

INTRO

Dark Ambient Drone.

RYDER

You're with your child at the neighborhood playground. All the children stop playing and silently form a circle. One steps behind the rest, runs around them, and tags your child. All then lock arms with one another. Your child solemnly steps into the circle. In a bright flash, they disappear.

A beat.

RYDER

You need my help.

AVFD music fades in.

RYDER

This is A Voice From Darkness.

ACT I

AVFD music fades out.

RYDER

Hello, this is Dr. Malcolm Ryder, parapsychologist. Here as always to answer your paranormal questions, warn you of strange events unfolding, and take your calls regarding the most dire of circumstances. That said, we already have a caller on the line. Someone I'm surprised to hear from, to be honest, as this person is an old acquaintance of mine whom I haven't spoken with in years. They claim to have something I want. We'll find out what that is together in the second half of our show. First though, we go to National Alerts.

National Alerts music fades in.

RYDER

National Alerts. This alert is for Fairhope, Alabama.

For the past four nights windows and doors have disappeared from homes and buildings across the town. I do not mean to suggest they're being stolen. No. The doors and windows of Fairhope are literally disappearing - leaving behind walls with no method of entry. Or escape. In all cases, the fire dept has arrived - broken through the walls to rescue those trapped inside. But in each case there are no living persons. Only the mummified remains of former Fairhope residents. The city council advises sleeping outdoors until the cause of this anomaly is discovered. So if you're in Fairhope, Alabama - please be careful when indoors.

National Alerts music fades out.

RYDER

That is the only National Alert for the week. Onward to Quick Questions. Do you have a question you'd like me to answer? Feel free to write to us at [avoicefromdarkness@gmail.com](mailto:avoicefromdarkness@gmail.com) or tweet us @vfdarkness. That's [avoicefromdarkness@gmail.com](mailto:avoicefromdarkness@gmail.com) or tweet @vfdarkness. Our first question comes to us via email from Grey: Dr. Ryder, they write. I'm still in school and recently when walking down the hallway, I turned the corner to another hall and it was empty. Deserted. But it was the middle of the day - between classes - there should've been dozens of students. I had to get to my next class so I rushed to where I thought I was supposed to be. I got to the classroom door and was about to go in, but the woman standing at the front - her hair was a different color and style than my teacher's. She was staring at the back of the room. All the students were lined up, with their noses to the wall. Confused, I wasn't sure what to do. I was supposed to have a class there.

At least I thought I was. One of the students turned my direction - glanced at me - but quickly turned back to the wall - now shaking with fear. The teacher told the students: "Do not look at the door. Do not look at her. She'll go away soon. She'll leave us alone. She won't hurt us this time if we don't look at her. She never stays more than a few minutes. Don't worry." I ran. Back down the hall around the corner. And I was safe - in a normal hallway - a hallway in my school. Dr. Ryder, what happened to me? Where did I go? The teacher made it sound like I've been there before. But I haven't. What does this all mean? What do I do?

A beat.

RYDER

Grey, I'm afraid you've found yourself in a complicated situation. You're likely stumbling into an alternate reality - one that bears some superficial similarities to ours, but is otherwise quite different. Especially with how time flows there. Now I could give you a dozen different home remedies that're supposed to prevent transversing realities - like carrying a broken pocket watch in your left pocket - but frankly these solutions never work. The best advice I can give is when you find yourself in this alternate place - and I'm sorry but you likely will find yourself there at least a few more times - don't stay more than a few minutes. And try not to harm the students there. Sometime in their past - your future - you'll inevitably do something to scare them. There's nothing you can do about it - *Alea iacta est*: the die is cast. As many as six thousand Americans a year slip into an alternate reality either temporarily or permanently - most likely without even realizing it.

This is how we get phenomena such as the Mandela effect. It's rarely a fatal condition. I'm sure you'll come out on the other end just fine.

A beat.

RYDER

I'm afraid that's the only question we have time for today. Shortly we'll hear from our caller on the line who claims to have something I want. We'll find out what that is after Today in Odd America.

TODAY IN ODD AMERICA

TIOA music fades in.

RYDER

Today in Odd America we find ourselves in Andover, Massachusetts. There on this day in 1962 the sexually-transmitted language of Vlin ceased to exist. The first known speaker of Vlin dates back to the Battle of Stones River in Murfreesboro, Tennessee. A woman, described as having olive skin tone and raven black hair appeared at the Union encampment on December 31st, 1862. A young officer, Captain James Vlin took her back to his tent that evening. The next morning he was incapable of speaking English. The woman's name is unknown to this day. James Vlin shot her the morning of January 1st. She was buried in an unmarked grave. It's unclear if she was the original speaker, and patient zero of the sexually-transmitted language, or if she too was merely a victim.

