Dystopian audiobook scripts

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Tuesday Is Egg Day

Rationing, the queue · Adult (30–45) · Neutral American · 1 minute

Tuesday is egg day, which means the line starts at four in the morning and the eggs arrive whenever they please.

I am ninth. Ninth is good. Ninth has gone home with an egg every week since March.

The woman ahead of me has a baby on her hip and a ration book with the corner torn off. I see it when she opens it to check. No corner, no stamp. No stamp, no egg. She knows it too. She keeps smoothing the page with her thumb, as if the corner might grow back.

"Next," says the clerk.

Eight people. Seven. The baby is chewing on a button.

I have been ninth since March. I have been careful and early and nobody's fool.

"Excuse me," I hear myself say. "You dropped this."

And I hold out my own book, open to Tuesday, and I look her right in the eye until she takes it.

The Listening Lamp

Surveillance state, comedic · Mature (55+) · Midwestern US · 1 minute

Every apartment in the Calloway Blocks came with a listening lamp, and after eleven years my wife and I had more or less adopted ours.

We called it Gerald. Dot said good morning to it.

"You know somebody is typing all this down," I told her.

"Then somebody knows how I take my coffee, Walt. I hope it does them good."

So when the man from the Bureau of Domestic Assurance knocked, I figured we were finally in for it. He stood on the mat turning his cap around in his hands.

"Mrs. Brandt. This is irregular. I'm not supposed to make contact."

"It's about the pot roast. The one from the fourteenth." He took out a little notebook. "You said two bay leaves, and then the baby next door started up, and I never got the rest."

Dot stood back from the door.

"Take your shoes off," she said. "I'll write it down."

The Inspector at Gate Nine

Walled city, the gate · Adult (40-55) · Neutral British · 90 seconds

Inspector Maren Oakes had worked Gate Nine for nineteen years, and in all that time she had never once been outside it.

People came in. That was the job. They came in from the dust with their papers folded small, and she read the papers, and she stamped them or she did not. The ones she did not stamp walked back the way they had come. She had trained herself not to watch them go.

The boy at her window that evening was perhaps ten. He had a work permit in the name of a man of forty-six.

"This isn't yours," she said.

"It's my dad's."

"And where is your father?"

"He said to give it to you. He said you'd know what to do."

"Did he. And his name?"

"Tobias Oakes."

She did not look up. She was rather proud of that, afterwards. She turned the permit over. The photograph was older and thinner than the brother she remembered, but it had his ears.

"He said to say sorry about the bicycle," the boy added. "I don't know what that means."

Nineteen years. Not a stamp out of place. There was a camera above her left shoulder and a supervisor due at seven.

"It means he owes me a bicycle," Maren said. She inked the stamp. Her hand was perfectly steady. "Stand up straight. You're forty-six. Try to look as though your knees hurt."

One Cup Back

Climate, the long drought · Mature (55+) · Southern US · 45 seconds

The water truck came on Thursdays, and you took your four gallons and you said thank you, because the driver remembered who didn't.

Mama kept one cup back every week. Not for drinking. She carried it out behind the house where a rosebush stood, brown as a broom, and she poured that cup on the roots and talked to it awhile.

I thought it was foolishness. I told her so. A cup of water was a cup of water, and my throat was as dry as anybody's.

"It's not for the rose," she said. "It's so I remember I'm a person who would."

It bloomed the summer I turned thirty. One flower. I did not drink that day at all.

Due Back in the Autumn

Quiet resistance, the seed library · Mature (55+) · Irish · 1 minute

Declan Furey keeps the last branch library in the Eastern Allotments open four days a week, and nobody has borrowed a book from it in years.

They borrow other things. A woman comes in on Monday and asks for something on roses. He hands her a gardening manual with a paper packet tucked at page ninety. Beans. Unlicensed, unregistered, saved from his own mother's garden.

"Due back in the autumn," he says. "With interest."

In the autumn she brings back two packets. That is the interest.

Today it is an inspector. Grey coat, clean boots. He walks the shelves slowly, takes down the gardening manual, and lets it fall open where it wants to.

Declan thinks about his knees, and whether they will let him run.

The inspector looks at the packet for a long time. Then he reaches into his own coat, and adds a second one beside it.

"Tomatoes," he says quietly. "My father's. Don't lose them."

There Is No Four

Bureaucracy, comedic · Any · Neutral American · 30 seconds

Thank you for calling the Office of Citizen Contentment. Your happiness is important to us.

If you are content, press one. If you are very content, press two. If you are calling to report a neighbor who is not content, press three and speak clearly.

There is no four.

You have pressed four. Please hold. Someone is coming to help you.

Actually, don't hold. Stay exactly where you are.

