

"STRAY"

FADE IN:

1 EXT. MOTEL - DAY - PARKING LOT

There is a motel parking lot. There are a few cars waiting in their spaces. A maid's cart waits outside a room. One door remains open and a pair of AMWAY SALESMAN'S BAGS wait to be taken to their trunk.

The SALESMAN leaves his room key on the dresser, exits the room, hefts the bags, walks them to his 1979 FORD GRANADA and shuts the trunk lid on top of them.

2 INT. CAR - DAY - HIGHWAY

Through the windshield a flat, grey two-lane highway stretches out into the distance. No other cars occupy the road. There are several empty farmhouses like islands in an ocean of dormant cropland lined by tall, spindly, ageless trees.

ANGLE ON CAR RADIO

The AM CAR RADIO pumps out the voice of RADIO EVANGELIST 1.

RADIO EVANGELIST 1

He is three and one. He's the Triune
Godhead. Father. Son. Holy, Holy
Spirit. One singular, eternal God.
Born of the Virgin Mary. Made self-
incarnate by the Holy Spirit.

ANGLE ON DRIVER

The evangelist continues. The Salesman is listening intently to the evangelist's message. He calmly steers his car down the highway.

ANGLE ON CAR RADIO

He hits Preset Two.

RADIO EVANGELIST 2

...didn't ask to be born. Blessed be.

RADIO AUDIENCE

Blessed be.

RADIO EVANGELIST 2

Didn't want to see daylight.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

2 CONTINUED:

RADIO EVANGELIST 2 (CONT'D)

Until he *saw* the daylight. Until he *heard* the dawn. Until he *learned* to love life. Blessed be.

RADIO AUDIENCE

Blessed be.

RADIO EVANGELIST 2

Life alone. Away from God. Outside the Law. Away from His father. He learned to live. To REEEEEELYYYY upon Himself only.

He hits Preset Three. An old man evangelizes.

RADIO EVANGELIST 3

Beast within me:

You suck the life, the blood, the God right out of me. I am rid of life, but what I have is not death. I am rid of blood, but what I have is not empty veins. I am rid of God, but what I have is not Satan.

It's never that easy. No it isn't.

There are opposites, but the opposites reside in the head of man. In the Godhead, the thing *itself* may be its own opposite.

Beast within me:

You are my Doubt and my Strength. Not many people speak of the Holy Spirit, and often when they do it is incomprehensible to human understanding and requires interpretation—a pocket guide to the Tower of Babel...

He hits Preset One.

RADIO EVANGELIST 1

You take the rudder in your own hand. You are Abraham and God tells you to act against Nature. You are a stand-in for God—"God the father". In a patriarchy the father rules.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

2 CONTINUED: (2)

RADIO EVANGELIST 1 (CONT'D)

Let me ask you one thing: Do you know your wife's first love?

When they snuck off behind vacation bible school, burdocks in her dress and knee socks? Do you know what they said to each other? How they spoke to each other? How they felt as they held on to each other? So tightly.

He is still her first love and you are the unnatural third: you create a crowd. An audience. You're extraneous.

He hits Preset Three.

RADIO EVANGELIST 3

Grant me peace.
Peace and strength.
Grant an end to my solitude.
Grant an end to my search for wisdom.
And an end to pity.
Wrap it up and end it.

Beast within me:

Are you holy or earthbound?
An Angel of God?
Inspiration, my breath?
A whisper?
A whisper.
And what am I?

He hits Preset One.

RADIO EVANGELIST 1

Mary and Joseph.
Here is your model.
Mary is *pregnant* by her first love and she is *married* to you. You are not her first love. And when the Child is borne, you are not even a close second.

She is your servant. She is your slave because He tells her to be. And she must sit there and take it—just as you do. Good Lord, don't talk to me about hardship--

(CONTINUED)

2 CONTINUED: (3)

He hits Preset Two.

RADIO EVANGELIST 2

He determined His future and then in walked Bud, if you know what I mean. Through the door to His life walked God's reminder – God Himself, in a sense – God's reminder that He was not free...

Title: STRAY. He hits Preset One.

RADIO EVANGELIST 2 (CONT'D)

That He could not divert!
That He could not STRAY!

RADIO EVANGELIST 1

Original sin is the corrupt nature of the offspring of Adam: a residual effect of The Fall.

The warm wind blows the Salesman's hair. He stares through the windshield, his eyes follow the passing sights.

RADIO EVANGELIST 1 (CONT'D)

But, you see, personal sin is primarily and essentially a violation of the law of love.

