Christmas audiobook scripts

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The Last Tree on the Lot

Christmas romance · Adult (30-45) · Neutral American · 1 minute

It was four o'clock on Christmas Eve, there was one tree left on the lot, and a man in a green scarf had his hand on it.

"I saw it first," I said.

"You were still parking."

"I saw it from the car."

He looked at the tree. In fairness, it was not much to fight over. It leaned. One whole side was missing. "It's for my daughter," he said. "She's six. I promised."

"It's for my father. He's eighty-one, and it's his first Christmas in my apartment instead of his own house."

We stood there in the slush, two adults holding one bad tree.

"Well," he said at last, "that's worse than mine."

"It's not a contest."

"It was, and you won." He let go. Then he picked up the heavy end. "Where's your car? You'll never get it on the roof alone, and I've got an hour to explain to a six-year-old what a ficus is."

Snowed In at Harlow Junction

Christmas romance · Adult (30-45) · Neutral American · 45 seconds

The train stopped at Harlow Junction at nine on the twenty-third of December, and it did not start again for two days. I have been grateful to the snow ever since.

There were eleven of us in the waiting room and one working radiator. She had the seat nearest to it and a paperback she was not reading.

"You can share," she said, without looking up. "The heat. Not the book."

"What's wrong with the book?"

"Nothing. The couple in it just got snowed in at a station, and I refuse to be that obvious."

I sat down. I held my hands out to the radiator. "Terrible plot," I agreed.

"Completely unbelievable," she said, and turned the page, and smiled at it.

Four Generations of Gravy

Family saga · Mature (55+) · Southern US · 1 minute

There have been four generations of Tolliver women in this kitchen on Christmas Day, and not one of us has ever agreed on the gravy.

My grandmother, Opal, stirred hers with a wooden spoon she would not let anybody wash. My mother used a whisk and called that progress. And now here stood my granddaughter, June, home from college, holding a phone over the pan.

"It says to add the flour slowly, Nana."

"It says. Who says?"

"The internet."

"Baby, the internet never fed forty people out of one oven."

From the table, my mother, ninety-two and missing nothing, called out, "Let the child alone, Marianne. You burned yours till you were thirty."

"I did not."

"Nineteen seventy-one. We ate it anyway."

June was trying hard not to laugh. I handed her the spoon. Opal's spoon, dark as a pecan shell. "Slowly, then," I said. "Go on. Somebody in this family ought to get it right."

The Missing Magi of St. Bride's

Cozy mystery, Christmas · Adult (40-55) · Neutral British · 1 minute

On the morning of the twenty-second, the verger of St. Bride's unlocked the church and found that one of the three wise men had left the nativity during the night.

"Balthazar," said Reverend Ansell, wringing her hands. "The one with the casket. He's plaster, Hetty. He weighs as much as a small pony."

Hetty Marsh, retired headmistress, examined the straw. "No drag marks. So he was carried. Two people, or one with a wheelbarrow."

"Who steals a wise man three days before Christmas?"

"Nobody steals one, Vicar. They'd take all three, or the baby, if it were mischief." She straightened up. "Somebody needed exactly one tall plaster king. Tell me, who is in charge of the float for the Christmas parade?"

The vicar's mouth opened, and closed. "Major Pym. But he told the committee he had a full set of his own."

"I'm sure he did," said Hetty, pulling on her gloves. "I'm sure he had two."

The Smallest Star on the Tree

Children's, picture book · Any · Neutral American · 45 seconds

At the very bottom of the ornament box, under the tinsel and the tangled lights, lived the smallest star in the house.

She was made of cardboard and one piece of foil. A corner was bent. Every year the glass angels went up high, and the silver bells went in the middle, and the smallest star waited.

"Perhaps this year," she whispered.

"Perhaps," said the bells, who were kind, but not hopeful.

Then two small hands reached down into the box. They went past the angels. They went past the bells.

"There you are," said the little boy. "I made you when I was three."