Inventory of a Kitchen, Year Nine

Rationing, a household list · Adult (25-40) · Neutral American · 30 seconds

One tin of peaches, saved for a reason I can't remember. Half a bag of barley flour. Salt, plenty of salt, they never did run short of salt.

Three candles. One onion, sprouting. My husband's coffee cup, which nobody uses.

That's the list they'll want at the door on Friday. I've written it all down, neatly, the way they like.

I've left off the fourth candle. A person has to keep something back.

Nine Red Doors

Walled city, the muralist · Adult (30–45) · Neutral American · 1 minute

My job was to paint the inside of the wall. Forty miles of it, sky blue up top and a line of green hills below, so that from the avenues you could almost forget what it was.

I worked that wall eleven years. By the time I reached the end, the beginning had peeled, and I'd go around again.

One morning in Sector Twelve I found a door painted on my hills. Not a real door. Somebody had done it overnight with a house brush, red, a little crooked, with a round knob.

My orders were clear. Blue over everything.

I stood there with the roller dripping on my boots. Then I mixed a little brown, and I painted that door a shadow, the way it ought to have had one. I gave it a step.

Next morning there were nine doors. I had enough brown for all of them.

Seven Twelve

Surveillance state, the daily score · Any · Neutral American · 45 seconds

Your number is on the bathroom mirror when you wake up, same as every morning. Seven hundred and twelve. Yesterday it was seven sixteen.

You go back over the day. You smiled at the transit officer. You recycled. You said the pledge at the right volume, not too loud, loud looks like trying.

Four points. Somebody took four points.

Then you remember. The old man on the stairs, the one with no number on his sleeve at all. He dropped his oranges and you picked them up.

You look at the mirror for a while. Seven twelve.

It is a strange thing to discover, at your age, that you would do it again. For oranges.

Warm, with a Chance of Showers

Climate, the weatherman · Adult (40–55) · Neutral American · 1 minute

I have read the weather on Channel Six for twenty-two years, and for the last five of them I have been lying.

Not big lies. They hand me the card and the card says warm. Warm, with a chance of late showers. I say it with the smile. I've got a good smile, it's why they kept me.

It has not rained in Marlow County since my daughter was in the fourth grade. She's in college now.

Tonight the card says warm. The red light comes on. Ed in the booth gives me the finger count, three, two.

"Good evening," I say. "It's a hundred and nineteen degrees. It's going to be a hundred and nineteen tomorrow. There are no showers. There haven't been any showers."

Ed has his hand on the switch. He isn't pulling it.

"If you have a neighbor over seventy," I say, "go knock on their door. Do it now. I'll wait."

Proof of Continued Existence

Bureaucracy, a letter · Mature (55+) · Neutral British · 1 minute

To the Residential Allocations Committee, Block Fourteen.

Dear Sirs,

I write regarding your notice of the third, which informs me that I am deceased, and that my flat has accordingly been reassigned.

I should like to query this.

I appreciate that the Committee is very busy and that mistakes of this kind are, as your clerk put it, statistically acceptable. I do not wish to be difficult. I have completed Form Nine, Proof of Continued Existence, and attach it herewith, together with a recent photograph in which I am holding yesterday's bulletin.

A young couple arrived this morning with their boxes. They were most apologetic. I have put them in the back bedroom and they are, I must say, excellent company.

I therefore withdraw my complaint. Kindly leave me dead. It is the first time in thirty years that anyone has stayed to supper.

Yours faithfully,

Edith Pallister (the late)

Valve Six

Corporate state, the water company · Adult (25-40) · Australian · 1 minute

Nobody at Brightwater Holdings had ever told Jacko Reilly not to open Valve Six. They had not needed to. Valve Six fed the old town pipe, and the old town had stopped paying in the spring.

He walked past it every night at two. Big yellow wheel, padlocked, with a tag that said ACCOUNT SUSPENDED.

"You're looking at it again," said Priya, from the gantry.

"I'm not."

"My nan's on that pipe, Jacko. I look at it too."

"Then you know we'd both be out by breakfast."

"Probably."

He thought about the bolt cutters in locker nine, which he had definitely not put there on purpose.

"If the wheel got opened," he said slowly. "Say for an hour a night. Would the gauges show it?"

Priya was already climbing down. "Not if somebody clever was reading the gauges."

"Are you clever?"

"Mate," she said. "I'm on nights. I've got nothing but time."

The Harmony

Quiet resistance, after curfew · Young adult (18-25) · Neutral American · 45 seconds

The siren went at nine, and after that you could be fined for a lit window, so we sat in the dark like everybody else.

That was the night the humming started. One voice, somewhere across the courtyard. An old tune. My grandmother used to sing it over the dishes, before they printed the list of songs.