The Salesman's eyes stare away into the distance. Ecstatic? The wind whips his hair.

Following some tinny piano music, we hear a RADIO ANNOUNCER's voice.

RADIO ANNOUNCER

Hello, friends. We urge you to join Pastor Watley next week when he will continue his series of short term devotions "I Am But a Reed in the All-Knowing Ocean". For a cassette tape copy of today's show, please send \$13.99 to "Dorman's Devotions", c/o Watley Ministries, P.O. Box 512, Warren, Indiana 48901. Once again, here is Pastor Dorman Watley.

RADIO EVANGELIST 1

(congenially)

Friends, it gives me great pleasure to come to you over the radio like

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

2 CONTINUED: (4)

RADIO EVANGELIST 1 (CONT'D)
 this every week. Your generous giving
 allows our ministry to reach outward
 ever further.

Whenever I can, I like to share my
 hopes and wishes with you about the
 future of Watley Ministries.

Next week, we will be upgrading our
 transformer...

There is a slight interruption of the station's signal.

RADIO EVANGELIST 1 (CONT'D)
 [Zzzzb.] You know, my friends they
 ask me, "Dorman --" [Zzzzzzzzzzzzz.]

The radio crackles and fails as it tries to pull in the
 signal.

3 EXT. HIGHWAY - DAY - POWER LINES

The Salesman's car passes beneath an ARRAY OF POWER LINES
 held aloft by a huge steel structure. The radio signal
 disappears under the INTERRUPTION caused by the electrical
 current.

4 INT. CAR - DAY - CU - RADIO

The Salesman's hand reaches to tune the already lost station.
 Unable to do so, he punches through the series of presets.
 Each is dead.

He shivers with the onset of evening chill. He rolls up his
 driver's side window. In his newfound silence, he begins to
 whistle a tune. He begins to sing.

SALESMAN

(singing)

I was sinking deep in sin
 Far from the peaceful shore,
 Very deeply stained within
 Sinking to rise to more.

When the Master of the Sea
 Heard my despairing cry,
 From the...

There is an uneasy moment as we look at the Salesman through
 the windshield. He freezes. Across the expanse of plain,
 sunlight shows through the sparse trees.

(CONTINUED)

4 CONTINUED:

From the distance, a source-less, inexplicable WHIRRING NOISE approaches the Salesman's car. Beetle's wings?

5 EXT. HIGHWAY - DAY - BEHIND SALESMAN'S CAR - SLOW MOTION

The car violently swerves to the right. The Salesman's head whips back and to the right. A spray fills the interior.

6 INT. CAR - DAY - CU - SALESMAN'S EYES

The Salesman's eyes shift toward the passenger's seat. He is confused.

FADE TO:

7 INT. CAR - NIGHT - START WITH TOTAL BLACKNESS - FLASHBACK

We see a small piece of the windshield out of focus with rain drops that form and merge. We hear a car slowing on wet asphalt. An electric window. A large car door opens, shuts. Our ears are now inside the car, the car begins to move, clothes rustle.

THE VISIBLE CAR INTERIOR - FLASHBACK

Suddenly, we can see it is night. The Salesman drives the car. Now the passenger seat contains a FEMALE HITCHHIKER. She is nearly thirty years old. Her hair is wet from the rain outside. It is difficult to make out her features. The woman's hand wipes nervously at the water she has dripped onto the car's upholstery.

HITCHHIKER

Thanks... Sorry I'm so wet.

She holds a STUFFED DOG that wears a name tag. The tag glints in the dark interior.

SALESMAN

It's--

He pauses.

HITCHHIKER

(quietly)

...ohh.

ANGLE ON SALESMAN - FLASHBACK

Silent and calm, as he had been with the evangelists on the radio, the Salesman watches the road.

ANGLE ON BACK OF HITCHHIKER - FLASHBACK

(CONTINUED)

7 CONTINUED:

She shifts her eyes abruptly back to the road to her right. She is frightened. Something is very wrong.

8 EXT. HIGHWAY - NIGHT - BEHIND CAR - SLOW MOTION - FLASHBACK

The car swerves violently with the Salesman and the Hitchhiker inside. The shrill squeal of the tires can be heard over the woman's faint scream.

CUT TO:

9 EXT. HIGHWAY - DAY - BEHIND CAR - SLOW MOTION - PRESENT DAY

Now back to the Salesman's car in daylight. Mimicking the previous scene, the car continues its slow motion swerve to the side of the highway. The car stops. The Salesman's head has disappeared from sight.

