like that.

ED
Did you ever look like that?

LORRAINE
You shut your mouth Ed Culhane, or I will shut it for you.

ED
I’m kiddin’! I’m kiddin’, Lorraine. Only playin’.

LORRAINE
Only playin’ indeed. Playin’ with a girl young enough to be— and she practically was your—

ED
She wasn’t practically my daughter. She wasn't family. And we weren’t... playin’, anyway.

LORRAINE
I’m not stupid, Ed.
ED
Never said you were. Nothing was goin’ on between us. Everything was on the up-and-up.

LORRAINE
More like the up and down and up and down and up and down!

ED
Lorraine! I never done nothing like that. Can’t believe you’d think it, even. I’m a decent man!

LORRAINE
That’s the thing about you men!

ED
“You men”? What about us men? We’re decent?

LORRAINE
Y’all think you’re goddamn clever, and you’re not.

ED
I think I’m goddamn clever?

LORRAINE
All y’all men think you’re so goddamn clever.

ED
I—I think I’m goddamn clever? I know I’m not goddamn clever, I know I’m a dummy!

LORRAINE
See, that’s how y’all do. “Oh, I’ll tell her I know I’m a dummy so she won’t really know
that I know I know what I’m talkin’ about.”

ED
“She won’t really... know that I know... that I know she... knows”?

LORRAINE
Don’t play dumb.

ED
Not playin’ dumb, sweetheart. Just tryin’ to follow along. “I know she... knows... that I
know she—”
LORRAINE
Maybe you are a dummy. Had to be at least a little dumb to think you could pull the wool over my eyes for so long.

ED
We don’t need to talk about this now, do we?

LORRAINE
About you bein’ goddamn clever?

ED
About Leah. I didn’t do nothing wrong, and we are not havin’ this talk, Lorraine.

LORRAINE
We gotta at some point. I gotta hear you say it.

ED
Say what? I’ll admit to something I didn’t do over my—

LORRAINE
Over your cold, dead, body?

Lorraine sticks her hand out and feels his forehead.

LORRAINE (CONT’D)
Well, you sure ain’t feelin’ too warm, Ed. There’s nowhere else to go. There’s nowhere left to go. So you sit your ass down, and we’re gonna have a chat.

The lights shift.

END OF SAMPLE PAGES

For more information about “That Long Damn Dark”, contact Ashley Rose Wellman at awellman@usc.edu.
EXCERPT FROM “YOU ARE THE BLOOD”

Written by Ashley Rose Wellman

YOU ARE THE BLOOD SYNOPSIS: When Shelby, a cynical stand-up comedian and the daughter of a convicted serial killer, discovers that her father David Boden is marrying an eccentric young performance artist named Sylvia who writes to murderers, the two develop a strange, charged friendship despite the looming and dangerous presence of the bloodshed in Shelby’s bloodline.

YOU ARE THE BLOOD - SCENE ELEVEN

The lights rise on David Boden, writing, mid-letter.

DAVID
—the first was a mistake, yes, but the second, the third… listen, Sylvia, I’m going to try to explain what this is like. What it was like for me. I’m going to try. Okay.

It’s one thing when someone gives themselves over to you sexually. Their body joins with yours and for a little bit of time, you have them. They’ve given themselves to you. Sacrificed, in a way. And you give yourself to them. But it’s not complete—you deflate and she falls asleep and you’re alone again and yourself again. Maybe you’ve left something in her and she’s sloughed off onto you but skin sheds and time erases things.

And it’s different when someone gives themselves to you emotionally—in the time you’re together you share parts of yourselves and you feel like you know the entirety of the other person.

But nobody really knows all of you. Nobody knows you at all. And so most people, they do this dance, between sex and emotion, and they give up little bits of themselves, and you offer little bits of yourself in return, but you never really have someone.

It’s different when you take someone’s life. When you watch them… leave, when you watch it through their eyes, as the lights go out, you realize they’re really yours, you know. They’ve given themselves to you, and even if it’s something you take, it a gift. A gift to you, a gift from you to the universe. To the… to whatever’s out there. I’m not a good man, but I don’t think one has to be a good man to be an enlightened man. There are lots of men out there… they weren’t good, and maybe they weren’t even right, but they understood.