And he put her right at the top, bent corner and all, where everybody could see.

The Year of the Orange

Memoir, childhood Christmas · Mature (55+) · Neutral American · 1 minute

The Christmas I was seven, my father lost his job at the mill, and I got exactly one present. It was an orange.

I'd like to say I was gracious. I was seven. I sat on the floor in my pajamas and looked at that orange as if it had personally let me down.

My mother said nothing. My father went out to the porch, in the cold, without his coat.

It was my older brother, Teddy, who saved the morning. He was eleven. He took the orange out of my hands, very serious, and held it up to the window.

"You know what this is? This came from a place where it's summer right now. Somebody picked this in the sun."

"So?"

"So smell it."

I did. And I swear to you, sixty years on, that kitchen filled up with somewhere warm. We split it four ways. My father came back in for his piece.

I have had bigger Christmases. I can't remember a single gift from any of them.

Somewhere in Belgium, December 1944

Historical fiction, wartime letter · Young adult (18-25) · Neutral American · 90 seconds

Dear Mother,

By the time this reaches you it will be past Christmas, so I will tell you now how we kept it, and you can read it aloud to Dad and Ruthie at the table.

We are somewhere in Belgium. I am not allowed to say more than that, and to be honest I could not if I tried. It is all snow and pine trees, and the snow is the kind we used to pray for at home.

On Christmas Eve our sergeant, a big quiet fellow from Ohio named Kowalczyk, came down the line with his helmet held out like a collection plate. "Everybody puts in one thing," he said. "I don't care what."

Somebody had a tin of peaches. Somebody had half a chocolate bar. I put in the last of your fudge. I hope you will forgive me. It went nine ways and was the best thing any of us had eaten since summer.

We could not light a fire. We could not sing above a whisper. So we whispered. Nine grown men, whispering carols in a hole in the ground, and Mother, I have never heard anything so fine in a cathedral.

I am well. My feet are dry. Save me a place at the table, and do not let Ruthie have my room.

Your loving son,

Danny

No Words, Only Pictures

Comic essay · Adult (30-45) · Neutral American · 1 minute

It is eleven forty on Christmas Eve, and I am sitting on the living room floor with four hundred pieces of a dollhouse and a set of instructions that contains no words.

There are only pictures. In the pictures, a small cheerful figure assembles the entire house using one tool. He is smiling. He does not appear to have any leftover screws. I have nine.

My wife comes downstairs in her robe. "How's it going?"

"Great. Nearly done."

"That's the roof. You've attached the roof to the floor."

"It's a modern design."

She sits beside me, picks up the instructions, and turns them the right way up. I had not known there was a right way up. We look at each other for a long moment.

"We could tell her it's a kit," she says. "From Santa. A project."

"She's four."

"Then start with step one," she says, handing me the tiny wrench, "and I'll make the coffee."

The Hour Before Midnight

Literary fiction · Mature (55+) · Neutral American · 1 minute

At eleven o'clock on Christmas Eve, when the last of the dishes were done, Eleanor Brandt turned off every light in the house except the tree and sat down to keep her appointment.

She had kept it for forty Decembers. First with Harold beside her, his stocking feet on the ottoman. Then, these last six years, alone. One small glass of sherry. No music. The hour before midnight, given over to nothing at all.

The house ticked as it cooled. Outside, snow was falling straight down through the streetlight, unhurried, as if it had been told there was plenty of time.

She did not pray, exactly. She did not remember, exactly. She only let the year come and stand in the room with her, the hard parts and the good ones, and found, to her surprise, that there was space for all of it.

At midnight the church bell began across the river. Eleanor raised her glass an inch toward the empty chair. "Well," she said. "We made it again."

The Pike's Crossing Tree Lighting

Small-town holiday novel · Adult (40–55) · Midwestern US · 1 minute

The town of Pike's Crossing had held its tree lighting on the first Saturday of December for ninety-one years, and for ninety-one years something had gone wrong.

