

INTRO

Dark ambient drone.

RYDER

Your car has broken down. You're stranded on the side of a road you've never traveled. The night sky is absent the moon and stars. Monstrous screeches barrel down from that same pitch black sky.

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. I'm being told we have a call on the line - a freshman student from my alma mater - good old Ravenswood University. Hello, caller. How are things out on Mackinac Island?

All of Diane's dialogue has the SFX of being through a phone.

We hear Diane slowly walking.

From her phone there's an otherworldly drone.

Also from her phone: ghostly whispers reciting Latin in the distance. Though, it slowly gets closer to Diane over the course of the call.

DIANE

Hello, Dr. Ryder? I'm Diane, and I'm - I'm lost.

RYDER

Are you somewhere on the campus, Diane? Somewhere on Ravenswood grounds?

DIANE

I'm in the school library. At least, I was. But now. Now I'm less sure. I don't know what happened.

RYDER

Let me lay out a scenario for you, Diane - Tell me if this sounds right - you were in the library - roaming the shelves. You found yourself deep in a thicket of dense tomes. One of them called out to you - likely an ancient leather bound book with Latin words scrawled across its spine. You picked this text up. You felt compelled to open to a random page - hoping to gain some insight into what knowledge lay within.

A beat.

RYDER

But instead when you opened the book - it crumbled to ash in your hands, you looked upward. Around you the shelves had changed. They were no longer six rows high, but climbed to the dark heavens above you. And the wood - once a stained oak - they're now charred black.

A beat.

RYDER

Diane, does that describe the library you find yourself in?

DIANE

Yes, that's where I am. Where am I? What happened to me?

RYDER

In 1912, Ravenswood's library burned to the ground. Terrible fire. And so much knowledge lost. Witness testimonies of paranormal encounters, transcripts for countless seances, ancient works of black magic. All gone to the ages. The librarian at the time - a Latin scholar named William Milner - rushed in - grabbed an armful of books - and came back out. He repeated this heroic effort several times - foolishly attempting to save the library. Finally, during one of his trips into the flames, he did not return. The roof collapsed and the building, the books, and the librarian were no more.

DIANE

What does that have to do with where I am now?

RYDER

You are wandering the stacks of the ghost library. That building, those books, the librarian - their spirits haunt Ravenswood. As do many others.

DIANE

Am I... Am I trapped here?

RYDER

Diane, what happened to you happens to a few students every semester. Frankly I'm surprised they didn't warn you at your orientation. They should have told you how to escape should you find yourself in the very place you're now in.

A beat.

DIANE

(embarrassed)

I skipped orientation... it sounded boring.

RYDER

(incredulous)

Skipped orientation? You're at the best school of supernatural scholarship in the country. That necessitates there being the supernatural at the school.

It's an incredible place to learn, but it's also quite dangerous.

A beat.

RYDER

Now, I'll help you out of the ghost library. But in return, I'd like you to go to my sister's office - Professor Amelia Ryder's office. Let her know you missed orientation. She'll make sure you don't end up in an equally awful situation elsewhere on campus - forever climbing the infinite tower or beheaded by the joyful executioner...

The voice whispering Latin is nearly as loud Diane's now.

DIANE

(afraid)

I promise. I promise I'll go. Please help me though. I think... I think the ghost of William Milner is in front of me. What do I do?

RYDER

Scream.

DIANE

What? No, he's a librarian, won't that just anger him?

RYDER

Of course that will. He'll become enraged and expel you from his library. Diane, I don't mean to beat a dead horse, but HAD you gone to orientation, you'd know that.

DIANE

All right. All right.

A beat.

Diane screams.

MILNER

Expulso Inde bibliothecam.

There's a sound to indicate the transition from the ghostly world to the mundane.

The otherworldly drone disappears.

DIANE

(shocked)

That worked. I'm back. Back in the normal library.

RYDER

Glad to be of help. Remember to go see my sister - Professor Amelia Ryder- first chance you get.

DIANE

I promise I will.

Call ends.

RYDER

All right, why don't we cut to Today in Odd America, and after that we should have time for another call.

TODAY IN ODD AMERICA

TIOA music plays.

RYDER

Today in Odd America we find ourselves in four states - Minnesota, Missouri, Illinois, and Louisiana. Across those states - four men abducted children... and slit their throats over the banks of the Mississippi River. On this day in 1988 the Mississippi Murders took place.

A beat.

RYDER

Federal investigators were called in to find the link between the four men and their identical abductions and murders. None of these men had any prior history of violence or criminal behavior. At the time, there were worries they belonged to a cult and repeated killings would echo across other communities along the river. But no link between the men could be established.

They'd never met or corresponded with one another. However... they all gave identical accounts of being haunted by the Mississippi River.

A beat.

RYDER

Each man told local and federal authorities stories of how they could hear the river. Hear it whisper to them. And what the river said - terrified them.

A beat.

