

[[Intro]]

You're at a bus stop and your bus is late.

Finally, it pulls up, you step aboard, and for a brief moment...

the driver's facial features - their eyes, nose, mouth are in all the wrong places.

As you stare, their face quickly rearranges itself to appear more normal. More human.

The door closes. There's no one else in the vehicle.

You need my help.

[[AVFD intro music kicks in]]

This is A Voice From Darkness.

[[AVFD intro music fades out]]

Hello, this is Dr. Malcolm Ryder, parapsychologist, here to help you with all problems paranormal, supernatural, and otherworldly. And we have a wonderful show planned for tonight. There's two national alerts for the state of Florida - one for the panhandle, and another for the everglades. After we go over these we'll explore one of the strangest roadside attractions in American history. And of course we'll finish our show with the phone lines open so you, our listeners, can call-in. But first, let's get to our national alerts

[[National Alerts music starts]]

A sinkhole has appeared in the middle of Kelson Ave in Marianna, Florida. The hole's depth is currently unknown however twenty feet down, stone carvings of faces appear. The carvings continue for as far down as anyone can tell. Each is unique yet is made to grotesquely express either the emotion of fear or that of delight. A spelunker descended into the hole to gather information about its depth. Two hours into his descent contact was lost and he was pulled out. When he resurfaced he was said to be in a daze. He removed his harness and immediately jumped back into the hole. Please be careful while driving on Kelson, Ave in Marianna, Florida.

Our second national alert is for the Florida Everglades. *The Singing* has returned to the wetlands. All those in the area are advised to wear hearing protection for at least the next 72 hours or until otherwise instructed. The source of The Singing is unknown but is said to compel all who hear it to walk into the wetlands and be devoured by the creatures there-in. Again, please wear hearing protection if you're within earshot of the Florida Everglades.

And that's all we have for national alerts this evening.

[[NA music fades out]]

Next up we have Today In Odd America, where we'll discuss a manifestation that once haunted every corner of this land. And afterwards we'll open the phone-lines.

[[Today In Odd America]]

Today in Odd America we find ourselves across the highways of our country. Forty four years ago today marks the last known visit to a roadside attraction commonly called The House of Narcissus. No physical evidence of this place exists. It was never found in the same location twice - yet hundreds of oral testimonies swear to its existence. Tonight I will cobble together disparate accounts from those who claim to have toured the fabled roadside museum. My hope is this will paint you a picture of what the experience was like for those who wound up touring a space dedicated completely to themselves.

"I was driving down Route 8," Maise Bridges stated to the Columbus Dispatch in 1955. "It was late and dark. No other cars were on the road. Then I saw it - a billboard illuminated by a single dim light that read: *Know Thyself, Next Exit*. No other words. But next to them, taking up the entirety of the right side was a painted picture - of me. Unmistakably me. Done in a sort of... Norman Rockwell style I suppose. I just... What was I supposed to do? Of course I took the next exit."

All descriptions of The House of Narcissus begin this way. A strange billboard on a lonely road, mere seconds to decide to take the exit or not. Oddly, there are few confirmed cases of those who saw the billboard and kept driving. It's impossible to say if that says something overall about human nature or merely the people The House chose to manifest for.

"I was overwhelmed when I first drove up to the house," Curtis Johnson said to the Louisville Times in 1948. "I'm not ashamed to admit it, but I might have cried a bit. I mean the place was just, just magnificent. Out there, in the middle of this grassy field, in the middle of nowhere there's this small piece of heaven, you know? I didn't feel like I was about to tour some cheap-o roadside scam where they show you a mannequin in a five dollar gorilla suit and tell you it's Bigfoot. I felt like I was home. Of course I rushed right outta my car up to the door. Why wouldn't I? I was home."

Descriptions of the museum are typically left vague. Abstract. At least when describing the exterior. Visitors will speak of the joy they felt upon seeing the house. Often they'll say a sense of nostalgia or homecoming overwhelmed them. However no one was ever able to give a single concrete detail of what The House looked like. How many stories were there? What color was the siding? What the house looks like remains a mystery to this day. But there's much agreement about its interior. At least in some respects.

"There're no employees, no turnstyle to go through, nothing like a museum or roadside attraction typically has. You just go in the front door, and you're suddenly there - in the first room. It's filled with photographs along the walls. They were all of my family, friends, neighbors, teachers, former classmates, folks from my church, employers, co-workers. People I might have

talked to only once in passing. None of these were photos I took or remember anyone else ever taking. None are in any photo album I own,” said Judge Michael Harvester in 1972, when he called into the KIRT radio station of Olympia, Washington.

The Photo Gallery is always the first room visitors find themselves in. Under each photo is a brass plaque, on which a single sentence is etched: the last words said by whomever is touring the house to the person featured in the photograph.