This year it was the switch. Mayor Lindqvist stood on the bandstand in front of four hundred people, pressed the big red button, and nothing happened.

"Give it a second," she said into the microphone.

"It's had a second, Carol," shouted Bud Ostrander from the hardware store.

"Then give it two, Bud."

The high school band, unsure, started the same carol again. A baby began to cry. And little Annie Sorensen, who was five and had been promised lights, walked right up the bandstand steps in her snowsuit, looked at the dark tree, and said, loud and clear, "Please."

I cannot explain what happened next. Bud says it was a loose wire warming up. All I know is that eight thousand bulbs came on at once, and four hundred people made exactly the same sound.

Reindeer on the Roof

Children's, picture book · Any · Neutral American · 30 seconds

Thump. Thump. Scritch. Something was on the roof, and Oliver was the only one awake to hear it.

He pulled the blanket up to his nose. He counted the thumps. Eight. Then one more, smaller, as if somebody had slipped.

"Whoa, there," said a deep voice, very far up. "Mind the chimney, old girl."

Oliver knew the rule. If you look, they leave. So he shut his eyes as tight as they would go, and smiled so hard his cheeks hurt.

The Lights on Calloway Street

Memoir · Adult (40-55) · Neutral American · 30 seconds

My father hung the Christmas lights on our house every year on the same day, in the same order, swearing the same three words.

He was not a festive man. He did it the way he did the taxes. But when he was done he would stand in the street with his arms folded and look at it for a full minute.

I asked him once what he was checking for.

"Nothing," he said. "I just like to see where we live."

The Fruitcake Alibi

Cozy mystery, Christmas · Adult (40-55) · Neutral American · 45 seconds

Nobody had ever eaten one of Winifred Clay's fruitcakes, which was precisely why I knew she was lying.

"I was home all evening, Sheriff," she said, patting her hair. "Baking. You can ask anyone on my list. Twelve cakes, delivered by nine."

Sheriff Dunn looked at me. I run the post office. I know what gets delivered in this town, and what gets quietly returned to sender.

"Winnie," I said gently, "your cakes take three days. You soak the fruit. You told the whole garden club."

"Well, yes."

"So you didn't bake last night. You baked on Tuesday." I let that settle. "Which means last night, while somebody was climbing through the Mercers' window, you had your evening entirely free."

Christmas Morning, 5:12 A.M.

Comic essay · Adult (25-40) · Neutral American · 30 seconds

At 5:12 on Christmas morning, a small cold hand patted my face, and a voice two inches from my ear whispered, "Is it time?"

It was not time. It was barely a number.

"Go back to bed," I said. "Santa's still here. If he sees you, he takes everything back."

A long, thoughtful silence.

"Then why," whispered my daughter, "can I hear Daddy eating the cookies?"

The Carol Singer of Kilbrae

Literary fiction, Irish village · Mature (55+) · Irish · 1 minute

My uncle Fintan had the worst singing voice in the county, and every Christmas Eve he took it door to door, and nobody had the heart to stop him.

I was sent along the year I was ten, to carry the lantern. "And to bring him home," my aunt said, "when he forgets where it is."

We did the whole of Kilbrae. He sang at the Brennans', he sang at the forge. People gave him a coin to go on to the next house.

The last door was old Mrs. Tierney's. She had buried her husband in November and had not been seen since.

"Fintan, don't," I said. "She won't want it."

"She won't," he agreed, and knocked.

He sang it terribly. Every verse. And after a long time the door opened a hand's width, and a voice said, "Fintan Hogan, that is the worst I ever heard it."

"It is, Mary."

"You'd better come in and try again."

The Bakery on Juniper Street

Christmas romance, small town · Adult (25-40) · Neutral American · 1 minute

I came home to run my mother's bakery for one Christmas, and I had a return ticket to prove it.

Six weeks. That was the deal I made with myself on the plane. Get her through the holiday rush, find a buyer, go back to my real life, where nobody knew I could pipe a gingerbread roof.