A beat.

Captain James Vlin was unable to communicate in any known language through spoken word or writing. Everything he said aloud was alien to those who heard him. Everything he wrote - indecipherable. He was sent back North after the battle, examined by doctors. Through one of the Union doctors, Daniel Foster, we have the first attempt at creating a Vlin alphabet. According to Dr. Foster's journal, he worked with James Vlin for weeks in an attempt to cure or understand him. He failed at both efforts. James Vlin was sent back to his family in Massachusetts.

A beat.

RYDER

He became prone to emotional outbursts when attempting to communicate with his family. Either angry or bursting into tears when they were unable to understand anything beyond his most simple wants. Journal entries and letters from his family at that period tell of their extended efforts to reteach him English or to learn his new language. All attempts failed. Four months after his arrival back home, the family's maid lost her ability to speak English. She too could now only speak in the sexually-transmitted language. James Vlin's spirits rose during this time, though the Vlin family found themselves mired in scandal. It was unclear if James had forced himself on the maid, a woman named Stephanie Sanders, or if she'd gone to him willingly.

A beat.

## RYDER

A small house was built on the far lot of the Vlin estate. James and Stephanie were wed and moved into their new home. A year later they had their first child. Less than ten months after the birth, the child could seemingly speak basic words of the sexually-transmitted language. Though it never did learn English. None of the eight children James and Stephanie had did.

The children, and parents, became regular research subjects at Harvard. Linguists, medical doctors, biologists all attempted to discover why the parents lost the ability to understand any language but Vlin, and why the children were incapable of learning any language but it.

Research papers and books were written about the Vlin family, but no answer was discovered. After several years of study, academics and the public lost interest in the strange linguistic phenomenon.

That is, until 1894 when an outbreak of the language occurred in Boston. Over the course of a four month period over 300 men and a few dozen women lost their ability to speak or read English, but gained the ability to understand Vlin.

The cause of the outbreak was traced back to Mary and Rebecca Vlin. Daughters of James and Stephanie. Both women were in their thirties, thought to be unwedable by the English-speaking side of the family. They disappeared from the Vlin estate sometime in the early 1890s. A judge found them guilty of both prostitution and willfully spreading a disease. For the latter crime, they were sentenced to death.

A beat.

## RYDER

All the new speakers of Vlin were forcibly removed from their homes in Boston and relocated to land in the town of Andover. High walls and armed guards were posted around the area. No official records corroborate this, however it's widely believed those inside the community were castrated to further prevent the spread of Vlin. The shelters in the Andover community were of terrible quality. Not able to keep rain or wind fully out.

All those inside the walls were reliant on a single well for fresh water.

Journalists and academics were discouraged from further reporting on the language of Vlin and the Andover community. In one case, a journalist at the Boston Herald who attempted to write on their harsh living conditions was found dead in a hotel room with two bullet holes in the back of his head. His death ruled a suicide.

A beat.

## RYDER

The subject of Vlin died out nationally until the outbreak of the first world war. In 1917, Patrick Baker - a Catholic theologian and pacifist gave a speech where he stated his belief that the language of Vlin was the original tongue man spoke before the fall of the tower of Babel and

God had finally forgiven mankind. He believed God wanted all people to become infected with the language to better understand one another and to come together in world peace. Baker was denounced by the Catholic Church and imprisoned under the Espionage Act of 1917 for speaking out against the war. This had a dampening effect on anyone else speaking out in favor of those infected with the language.

A beat.

RYDER

During the second world war, comparisons were made between Andover and the Japanese internment camps. Still, nothing further was done to help the Andover community.

A beat.

RYDER

What happened to the speakers of Vlin between the end of the second world war and the early sixties is a mystery. Many journals written in Vlin exist but remain untranslated. All we know for sure is that every speaker of the language died of either disease, old age, or other causes during that period. Until finally, on this day in 1962 the last speaker of Vlin passed away. The language disappeared from the earth just shy of being a century old. Despite the work of scholars and doctors, not a single word has been translated to this day. Conspiracy theorists believe the government preserved the language by freezing bodily fluids from members of the Andover community. And so it might be possible some day another outbreak occurs - perhaps even at the global level. Contrary to this view, some theologians now accept the Baker heresy and believe God gave us one chance to again be united with a single language, and we rejected this gift. I do not hold either belief myself, but do think it's tragic when a language leaves the world. With it goes an ephemeral piece of humanity that we likely cannot ever get back.

A beat.

RYDER

Now back to our main show.

ACT II

TIOA music fades out.

RYDER

And we're back. On the line we have an old acquaintance of mine. Someone I'm surprised to hear from, to be honest.

ALEC

And I'm surprised you took my call, Malcolm. Figured you'd forgotten about old Alec Byrd.