RYDER

The Mississippi River told these men it was no river at all. But a snake. A dragon. A leviathan. A massive creature that only took the form of water while it slumbered. But the river was hungry. The river whispered that if it was not fed blood of the innocent it would be forced to awaken. Forced once again to take its true form. And in the form, it required far more blood for sustenance. More blood than all the men, women, and children across the world could provide.

A beat.

RYDER

And so these four men made a blood sacrifice to the Mississippi River.

A beat.

RYDER

When their identical tales of the river being a slumbering leviathan leaked to the press, police stations in every state bordering the Mississippi received anonymous phone calls, letters... Confessions. Dozens of men and women who lived near the river reported they too heard the same message from the river.

They too were told to feed the river blood or risk the reawakening of the leviathan.

A beat.

RYDER

But all these confessors had ignored the river. Terrified to harm the innocent. These dozens of confessors also reported the river fell silent after this day in 1988. After the river was fed the blood of four innocent children.

A beat.

RYDER

Two of the four men remain in prison. The other two - executed by their states. And the Mississippi River remains silent save for the sound of water moving down its muddy banks.

A beat.

RYDER

This has been Today In Odd America. Now back to our main show.
Today In Odd America music fades out.

ACT II

RYDER

And we're back. I have a return caller on the line. You might remember Amanda from a few weeks ago. Amanda came across a mysterious black door at an art museum. The door caused a time lapse when she first encountered it, and then after that evening the black door began following her. Occasionally others see it and then tell her to: "Open the door." Is that an accurate enough summary of where we left off, Amanda?

AMANDA

There's something more. Something I didn't tell you the first time we spoke. Something I forgot.

RYDER

What did you forget, Amanda?

AMANDA

At the art museum. I spoke to a man. You talked about him in the last episode of your show - I listened to the last episode - and when you spoke about him - I remembered I'd met him - at the museum.

RYDER

(concerned)

Who did you meet at the art museum?

AMANDA

In the Today In Odd America segment - you said there's a man - he's handsome, but not like a Hollywood star, he wears a grey suit, but nothing fancy.

RYDER

And he's missing his left ring finger. Amanda, no. You couldn't have seen The Traveling Salesman. He disappeared a decade ago.

AMANDA

I saw him. That night - the night I first came across the black door. My date - the bad date that I was on. When he ran up to go eat all the hors d'oeuvres, this man - him - The Traveling Salesman - he came up behind me. Said, "You can do better. You know that, right?" I thought he was being a creep - hitting on me. It's like he read my mind. He said, "I'm not flirting - just stating a fact."

RYDER

What else did he say? He never makes small talk. Any person he speaks to - he wants something from. What else did he say to you?

AMANDA

I told him I wished I hadn't brought the guy I was with. He told me. He told me - he'd been in the Post-Modern Sculpture wing moments before. That it was empty. Probably would be all night - "Who even likes that sort of art?" He said, I should go hide there for awhile. My date would take the hint and leave. Then I could enjoy the rest of the night alone. The other week - when we first talked - I thought those were all my own thoughts. My ideas. But they weren't. They were his.

RYDER

Yes, that sort of influence is one of his many talents. And so - he led you right to the black door. Amanda, I'm afraid this is far worse than I initially thought. There must be some dark purpose he set you on course for.

AMANDA

Do you know what the door is? Have you learned anything since we last spoke?

A beat.

RYDER

No, I'm sorry to say I haven't. The situation you're dealing with... There's not a lot... well, it's an outlier.-

AMANDA

(interrupts, impatient)

I thought most things you dealt with were outliers? When I first called into the show, that's what you said.

RYDER

That's true, yes. But that doesn't mean there aren't gradients to the outliers.

AMANDA

I think... I think maybe I should just open the door. More people see it now.

That means more people tell me to open it. More people try to hurt me - to get me to open the door. And it's staying closer - for longer now. Before - it might appear down the hall from me. But now - now it's almost always within arm's reach. It'd be so easy just to open it.

RYDER

Amanda, you said you listened to the last episode. Do you remember what happened to the people of Delton? Their town is no more. Their people - no more. All that remains is black sand. If you open that door - you will meet the same fate. Anyone who's struck a deal with The Traveling Salesman - if they were still alive - would tell you the same thing.

A beat.

AMANDA

Sometimes I see him in my dreams. Always in the distance - The Traveling Salesman. I think he's watching me. Waiting for me to open the door. Is that really him? The man I see in my dreams?

A beat.

RYDER

Yes... Yes, if you're dreaming of him, then it's truly him. Just as he has the ability to influence your thoughts, and to evade your memory - he has that ability as well - to enter your dreams. Amanda, he's danger-

AMANDA

(interrupts)

Good. I want to talk to him.

She hangs up.

A beat.

Ryder sighs.

RYDER

Amanda, if you're still listening - I implore you - do not approach The Traveling Salesman in your dreams, in reality. Anywhere.

A beat.

RYDER

And Amelia, I know you're listening. Please be prepared to help Diane when she comes to you.
And...

A beat.

RYDER

Please warn the others on the island: The Traveling Salesman has returned.

A beat.

RYDER

That's all for tonight. Until next time, this has been A Voice From Darkness.

Outro music.