Then Sam Delgado walked in for his standing order.

Two dozen rolls, every morning at six, for the firehouse. He had done it for years. He knew where we kept the spare key. He knew my mother took her tea with honey when her hands hurt.

"You're the daughter," he said. "The one in the city."

"Just visiting."

"Sure." He took the bag, and then he looked at the window I had frosted at midnight, a whole snowy village, chimney by chimney, because I couldn't sleep. "That's a lot of work," he said, "for somebody who's just visiting."

I still have the ticket. It's in a drawer, under the piping bags.

Father Christmas Takes the Bus

Children's, chapter book · Any · Neutral British · 1 minute

On the foggiest Christmas Eve anyone could remember, the sleigh would not start, and Father Christmas had to take the number nine bus.

"Single or return?" asked the driver, who had seen a great many things on the night route and was not going to be surprised by this one.

"Return, please. And is there room for the sack?"

"Luggage rack. Mind the lady's shopping."

So Father Christmas sat down beside a boy called Arlo, who should have been asleep and was staring very hard.

"Are you really him?"

"I am."

"Then why are you on the bus?"

"Fog," said Father Christmas. "The reindeer won't fly in it. Very sensible animals."

Arlo thought about this. Then he reached up and pressed the bell. "This is my stop," he said. "You can do my house first. Then you won't have to carry it so far."

And that, said the driver afterwards, was the only time he ever heard the old man laugh the whole way down the hill.

The Empty Chair

Family saga · Adult (40-55) · Neutral American · 90 seconds

For thirty years Frank Dalessio had carved the Christmas roast, and this year, for the first time, nobody knew who was supposed to pick up the knife.

The whole family was at the table. Eleven of them, and the twelfth chair, his chair, which Rosa had set a place at without a word to anyone.

"Ma," said Paul, the eldest. "Let me."

"You'll hack it," said his sister Gina. "Dad always said you carve like you're angry at it."

"Dad said a lot of things."

"He said that one twice."

It was the old fight, comfortable as a coat, and they might have had the whole of it. But Rosa stood up. She was seventy-eight and five foot nothing, and the room went quiet the way it always had for her.

"Your father," she said, "was a terrible carver."

Nobody breathed.

"Thirty years. Thick on one side, thin on the other. I never told him, because he was so proud." She held the knife out, handle first, not to Paul and not to Gina, but down the table to the youngest grandchild, Leo, who was fourteen and went scarlet. "You. You have steady hands. Come and do it properly."

Leo came. He cut the first slice with his tongue between his teeth, and it fell thick on one side and thin on the other.

Rosa looked at it for a long moment. Then she laughed until she had to sit down. "There he is," she said. "Pass the plates."

The Train Under the Tree

Memoir · Adult (40-55) · Neutral American · 30 seconds

Every December my grandfather built a railroad around the Christmas tree, and no child was permitted to touch it.

We could watch. We could, if we were very good, blow the whistle. The controls were his.

The year he turned eighty, his hands shook too much to set the cars on the track. He looked at me for a while. Then he slid the transformer across the rug.

"Slow on the curve," he said. That was the whole ceremony.

A Ceasefire in Apartment 4B

Comic fiction · Adult (40-55) · Neutral American · 45 seconds

Mrs. Petrakis in 4B and Mr. Hale in 4C had not spoken since the argument about the recycling, which was in March.

On Christmas Eve the power went out in the whole building. At seven, there was a knock on her door.

"I have candles," said Mr. Hale stiffly. "Too many. I thought, a fire hazard, to keep them all."

"I have a gas stove," said Mrs. Petrakis, "and a lamb that will not wait."

They looked at each other across the dark hallway.

"This changes nothing about the recycling."

"Nothing whatsoever."

"Then bring the candles," she said, "and wipe your feet."

The power came back at nine. Neither of them mentioned it until well after midnight.

The Angel Was Crooked

Memoir · Adult (30-45) · Neutral American · 30 seconds

The angel on top of our tree leaned to the left for my entire childhood, and my mother would not let anyone fix it.