RYDER

You said you have something I want. I'm curious what that is.

ALEC

My last year at Ravenswood - there was a time we drank at the Queen of Cups: you, me, most of the old crew. Do you remember?

RYDER

We went there many times. You'd have to be more specific. But, Alec, I'm not interested in talking about drinking stories from college. Why did you call?

ALEC

Context is key, Malcolm. I'll tell you what I have. But I want you to understand why I have it.

RYDER

Fine. Go on.

ALEC

This time at the Queen - five of us were there. You, Sonja, Charlotte, me, and Julian. Normally we'd all only stay for a few rounds, joke about something stupid we heard an undergrad say or try to out know-it-all each another. This particular time though - we asked each other the one question we'd all avoided. Do you remember what that was?

A beat.

RYDER

What are you afraid of?

ALEC

It's so funny - all of us were studying the supernatural. In a sense - studying the greatest cause of fear. Talking about it in dry, technical, academic terms.

Completely refusing to engage with this deep, primal emotion on any personal level. Well... everyone except Julian. But look what happened to him?

RYDER

What do you have that I want, Alec? I swear if you only called into my show to-

ALEC

(interrupts)

That story you told the other week about your grandad and his shadow. About how when you were a boy and he cut off his shadow... and it came at you. You told the four of us that same story that night at the Queen. Said shadows still spooked you. Gave you nightmares.

RYDER

Yes, it was a traumatic event from my childhood. These sorts of things hold a power over us even as we age.

ALEC

A few months after that night you had me kicked out of Ravenswood. I'd exaggerated some research-

RYDER

You fabricated results - giving credence to a false method of removing ghosts from a haunted place. If your made-up data had been taken seriously by anyone - people would've been hurt.

ALEC

It wasn't false. I just. Just embellished a bit. I had to otherwise I would have lost my fellowship. Not that that really mattered in the end. You ratted me out.

RYDER

I made sure no one got hurt from your false claims. Alec, what do you have that I want?

ALEC

Your granddad's shadow knife.

RYDER

How? That's impossible. He never would've entrusted something so dangerous to you.

Alec laughs.

ALEC

I'm sorry. It's just funny, right? You deal with, with... the unwelcome riders, cities that appear out of nowhere, so many ACTUALLY impossible things. But old Alec Byrd possessing your granddad's knife strains the credulity of Doctor Malcolm Ryder.

RYDER

Why do you have the knife?

ALEC

Duncan Ryder was one of my favorite professors. It would've been rude of me to leave the island without saying goodbye. During that final visit, he left me alone in his study while he got us drinks. In that moment, I admitted to myself why I was truly there: to steal the knife. To then use it to take vengeance against you. I was partially successful.

RYDER

You intended on cutting your shadow off and having it attack me?

ALEC

My plan... well, there was no plan. None of this was thought out.

A beat.

ALEC

I should've listened better to your story. The great Duncan Ryder couldn't control his shadow for more than a few minutes after he'd cut it from himself. It morphed, changed shape into something monstrous.

I don't know what made me think I'd have better results. I cut my shadow off in one of the courtyards on campus. Told it to go find you. I didn't say to kill you. I don't think I did. Not that it mattered. Thirty seconds after I severed it, it stopped listening. Stealthed away into the darkness of the night.

RYDER

How did you get it back?

ALEC

I didn't. For nearly twenty years now, I've walked this world without a shadow. Don't get me wrong, I tried to get it back. Stayed a few days longer on Mackinaw than I intended. After a while though, they wouldn't let me on university grounds.

RYDER

You could have told someone. Anyone. Any of us - even if you were furious at me - Charlotte, Sonja, they would have helped you. You could have gone back to my grandfather.

ALEC

Are you even thinking that through? I was the grad student they just kicked out. And what, I go back not a week later and tell them I practiced some ancient form of black magic I didn't even understand? To scare - or possibly kill - the student who turned me in? No. I didn't tell anyone. And when I wasn't allowed back on school grounds... that was that. I went to other libraries in other parts of the country, dark arts practitioners. Did research. No such luck though. As I said, going on twenty years - no such luck.

RYDER

Why come forward now?

ALEC

I've run out of time. Julian's after me. He knows I have the knife and he wants it. I don't know what for. But I need your help, Malcolm. I need protection. Can you meet me on the island - at the Queen of Cups - in two days?



RYDER

Bring the knife. Return it to me. And I'll be there.

ALEC

I don't want that evil little thing. It's all yours. See you in a few days.

Phone click.

A beat.

RYDER

All right, that is all the time we have for tonight. And I have some travel arrangements to make. But remember, if you're experiencing anything paranormal, supernatural, otherworldly - please feel free to call in-

AVFD outro music fades in.

RYDER

Next time, on A Voice From Darkness.