Back in the 17th century, in China, there was a rebel leader named Zhang Xianzhong.
He started his conquest of China only by killing those who objected to his rule. Then he
told his armies to start massacring people in outlining villages, and put to death any man
who didn't follow that order. Then he had his troops kill people at random. Finally, sitting
upon a throne made of severed feet and ears, he ordered his army to fight to the death as a
few loyal servants carved this into a stone:

*Heaven brings forth endless things to benefit man.*

*Man has nothing with which to repay Heaven.*


A long pause. The lights rise on Sylvia, reading
the letter. She looks visibly shaken. She reads on.

**DAVID (CONT’D)**

Death is the ultimate gift, Sylvia. I wouldn’t expect most people to understand why I did
what I did. But you. I feel like you understand. You understand me. I’m not a good man.
You know this. But I understand things about the world. Things that aren’t pleasant, things
that aren’t sanitized and clean, things that are messy and fluid and bleeding out.

You understand these things, too. I see it in the poetry you send me. I see it in the way that
you talk about your perception of life. Of humanity.

If I could see it in your eyes, I’d know. Really know. And that’s why you have to visit me,
Sylvia. Soon. As soon as you can.

Sylvia closes the letter, but the lights remain,
illuminating David.

She pulls out a notepad, and begins to write a
letter of her own, similar to a previous letter
David wrote her.

**SYLVIA**

Okay. I’m going to send you one like the one you sent me— when was it? Anyway. Here
goes: touch your face. Feel the stubble of your beard starting to grow in.

David sits, reading. He doesn’t touch his face.

**SYLVIA (CONT’D)**

Did you? Okay, now imagine I’m there, lying in bed with you. Run your hands over your
arms, until they feel all tingly, like I’m touching you very lightly.

He sits. No movement.
SYLVIA (CONT’D)
Put your hands together. As if they’re bound over your head. As if I can do anything I want to you. Did you?

David smirks in amusement. He remains unbound.

SYLVIA (CONT’D)
Touch your chest. Feel the bones beneath your collar. Feel what beats beneath the bones.

David scratches at his crotch.

SYLVIA (CONT’D)
Tell me you love me. Tell me you love me.

David folds up the letter and puts it aside. The lights die on him. Sylvia doesn’t realize she stands alone, in a void.

SYLVIA (CONT’D)
Tell me you love me. Tell me you love me. Tell me you love me.

She stands, the only thing in the world.

SYLVIA (CONT’D)
I’ll come to visit you soon, David.

The lights fade on Sylvia.

YOU ARE THE BLOOD - SCENE TWELVE

Shelby Boden’s apartment.

Shelby and Ben struggle through the door of the apartment, both carrying boxes. The apartment is still a mess and is now littered with other boxes with labels scrawled on them.

BEN
(Out of breath:)
How is it you live in the one building in this area without an elevator?
SHELBY
It’s only the fourth floor.

BEN
Yeah, but with these boxes it might as well be the fortieth

SHELBY
Then maybe you shouldn’t have brought so much shit to your *temporary* residence.

BEN
Couldn’t risk leaving it all there and having mom have another one of her punishment yard sales.

SHELBY
God, I cried for days when I found out she sold all my childhood dress-up clothes when I moved out for college. I don’t know why. Like, what was I going to do with them? What was I going to do with a sparkly princess costume made for a six-year-old?

BEN
It was the not-knowing. Not knowing what she even gave away.

SHELBY
She might as well have had a bonfire. “You don’t want to live under my roof anymore? Fine! Say goodbye to your happy fucking memories! I’ll just give ‘em away to strangers. Bye-bye, childhood!”

BEN
It was just her weird way of coping, I guess. Her trying to be okay with letting us go.

SHELBY
“Letting us go”? I live 20 minutes away. And stop leaping to her defense. You’re in too deep, Ben. This is why you had to leave.

BEN
I know. And I’ll be out of your hair once I find a cheap place. Find some roommates or something.

SHELBY
Don’t sweat it. I’d rather you be here than dealing with mom right now. Besides, if you find a new place right away, we’ll have to cart all the boxes up and down and up and down again and I’m not down for that. Was that the last of ‘em?

BEN
I think so.
SHELBY
We did it! You want a beer?

BEN
It’s not even noon yet.