"She's listening," my mother said. "Leave her be."

I straightened that angel myself the first Christmas I had my own apartment. Wire, a twist tie, perfectly upright.

I lasted two days. Then I climbed back up on the chair and bent her over again, toward the kitchen, where the voices would have been.

Elf, Seasonal, Part-Time

Comic essay · Young adult (18-25) · Neutral American · 30 seconds

I was an elf for one December, at the mall, for eleven dollars an hour, and I would like to correct some misunderstandings.

We do not make toys. We manage a line. The hat itches. The shoes have bells, so you can never sneak up on your own break.

But once a day, some small child looks past Santa, straight at you, and whispers, "Are you real?"

And for eleven dollars an hour, you say, "Obviously."

The Snowman Who Stayed Up

Children's, picture book · Any · Neutral American · 45 seconds

On Christmas Eve, when all the windows went dark, the snowman in the Bakers' front yard decided to stay awake.

He had heard the children talking. Somebody was coming. Somebody with a sleigh.

So he waited. The moon went by. An owl went by. A cat went by and was rude about his nose.

"You'll never last," said the cat. "Nobody sees him."

"I don't blink," said the snowman. "I haven't any eyelids."

And very late, when even the cat had gone in, there was a jingle, high up, and a shadow on the snow.

In the morning the snowman was just the same. Except that he was wearing, quite definitely, a new red scarf.

The Ferry Doesn't Run on Christmas

Christmas romance, second chance · Adult (30-45) · Scottish · 45 seconds

The ferry does not run on Christmas Day, which is how I came to spend it on the island with Ewan Macrae, who I had been avoiding since I was seventeen.

"You'll be wanting the spare room," he said at the pier. He had my bag before I could argue.

"I'll be wanting the hotel."

"Hotel's shut till March."

"Then I'll sit in the waiting room."

"For two days? In that coat?" He started up the hill. "There's a fire, Isla. There's soup. And I've had fifteen years to think what I should've said to you, so you'll not need to do any of the talking."

I followed him. I told myself it was for the soup.

No Small Shepherds

Small-town holiday novel · Adult (30–45) · Neutral American · 1 minute

Mrs. Delacroix had directed the children's Christmas pageant for thirty years, and she ran it the way other people run a submarine.

"Shepherds, you are tired," she called from the third pew. "You have been in a field. Why is that shepherd dancing?"

"He needs the bathroom, Mrs. Delacroix."

"Then he needs it in character."

I was the new pastor. It was my first December. I had been warned not to offer suggestions.

"Could the angel perhaps come in a bit sooner?" I said.

The church went silent. Twenty-two children turned to look at me with real pity.

"Reverend," said Mrs. Delacroix, taking off her glasses, "the angel comes in when the shepherds are afraid. The shepherds are not yet afraid." She raised her voice. "Are you, shepherds?"

"No, Mrs. Delacroix."

She put her glasses back on and looked at them over the top. There was a long pause.

"Now we are," whispered the smallest one, and the angel came in right on time.

Night Shift, December Twenty-Fourth

Literary fiction · Adult (40-55) · Neutral American · 1 minute

I have worked every Christmas Eve for nine years, by choice, and the reason is in room 412.

Not the same patient. The same kind. Somebody old, somebody awake at three, somebody whose family came at dinner and went home.

Tonight it is Mr. Halvorsen. Ninety. A retired tugboat captain with a new hip and no intention of sleeping.

"You drew the short straw," he says when I check his line.

"I volunteered."

"On Christmas? What's wrong with you?"

"My kids are grown. My husband snores. And the coffee's free."

He laughs, then winces. I fix his pillow. Out the window, the parking lot is empty and the snow in the lamps looks like static.

"My wife used to wake me at midnight," he says. "Every year. Just to say it first."

I look at the clock. Eleven fifty-eight. I pull the chair over and sit, which we are not supposed to do.