10 EXT. HIGHWAY - DAY - BULLET HOLE IN DRIVER'S WINDOW

The car's radio has come back to life, playing a 1970s European disco tune.

A lone BULLET HOLE appears on the driver's side window of the Salesman's car. Through the window, we can see the BLOOD AND GORE spread against the passenger window. Slowly, the Salesman rises from below the window. He has a HUGE WOUND near his temple. He opens the car door and stumbles out. His shirt is only a bit bloody.

11 EXT. HIGHWAY/ROADSIDE - DAY - EXTREME HIGH ANGLE ABOVE CAR

The Salesman stumbles into the roadside ditch and through the field on the other side. He is making his way toward a house and barn in the distance.

12 EXT. YARD - DAY - EXTREME HIGH ANGLE - SALESMAN

The Salesman, absolutely unable to move another step, falls face forward into the unkempt grasses in front of the house. Unnoticed.

FADE TO:

13 EXT. YARD - THE NEXT MORNING - SAME ANGLE - SALESMAN

He is still in the grass. LILLY, a young, wiry fundamentalist girl, runs from the barn toward the house. As she nears the front steps, she swerves toward the unfamiliar sight of the Salesman's body in the front yard. She stops in front of the body and screams.

(CONTINUED)

13 CONTINUED:

LILLY
 (top of her lungs)
 MOMMA! MOMMY!

Her MOMMA, a young, strong fundamentalist woman appears in the house's doorway. She runs out to the Salesman's body with a LARGE STICK. Lilly slowly moves toward it, too. Flies walk on the Salesman's head and shirt. Firmly, Momma turns him over with the stick. His mouth moves. He is alive.

MOMMA
 Get inside and get me that first aid
 kit. Run! Watch out for that fence!

Lilly complies with vigor. She runs around the electric fence and bursts into the house.

14 INT. KITCHEN - DAY - LILLY

Lilly searches the cupboard for the much-needed supplies. Lilly looks through the window to the front yard. Momma has raised the stick above her head and is about to bring it down upon the Salesman's head. Momma strikes. And raises it. She strikes again.

15 EXT. YARD - DAY - SUPPLIES ARRIVE

Lilly arrives with the possibly too late supplies. Momma kneels beside the Salesman. She waves off the flies.

MOMMA
 Help me get him inside.

LILLY
 Is he dead, Mother?

MOMMA
 No, but by all rights he should be.

Momma and Lilly drag the Salesman's body toward the house.

FADE TO:

16 INT. LIVING ROOM COUCH - DAY - SALESMAN

The living room is dark. For the Salesman's benefit Lilly and Momma turn the living room mirror to face the wall. Lilly seats herself on the floor in front of the couch and waits.

The Salesman's eyes flicker and open. He wears the starched, stiff clothes of Lilly's father.

(CONTINUED)

16 CONTINUED:

LILLY

Momma. He's awake.

She turns to her mother. Momma kneels beside the Salesman. Confused, he fumbles as he tries to assess the problem with his head.

SALESMAN

(weakly)

I...think I had an accident.

MOMMA

Well mister, you have a big hole in your head.

Momma moves his hand away from the wound.

MOMMA (CONT'D)

Don't touch it.

LILLY

Can we clean it again, Momma?

MOMMA

It's clean enough, blessed.

(to Salesman)

I don't know why you haven't bled to death. It just don't bleed.

The Salesman has no answer to this.

LILLY

Momma...

Momma picks up the wallet in front of the Salesman.

MOMMA

I know it isn't polite, but we've waited for some time now. We need some answers.

Momma stops as she looks at the Salesman's identification. A drivers license, a salesman's ID.

LILLY

Momma...?

MOMMA

See...

Momma shows Lilly a credit card-sized calendar with "Dorman Watley, Watley Ministries" on one side.

(CONTINUED)

16 CONTINUED: (2)

MOMMA (CONT'D)

His name is "Dorman". It says here
he's man of God.

Lilly beams. The Salesman struggles to remember just what a
man of God is. He stares. The girl seems eager. He takes the
card and studies it.

LILLY

We belong to Hunger Valley Road.

MOMMA

Oh, when's the last time you were
there, Lilly?

LILLY

Why don't we go, Momma.

MOMMA

Your Daddy--
(to the Salesman)
Her daddy was a deacon--

LILLY

We belong there, Momma! I accepted
the Lord Jesus Christ--

The Salesman makes a sound.