Even this first room can be disarming to a visitor. As Judge Harvester said: “You don’t realize how many people you speak to, thinking you’ll do so again, but then never do. It adds up over a life. It really does. I didn’t look at all the pictures, or read all the plaques. I had to stop after awhile. I saw one in particular... the last words I said to an old neighbor of mine, lived a few houses away from the place I bought right after law school. Me, him, and some of the guys down the block would get together to play poker twice a month. Last thing I said to him, ‘I’ll see you in a few weeks.’ I don’t remember what happened after that. I guess the poker game fell apart. I don’t think either of us moved, I don’t remember us getting into any fights. But I never spoke to him again. And that’s just one example. People like to call that first room the photo gallery, and that makes sense, I guess. But that’s not what it is. It’s a monument. A monument to lost relationships.”

Most visitors to The House expressed regret coming there at all after visiting this first room. Unfortunately, the way they entered disappears after entry - replaced by a wall filled with photographs. Once you enter, The House forces you to continue through the rooms. That is, if you wish to leave.

“The second room was a full scale replica of my childhood home,” said Sara Lopez to the San Diego Tribune in 1966. “All five rooms of our house back on Balboa Avenue. “I went through the cabinets in the kitchen. The dishes... they were identical to ones we had. There were these little hand drawn designs on them. They’re abstract, hard to describe, but the plates in that museum. They matched perfectly how I remembered them. It was impossible.” Most statements regarding the second room share similar amazement at the level of detail on even the most insignificant items - stains on the carpet, entryways scuffed and dirty from children’s shoes. “What really got me about the second room, “Sara Lopez said, “were the smells. The kitchen had this overwhelming odor of garlic and cumin, spices my mother put in everything. The carpet near the entryway smelled like wet dog. Our lab, Daisy, would run through our neighbors sprinkler then come inside, right to that patch of carpet, and roll around. Little things like that, I’d forgotten about completely. Hadn’t thought of in years, but suddenly a million memories came rushing back to me.”

The average visitor reported spending somewhere between four to five hours in The House of Narcissus. There were outliers of course, in both directions. Some, after seeing the photo gallery, ran through the other rooms without lingering. Others claimed to have spent days and only left when they were near dehydration.

There are dozens of other rooms in The House. Too many to go over tonight. But I'll end by stating what's in the only obligatory room, the last room. The room with the only way out.

At the very end of a long hallway is a plain wooden door with a small sign above that reads: *What if...*

Inside is a small movie theatre. There's a single red cushioned seat in the room with the perfect view of a small screen. To the right of the screen is a door with an exit sign above. The door will not open unless the visitor sits down in the chair and watches, truly watches and listens, to the film that plays in that small theatre.

"On the day of what was supposed to be my wedding I called my best friend - my bridesmaid. I cried and I gave her the awful job of telling my husband-to-be I'd changed my mind," said Tonya Blanton to the Sante Fe Dispatch in 1958. "I was living in Minneapolis at the time. Born there, was to be married there, figured I'd die there eventually too. I don't know what overcame me. But I got in my car and drove. Found myself in New Mexico and started a new life. My parents were furious. And I never spoke to the man who was to be my husband ever again. He sent me a letter when I'd settled in Santa Fe. I wasn't brave enough to open it. But in that last room. In that last room of that awful house - a film played. It showed what my life would have been had I stayed in Minneapolis. I won't... I won't say what all I saw. What all I missed out on. All I'll say is I know I made the wrong choice. I've thought about that every single day since visiting that terrible place."

Tonya Blanton is not a unique case. Chicago journalist Studs Terkel in his book *The American Road: An Oral History* devoted a chapter to The House of Narcissus. He conducted over twenty interviews with those who'd toured the roadside wonder. When asked if they could change places and live the life they saw in that last room - would they? Every person he interviewed said they would.

The House of Narcissus only existed for some sixty odd years. The last known visit occurred in 1977, outside of Spring Green, Wisconsin. "People say I must've burned the place down or something," Buddy Palmer, the last recognized visitor, said to the Madison Gazette in 1980. "I didn't, I swear," he went on, "but if I had some matches and kerosene on me, would I of? Sure thing. No one should ever be forced to watch the movie that plays in that last room. I'll think of that picture the rest of my life. I'll know I messed up early on and I'm not living my best, happiest life. You know how hard it is to get out of the bed in the morning with that hanging over you? Sometimes that movie plays in my dreams. I usually gotta call in sick to work the next day when it does. I just can't stop thinking about it. The rest of the place too... it's just... Just too much."

For those of you listening to this while driving alone, rest assured, you're unlikely to see a billboard with your own face staring back at you and the words: *Know Thyself, Next Exit*. But in the rare chance such an event occurs, please consider my advice: don't take that exit. Just keep driving. There are some truths about ourselves perhaps better left unexplored.

And now back to our main show.

[[TIOA music fades out]]