

INTRO

Dark ambient drone.

RYDER

You are in your bedroom late at night. You hear your child call out for help. You rush down the hall only to find two versions of your child. You're unsure which is the true one - and which the imposter.

A beat.

RYDER

You need my help.

DARK AMBIENT DRONE CHANGES TO:
INTRO MUSIC

RYDER

This is A Voice From Darkness.

Intro music continues, but gradually fades out.

ACT I

RYDER

Hello, this is Dr. Malcolm Ryder, parapsychologist. As always, If you're experiencing anything supernatural, paranormal, unexplainable in anyway. Please call in. I'm here - to help.

A beat.

RYDER

While we wait for a call to come in, I have to say, it is a gorgeous evening in Chicago. On my way into the studio I got off the brownline two stops early and walked the rest of the way. Oh, and we have a call on the line. Let's patch them through. Hello caller, you're on the air. Tell us your name and the nature of the otherworldly situation you find yourself in.

All of Rachel's dialogue has the SFX of coming through a phone.

RACHEL

(frantic)

Rachel. Rachel. My name's Rachel. There's people in my car. There weren't any before, but then they - they appeared. What do I do - what - what...

RYDER

(interrupts)

What part of the country are you in?

RACHEL

They don't... they don't look human. Their faces... they're long. Pale. Their eyes. Oh my god, their eyes...

RYDER

(interrupts)

What part of the country are you in?

RACHEL

Wyoming. Why does that matter?

There's an unfriendly teeth chattering/clicking sound through the phone - followed by a gasp from Rachel.

RYDER

Listen to me carefully. Do not ask questions. Do not stop driving. Do not say another word unless answering a question from me.

A beat.

RYDER

In your car are the Unwelcome Riders. You're on I-80, correct?

No response.

RYDER

Rachel, you can answer my question.

RACHEL

Yes. Yes I am.

RYDER

And you went through the Green River Tunnel.

That's when they appeared in your car - as you exited the tunnel.

RACHEL

I went through a tunnel. I don't know the name of it.

RYDER

It's the Green River Tunnel. The Unwelcome Riders - they appear in traveler's vehicles. Mostly people who are alone.

RACHEL

I am alone. I was alone. I'm moving across the country - to Chicago. Your city. I got a job offer there. Will - will I make it?

There's a chattering sound through the phone.

RYDER

Do not ask questions. If you ask questions, they will... well, let's not talk about that. But yes, Rachel. If you listen to me, do as I say, you will make it to Chicago. It's a beautiful night tonight - you heard me say that earlier? It's going to be beautiful all week long. We'll get you here safe and you can see it for yourself.

RACHEL

I'd like that.

The chattering of The Unwelcome Riders continues.

RACHEL

They're all - they're all making noises.

RYDER

Yes, I can hear them. You're lucky. There're eight "families" of Unwelcome Riders - at least that we know of. The ones in your car - the Green River Tunnel Family - is one of the least likely to... to follow through with their ritual.

RACHEL

What's there-

RYDER

(interrupts)

Do. Not. Ask. Questions. Do not ask questions. Do not exit the road you're on - until I tell you to. If you do either of these things...

A beat.

RYDER

You're unlikely to make it to Chicago. Do you understand?

RACHEL

Yes. But... how do I...

She stops herself.

RACHEL

Tell me under what conditions they'll leave my car.

RYDER

A little over twenty miles from the Green River Tunnel is a tourist attraction called Little America. Have you seen signs? How far away are you?

RACHEL

I just past a sign, it's ten miles away.

RYDER

Good. Drive there. Park your car at the tourist stop. It doesn't matter if it's open or closed.

Rachel shudders.

RACHEL

One of them. One of the ones in the back is stroking my hair. What do I...

She stops herself from asking the question.

RACHEL

Tell me what to do to get it to stop.

RYDER

I - I don't know. I don't recall any of them exhibiting that behavior before.

Ryder pulls out a book and frantically flips through pages.

RYDER

Give me a minute. I have written accounts in front of me. All known incidents involving the Unwelcome Riders.

RACHEL

(crying)

My hair. My hair is falling out. When... when it touches me, it's like my hair and skin are dying.

RYDER

Give me a minute, Rachel. Let's go to Today in Odd America while I review my research.

TODAY IN ODD AMERICA

TIOA music plays.

RYDER

Today in Odd America we find ourselves in Delton, Nebraska. The year, 2010. Delton, like many rural Midwestern towns was dying. The young fled for bigger cities. Half the town was unemployed. The other half on disability. Or drug addicts. The community was in a state of despair.

A beat.

RYDER

Until a Stranger came to town.

A beat.

RYDER

Yes, you've heard those words on this show before - and they nearly always denote the arrival of The Traveling Salesman. And this story - the story of Delton, Nebraska - is the last known sighting of that dark dealmaker.

A beat.

RYDER

The people of Delton gathered in their town hall. They were told a man arrived who had jobs - jobs for everyone who wanted one. Well-paying jobs. The people of Delton liked this man. He stood before them in their hall - He was handsome, but not in the way of a Hollywood star. He wore a grey suit, but nothing too fancy. However he was missing his left ring finger. The people of Delton did not know that this was a tell-tale sign - a warning - that the man who stood before them was no man at all... but The Traveling Salesman. A monster if ever there was one.

A beat.