SALESMAN

Yes. I...

They turn to him.

SALESMAN (CONT'D)

(continuing)
I believe.

LILLY

(turning to Momma)
I knew it.

FADE TO:

17 INT. LILLY'S ROOM - DAY - CU - LILLY

LILLY

(into camera)
But what I don't understand is if he
is really a man of God, why does he
have that hole in his head. I mean,
who would have shot him like that?

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

17 CONTINUED:

LILLY (CONT'D)

I suppose that it is God's will.
 But, if this man is a man of God,
 and it was God who willed him to be
 shot, then why is it God's will to
 shoot a man of God? And why would a
 man be a man of a God who would will
 him shot? Unless he did something to
 God, unless he is not as innocent as
 he seems, unless he really isn't a
 true man of God...like Daddy... a
 faker.

Lilly turns to her mother. Momma is not there. Lilly rises
 to search for her. We follow Lilly into the Living Room where
 the Salesman lay. Her mother is resting her head on the
 Salesman's chest. The room is tidier than before. There is
 FOOD ON A TRAY TABLE.

As Lilly enters, Momma slowly responds to her presence.

MOMMA

His heartbeat seems normal.

Momma releases his hand.

FADE TO:

18 INT. LIVING ROOM COUCH - DAY - SALESMAN

The Salesman has eaten some of the food from the tray table.
 He is sitting up, now. Lilly is seated at his feet, asleep
 with her head on the couch. The Salesman puts his hand out
 and pets her head. He rubs his hand down her neck.

MOMMA (O.S.)

She's a good girl.

ANGLE ON SALESMAN - TIME ELISION

The Salesman looks up to Momma. He offers a quiet smile.

ANGLE ON MOMMA

Momma looks out the window at Lilly who is now outside,
 running with a DOG LEASH.

LILLY

(outside)

Jeremy! Jer-e-my! Where are you,
 dog?

(CONTINUED)

18 CONTINUED:

SALESMAN

You're lucky to have her.

Momma looks out at Lilly searching for the dog, Jeremy.

SALESMAN (CONT'D)

God took my daughter away.

Pause.

MOMMA

She's not mine, really.

Lilly enters the kitchen with a bang.

LILLY (O.S.)

Momma, I can't find Jeremy. What if
he's lost?

MOMMA

(pragmatically)

Either he'll come back or he won't.

The Salesman is beginning to seem livelier. Lilly appears in the doorway to the living room. Her knee socks have clumps of burrdocks clinging to them.

LILLY

(top of her lungs)

MOMMA!

FADE TO:

19 INT. LIVING ROOM - NIGHT - ANGLE ON LILLY'S DOOR

Lilly's door opens from the darkness. She stands in her nightshirt.

LILLY

Remember when we went after those
squirrels? In spring, they were--

SALESMAN

Wha--?

LILLY

And when you fired into the sycamore
trees and it made a green line in
the night? Like a tracer? What made
that light? Did electricity make
that?

(CONTINUED)

19 CONTINUED:

SALESMAN (O.S.)
That wasn't me, Lilly.

LILLY
Good-night, sir.

SALESMAN (O.S.)
Good-night, Lilly.

She shuts the door. Darkness.

FADE TO:

20 INT. LIVING ROOM - NIGHT - ANGLE ON MOMMA'S DOOR

From the darkness, Momma slips past the camera in a transparent nightgown. She approaches the sleeping Salesman. She kneels at the couch.

MOMMA
Dor-man...

She brushes the hair from his face. She traces the edges of his wound. She inserts her finger into it. There is a loud rap from inside Lilly's room. We follow Momma as she shoots around. She freezes.

MOMMA (CONT'D)
Lilly?

Through a window ONLY WE SEE Lilly slinking toward the barn.

21 INT. BARN - NIGHT - TACK ROOM AND ELECTRIC FENCE ENERGIZER

The energizer unit for the electric fence emits a series of hums and clicks. Hmm. Click. Hmm. Click. Hmm. Click. It pulses its holy electricity through the frayed wiring below.

LILLY
(whispering)
Where have you been?

The energizer continues to pulse, hum, click.

LILLY (CONT'D)
What are you doing here?

A rifle is leaning against the pulsing energizer.

LILLY (CONT'D)
I missed you, Daddy...

(CONTINUED)

21 CONTINUED:

Lilly reaches down to the rifle. It is in contact with the energizer's terminal.

LILLY (CONT'D)
Aaaarrrrrrh!h!