SHELBY
It’s Saturday!

BEN
Are you usually drunk by noon on weekends?

SHELBY
What kind of bricks are you hiding in here anyway? This one killed my arms.

BEN
Don’t look through my stuff.

SHELBY
I’m just curious.

BEN

SHELBY (CONT’D)
Shelby opens up the box and bursts out laughing.

SHELBY (CONT’D)
Well, I can see why you didn’t leave these at mom’s. Wouldn’t exactly help your case in the whole “mom thinks you’re a budding serial killer” thing.

BEN

SHELBY (CONT’D)

BEN
That’s not funny.

SHELBY
Lighten up, Ben. Even Ted Bundy cracked jokes. And skulls. And if Gacy could literally be a clown—
BEN
Stop it. I don’t know how you can laugh about stuff like this.

SHELBY
I don’t know how you can’t.

A pause. Shelby keeps looking through the books in the box.

BEN
John Wayne Gacy had kids. Did you know that? His own children. A little boy and a little girl.

SHELBY
What happened to them?

BEN
I don’t know where they are now, but apparently their step-father adopted them after their mom left Gacy. They never saw him again.

SHELBY
Good for them.

BEN
Do you think he saw his son the way he saw the boys that he...

SHELBY
I don’t know. It’s different when you know someone, right? When you raise them?

BEN
Dad didn’t ever... to you... right?

SHELBY
I’m not having this conversation again. I answered these questions enough when I was eleven. “No ma’am, he never touched me like that. No ma’am, he never hit me. No ma’am, he never hurt me like that. No ma’am, he never talked about things like that with me. No ma’am, he never held me down and—”

BEN
Okay.

SHELBY
Maybe I just wasn’t old enough yet. Eleven. He liked high school girls. Or if I hadn’t started puberty so late—
BEN
That’s disgusting.

SHELBY
Well, what was dad, other than disgusting?

BEN
You’d tell me, right? If he ever...

SHELBY
He didn’t. I spent years trying to figure out why. If he was that crazy, if he was that sick, if he was that uncontrollable, how was he so...

BEN
Controlled?

SHELBY
How was it that we never saw it? How is that possible?

BEN
That’s why I read books like this. The signs had to be there. They had to.

SHELBY
They weren’t. I remember a lot more than you do.

A knock on the door of Shelby’s apartment.

BEN
Who’s that?

SHELBY
Sylvia.

Shelby goes to answer the door.

BEN
(Quietly:)
What? Why are you still seeing her?

SHELBY
You’d like her, Ben. You can chat about skin suits and killer clowns together. Bet she would’ve dated Bundy if they hadn’t fried him before she was born. He was very handsome, you know!
BEN
I’m going out. Shelby, I don’t want to—

SHELBY
Calm down, Ben. And remember. I’m Janet.

BEN
And who am I?

SHELBY
I didn’t tell her your name.

Shelby opens the door, and Sylvia immediately rushes in and hugs her.

SYLVIA
Janet!

SHELBY
Come in, come in. This is my brother. He’s staying with me because he finally put on his big-boy pants and moved out of mama’s house and into sister’s house. It’s progress.

Ben waves awkwardly.

SYLVIA
Right! Your brother. From after my performance. I remember you. What your name?

BEN
Uh, Charlty.

SYLVIA
Charlty? Is that short for something?

SHELBY
No, no. Old family name. The Charltyes of Mercer Island. Janet and Charlty, takin’ on the world!

Shelby claps Ben on the back and he stumbles a little.

SYLVIA
Well, good to meet you. Again.
Sylvia goes in for a hug. Ben awkwardly hugs back. The hug lasts a little too long. Shelby watches, puzzled.

SHELBY
Okay, that’s enough Charlty. Let’s not get too handsy with the guest.

BEN
Right, Okay. I was just heading out for a run, anyway.

SHELBY
You’re wearing boat shoes. And there’s no way you can run in those pants.

BEN
A walk, then.

SHELBY
It’s supposed to rain.

BEN
It’s Seattle, it’s always “supposed to rain”. I’m going out.

SHELBY
Put all this shit away when you come back! And if you walk by Pike Place, get me some of that weird plum wine from the guy with the foggy eye.