RYDER

The Traveling Salesman told Delton that he represented a company - that company's name, I do not know - but the company he told them - had made a wondrous technological breakthrough. One that would change the way Americans worked forever. And they wanted to start with the town of Delton. "How would you all like to work in your sleep?" The Traveling Salesman asked. "No fooling," he said. "With our technology, we can put you to work in your bed at night. Come work for us in your dreams, get paid, and have your waking hours all to yourself."

A beat.

RYDER

It sounded too good to be true. And of course it was.

A beat.

RYDER

Those who agreed to The Traveling Salesman's deal - most of the town I'm afraid to say - dreamed that night of a scarcely-lit concrete warehouse. Above, from the second story, they saw windows looking down on the warehouse floor. Frosted glass windows. From behind, could be seen the silhouette of a gigantic creature - with the abdomen and thorax of a spider. But impossibly long human arms. And its heads. Its heads in a shape like nothing the people of Delton had ever seen before. The dream-workers performed the same monotonous task all throughout the night - filling a black sand into cardboard boxes, sealing the boxes shut, and placing them on a conveyor belt. The boxes disappeared from the factory.

A beat.

RYDER

When the dream-workers awoke, they were exhausted. They experienced no rest from their sleep. And so, during the day, they'd attempt to sleep again. But they found themselves right back in the same concrete warehouse. Working another shift.

A beat.

RYDER

The Traveling Salesman had stayed in town to encourage others to accept his offer. Many of the dream-workers went to him, begged him to let them quit. They wanted their sleep back. No amount of money was worth what they'd bargained away. The Traveling Salesman told them - sorry, but he wasn't their boss. Their boss could be found in their dreams, behind the frosted glass of the second floor. If they desired to quit, they merely had to go tell the creature there they wished to.

A beat.

RYDER

None quit. Soon after, all the dream-workers of Delton died from exhaustion. The Traveling Salesman disappeared. As he always does. He has not been seen since. The town of Delton is no more. Where its buildings and streets once stood - there is now only black sand.

A beat.

RYDER

If you see a handsome man who wears a grey suit and offers you a deal too good to be true, remember to look at his left hand. Look at his ring finger. If it is missing, turn his deal down, and run from him. That is the only way to possibly survive The Traveling Salesman.

A beat.

RYDER

This has been Today in Odd America.

ACT II

RYDER

Rachel, are you still there?

RACHEL

Yes.

RYDER

I found a case - similar to yours - with the hair stroking. Normally, if one encounters the Green River Tunnel Family, they simply park their car at Little America and wait thirteen minutes. The Unwelcome Riders then disappear from the vehicle. In this case though...

A beat.

RYDER

I'm afraid you'll need to do a bit more.

RACHEL

Anything. Anything to get through this.

RYDER

How far are you from Little America?

RACHEL

I'm almost at the exit.

RYDER

Good. Go there. Park in one of the odd numbered spots in front of the hotel.

RACHEL

What if there aren't any-
(interrupted)

RYDER

We'll worry about that if it happens. But not before then.

We hear the car driving, the turn signal to indicate the car is taking the exit.

RYDER

Do you have something sharp on you? Something you could stab or cut with?

RACHEL

Do I need to stab or cut them?

Angry Chattering. Rachel screams.

RACHEL

The one behind me. It ripped out a chunk of my hair.

RYDER

You asked a question. They don't like questions. Do you have a knife or something sharp?

RACHEL

I think I have a box cutter in the glove box.

RYDER

When you park, you'll need it.

RACHEL

But one of them - one of them is sitting in front of it. How do I -
(stops herself)

I won't be able to get the box cutter without reaching across the... the Unwelcome Rider - the one in the front passenger seat.

RYDER

You'll have to reach across and open the glove box.

RACHEL

I'm parking. Parking in spot number three.

We hear the car slowing, breaking. The car shifted into park.

RYDER

Good. They'll like that number. Get your box cutter.

We hear Rachel's heavy breathing as she slowly reaches across the creature.

She opens the glove box. She moves things around inside.

And grabs the box cutter.

She slams the glove box shut again.

RACHEL

I have it. I have it. It didn't stop me from getting it or touch me or anything.

RYDER

Listen now - you need to open the box cutter - get the blade out. And you need to - you need to cut yourself. Across the palm of your hand. Make an X on the palm of your hand. So two cuts. Neither of them can be shallow. You must bleed.

RACHEL

I can't. I can't. You didn't tell me I'd have to do that.

RYDER

If you don't do that. If you don't follow the instructions I give you - you will disappear. The Unwelcome Riders will take you with them. Where to - I have no idea. Anyone who's been abducted by them - any of the families - has never returned. You must do this if you want to make it to Chicago.

Rachel winces.

RACHEL

I - I did it. I cut myself. There's a bloody X on my right hand. Is that it?

Angry chattering.

Rachel screams.

The chattering and scream fade away.

RYDER

Rachel? Rachel? Are you still there?

A beat.

RYDER

Rachel?

A beat.

RYDER

(underbreath)

You were so close. So close. Why did you ask another question? Why did you ask so many questions? You could have... you could have made it. You almost did.

A long pause.

RYDER

(exhausted)

That's all for this evening. Please - if you're having any problems that are... supernatural. Paranormal. Call-in next time. On A Voice From Darkness.

Outro Music.