22 EXT. BARNYARD - NIGHT - ELECTRIC FENCE

There is a flash of green light from the inside of the barn. The three strands of electric fence wire glow a brilliant green.

23 INT. LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Relieved to think that Lilly is still asleep, Momma returns to her designs upon the Salesman. She pauses as the lights dim. Then, she reaches into the Salesman's shirt. She pets his chest.

MOMMA
My husband had chest hair just like yours. When he was still living.

SALESMAN
Did he, sister?

MOMMA
Thick...

There is a rustling sound in the kitchen. A soft, deliberate rubbing sound. Momma heads down to kiss the Salesman. As she does, he begins to speak.

SALESMAN
(lispng through her lips)
Sss...ister...

She pulls back a bit. Still close.

SALESMAN (CONT'D)
I know how this is going to sound, and I don't want you to take this the wrong way, but right now I have the most Godawful headache.

She leans back. The rustling sound continues in the kitchen. Momma hears it.

SALESMAN (CONT'D)
Believe me, under any other circumstances...well, I don't know just what I might do-

(CONTINUED)

23 CONTINUED:

Momma slowly moves toward the kitchen.

MOMMA

Lilly?

24 INT. KITCHEN - NIGHT

Momma switches on the kitchen light. We see Lilly kneeling on the floor rubbing a rag against her blackened, puffy hands. She cradles the rifle in her lap as she peels away what she can of the dead skin. She shows her hands to Momma.

LILLY

MOMMA! Daddy hurt me!

Momma reaches out to her daughter, then tenses at the words she has just heard. She leans down toward Lilly.

LILLY (CONT'D)

No! You've got to run, Momma.

Lilly pushes Momma in the direction of the kitchen door with the rifle.

SALESMAN (O.S.)

Lilly?

LILLY

Momma, go! NOW!

Momma moves toward the kitchen door as Lilly emphatically pushes. Once Momma has made it to the kitchen door steps, Lilly levels the rifle at her back.

LILLY (CONT'D)

(quietly)

Just like a squirrel.

Lilly loads a bullet into the rifle's chamber with a smooth slap.

25 INT. LIVING ROOM COUCH - NIGHT - SALESMAN

The Salesman struggles against his pain, but he cannot make it to his feet.

26 EXT. YARD - NIGHT - MOMMA

In the weak evening light, Momma scurries toward the road. The grass is wet on her mother's feet and calves. From the steps, Lilly follows her with the rifle site.

Momma runs with fear in her eyes and her stride. She pants.

27 INT. LIVING ROOM COUCH - NIGHT - SALESMAN

The Salesman strains, and still he cannot stand. He is confused and panicking.

SALESMAN

Lilly, don't!

28 EXT. KITCHEN STEPS - NIGHT - LILLY

She waits and watches as Momma runs.

LILLY

Run.

Behind Lilly in the kitchen entry, a dark figure appears. Is it the Salesman?

SALESMAN

(in a strange voice)

Lilly.

Frightened, Lilly's eyes open from their squint. She squeezes the trigger out of fear. The bullet whirs toward Momma.

SALESMAN (CONT'D)

NO!

29 EXT. YARD - NIGHT - MOMMA

The bullet pops through Momma's back and out her chest. She falls on her haunches in the grass. With her elbows abnormally high, she gropes for the hole in her chest.

SALESMAN (O.S.)

(singing)

...Heard my despairing cry,
From the waters lifted me
Now saved... am... I...

LILLY

Momma, no!

Lilly fires again. In anger. This time the bullet whizzes past her mother and toward the highway. She cries in remorse.

CUT TO:

30 EXT. YARD - NIGHT - POV BULLET

The bullet whirs menacingly toward its eventual destination: a 1979 FORD GRANADA. The Granada moves with a strangely lit interior. The Salesman is driving, singing.

(CONTINUED)

30 CONTINUED:

The wet-haired Hitchhiker rides in the passenger seat. The Hitchhiker notices the bullet en route to the car. She begins to scream.

SALESMAN

(singing)

Love lifted me

Love lifted me

When nothing else could help

Love lifted me

Love lifted me

CUT TO:

31 INT. KITCHEN - NIGHT - SALESMAN

The Salesman falls to the kitchen floor. The blood flows heavily from his head and begins to cover the linoleum.

SALESMAN (O.S.)

(singing)

Love lifted even me

When nothing else could help

Love... lifted... me...

Lilly stands frozen on the kitchen steps.

LILLY

Momma...

CUT TO BLACK.

THE END.