BEN
Nagging me to clean my room and bring you wine? Yay, it’s exactly like living with mom!

SHELBY
Watch yourself, Charlty. You watch yourself.

BEN
Good to see you again, Sylvia.

SYLVIA
Yeah, you too!

Ben exits through the front door of the apartment.

SYLVIA (CONT’D)
I watched that comedian you sent me videos of.

SHELBY
And?
He was pretty good, actually.

Awww, look, you do have a soul! I promise you, people hate people that say shit like “I don’t like comedy”.

Yeah, I’ve kind of gotten use to people not knowing what to do with me. I liked that guy’s stuff, though. It wasn’t really joke-jokes. Just stories. He just stood up there and was really, really honest, you know?

Raw?

Yeah. Exactly.

So! Did you want me to watch your new piece?

Um, not really. I wanted to... I need someone to confirm that what I’m about to do isn’t totally off-the-rails.

What are you going to do? Are you thinking of integrating Spaghettios instead of alphabet soup in your next “Semiotics of Garbage” thing? Because honestly—

No, no, nothing like that. Um. I think I’m going to Texas. To see David. In person.

Whoa.

Yeah. I mean, I don’t just “think” I am. I bought the plane ticket and everything. And found a place to stay near the prison. A nice little bed and breakfast.

They have a “nice little bed and breakfast” next to the prison?

It’s actually run by a woman who’s husband is a lifer.
SHELBY

She writes to prisoners, too?

SYLVIA

No, they were married before he got sent there. But anyway, I figure now’s the time. Our engagement can’t keep going on if we don’t actually... engage.

SHELBY

How do you feel?

SYLVIA

I feel good. Actually getting to see his face, to touch him. I can’t even imagine how wonderful it’ll feel. I dream about him all the time. About touching him. About what he feels like.

SHELBY

What does he feel like?

SYLVIA

Like warmth and light. Sunshine.

SHELBY

Yep, David Boden. Ray of sunshine.

SYLVIA


SHELBY

Punishing. Deadly.

SYLVIA

Sometimes. But not with me.

SHELBY

Yeah, I guess there’ll be guards everywhere. You’ll be safe.

SYLVIA

Even if there weren’t. Even if he wasn’t in prison... he wouldn’t. Not to me. He loves me. He didn’t love those... the girls.

SHELBY

Well, I’d sure as hell hope not.
Sylvia notices the stack of books that Shelby pulled out of Ben’s moving box.

Sylvia

You reading about serial killers, Janet?

Shelby

No. Those are my brother’s.

Sylvia

He’s interested in this stuff, too?

Shelby

You’d get along swimmingly.

Shelby picks up one of the books.

Shelby (Cont’d)

I think I actually read this one. It was in my high school library.

She holds the book out to Sylvia.

Sylvia

Ed Gein.

Shelby

You like him?

Sylvia

What do you mean, do I like him?

Shelby

Does he tickle your fancy like the others?

Sylvia

No. No. I connect with the person. I feel sympathy for someone like this, because I can’t even imagine how emotionally disturbed he must have been. But I don’t like men just because they’ve done things like this. I’m not a murder junkie like some girls.

Shelby

What are you, then?

Sylvia

Open-minded.

Shelby starts flipping through the Ed Gein book.
SHELBY
I do remember this. It’s the pictures that are the fucked-up part. I mean, all of it’s fucked-up, but it’s the pictures that really get to you. Belts made out of human nipples. Gloves made from actual hands. Skin lamps and bone furniture and bloody skins drying in the sun.

SYLVIA
It’s horrific.

SHELBY
I used to sit with books like this for hours. The pictures scared me so much that I figured if I kept looking at them, they’d stop scaring me. It took a long, long, long time. But then, one day, I opened it up to this picture of the nipple-belt, and just burst out laughing. It’s a belt made of nipples, you know? It’s kind of funny.

SYLVIA
He was a sick man.

SHELBY
So’s David Boden.

SYLVIA
They’re not sick in the same way. David’s had a long, long time to think about what he’s done. He’s different now.

SHELBY
Is he?

Silence. Sylvia looks over at the book in Shelby’s hands. The lights shift.

END OF SAMPLE PAGES

For more information about “You Are The Blood”, contact Ashley Rose Wellman at awellman@usc.edu.