"Two minutes," I tell him. "Then I'm going to beat you to it."

Footprints at Holly Lodge

Cozy mystery, country house · Mature (55+) · Neutral British · 1 minute

There was one set of footprints leading up to Holly Lodge through the snow on Christmas morning, and none coming away, which would have been unremarkable had the silver not been gone.

"So the thief is still in the house," said Lady Carstairs, with relish. She had been waiting forty years for something to happen at Christmas.

"That is one reading, madam," said Inspector Bream.

"You have another?"

"Several. How many arrived last night, after the snow began?"

"Only my nephew. Rupert came up on foot from the station, around eleven. Poor boy was frozen."

Bream crouched at the edge of the drive. The prints were deep and clean. And the heel, he noticed, was the deeper end of every one.

"Lady Carstairs," he said, "does your nephew, as a rule, walk backwards?"

She stared at him.

"Because someone left this house last night. And took a good deal of trouble to look as if he were arriving."

A Tree for 1932

Historical fiction, family saga · Mature (55+) · Midwestern US · 1 minute

In December of 1932 there was no money for a Christmas tree, so my father went out and borrowed one.

That was his word. Borrowed. He came through the door after dark with a little cedar, roots and all, wrapped in a feed sack.

"Walt," my mother said. "Whose is that?"

"The county's. From the ditch by the Larson place. I'll put it back."

"You will not put back a tree."

"Watch me, Edith."

We stood it in a lard bucket. We hung it with buttons and a paper chain my sister made out of the seed catalog. And the day after New Year's, with the ground like iron, my father carried it a mile and a half and planted it right where he'd found it.

It's still there. Forty feet tall, by the ditch on the county road. I drive my grandchildren past it every December and tell them that's our Christmas tree. They think I'm joking.

Dear Sir or Reindeer

Family fiction · Adult (40-55) · Neutral American · 1 minute

Every December, the letters addressed to the North Pole ended up on the desk of Gil Farrow, a mail sorter who had no children and no patience.

Most asked for bicycles. He stamped them and moved on. But one, in careful pencil, began, "Dear Sir or Reindeer, whoever opens the mail."

Gil stopped.

"I do not need anything this year," it went on. "But my grandpa has stopped coming downstairs, and he used to like the mail. Could you send him something? It could just be a letter. His name is Arthur. From, Bea."

"Farrow," called the supervisor. "You're holding up the belt."

"Then hold it."

He had not written a letter by hand in twenty years. He found a pen. He sat for a while. Then he wrote, "Dear Arthur. You don't know me. I sort the mail in your town, and I hear you used to enjoy it. Here is some. More to follow."

The Long Way to Marlow

Christmas romance, road trip · Adult (25-40) · Neutral American · 90 seconds

Every flight out of the city was cancelled on the twenty-fourth, there was one rental car left at the counter, and the man in front of me had just signed for it.

"Where are you headed?" I asked. I am not proud of how it came out.

"Marlow. Upstate."

"I'm going to Pine Hollow. That's twenty minutes past it."

"It is," he agreed, and waited.

"I'll pay for the gas."

"I'll pay for the gas. You navigate, and you don't touch the radio." He held out his hand. "Ben."

"Nora. What's wrong with the radio?"

"It's December. There are nine songs."

We were three hours in, somewhere dark, with snow coming at the windshield like stars, when he said, "So who's in Pine Hollow?"

"My parents. My sister. My sister's perfect husband." I watched the wipers. "They're going to ask why I came alone again."

"Who's in Marlow?" I asked.

"My grandmother. She's going to ask the same thing." He was quiet for a mile. "She's ninety-four. She writes it on the calendar. 'Ben, alone, again.'"

I laughed. I couldn't help it. He glanced over, and then back at the road, and I saw him decide something.

"Here's a thought," he said. "Marlow's first. You come in for ten minutes, you eat one cookie, and she gets to cross it off."

"That's dishonest."

"It's ten minutes." He almost smiled. "We can call it navigating."

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