"Don't," my father said. I hadn't made a sound.

Then a second voice joined, lower down. Then a third.

I looked at my father. He was staring at the black window with his jaw set. And very quietly, a little flat, the way he did everything, he started to hum the harmony.

The Museum of Before

Aftermath, the school tour · Adult (30-45) · Scottish · 1 minute

Isla Darrow takes the school groups through the Museum of Before on Wednesdays, and the children always laugh at the same things.

They laugh at the lawnmower. A machine for cutting grass shorter, when grass was a thing you had too much of. They laugh at the umbrella.

"And this?" says a wee girl at the front, pointing.

It is a garden hose, coiled on a hook. Green. There is a brass fitting on the end, gone dull.

"That carried water," Isla says. "To the flowers. Or you'd put your thumb over the end, and chase your brother round the garden with it."

Nobody laughs. They are looking at her as though she has described flying.

"You wasted it?" the girl says. "On purpose?"

Isla opens her mouth to explain, and finds that she cannot. She can only remember the sound of it. Her brother, shrieking. The grass, wet.

"Aye," she says. "We did. It was lovely."

Rules of the Bread Queue

Rationing, comedic · Mature (55+) · Neutral British · 45 seconds

There are rules to a bread queue, and they are not the ones on the poster.

One. You do not ask what is at the front. Hope is bad for morale.

Two. You hold a place for the person behind you, and for nobody else. I have seen friendships of forty years ended by a saved place.

Three. You do not discuss the old days. Mr. Abbot once described a bacon sandwich, in detail, and a woman had to be helped home.

I have stood in this queue every morning for six years. I know all their names, their knees, their grandchildren.

Heaven help me, I should miss it if there were bread.

Pigeon Nuisance, Halsey Street

Surveillance state, the camera operator · Adult (25-40) · Neutral American · 1 minute

Operator Tess Varga watched nine streets of the Lowell District from a chair that did not recline, and her quota was six reports a shift.

By four o'clock she had five.

On screen eleven, an old woman was hanging washing on a roof. That was permitted. Under the last sheet, though, when the wind lifted it, Tess could see children. Six of them, cross-legged, and a chalkboard propped on a chimney.

An unlicensed school. That was not five points. That was a promotion.

Her supervisor was two desks away, eating a pear.

Tess looked at the chalkboard. Somebody small had written the alphabet on it, and got the S backwards. She had done the same until she was eight.

She typed her sixth report. Pigeon nuisance, Halsey Street, recommend no action.

Then she reached up and nudged the camera a few degrees left, so that all it could see was laundry.

A Duck in a Hat

Bureaucracy, election day · Adult (40-55) · Neutral American · 1 minute

Election Day in Unity Township was a real holiday. There was bunting. There was a band. There was a ballot the size of a dinner menu, with one name on it and a box to check.

I had checked that box in every election since I was eighteen. So had everybody. The Chairman usually won by about a hundred and four percent.

This year, behind the curtain, I noticed something. The ballot had a back.

It was blank. A whole empty side of good white paper.

I stood there so long the poll watcher coughed.

I didn't write anything brave. I want that understood. I'm an assistant manager at a button factory.

I drew a duck. A small one, wearing a hat.

Next morning the bulletin said the Chairman had won again, with ninety-nine percent. And I thought, somewhere in this town, somebody else has a pencil.

Tied to the Steeple

Climate, the drowned coast · Adult (40-55) · Irish · 90 seconds

On the first Sunday of the month I row out over Ballyharran, and I tie up to the church steeple, because it's the only thing left to tie to.

My mother's kitchen is forty feet below the boat. On a clear day you can see the slates of the roof, and the fish going in and out of the chimney like they pay rent.

I used to come out here to be angry. I was good at it. I'd sit and name them, every minister and every expert who told us we had a hundred years.

That Sunday there was another boat. A girl of maybe nineteen, dropping a weighted line over the side and writing in a notebook.

"Are you from the Board?" I called.

"No." She went red. "I'm an engineer. Well, I'm nearly one. I'm trying to work out if you could build on it. On stilts, like. My granda's house is down there."

"Which one?"

"The blue door."

"Kinsella's," I said. I knew that door. I had been chased away from it for stealing apples.

She was looking at me as if I might tell her to go home. A year ago I would have. There is nothing so tiring as somebody else's hope.

But I found I was pulling my boat alongside hers.

"Give me that line," I said. "You're measuring from the wrong end. The ground rises toward the church. Start there."

Forty Years, in Pencil

Bureaucracy, the mourning permit · Adult (30–45) · Neutral American · 90 seconds

The Bureau of Productive Sentiment allowed three days of mourning for a spouse, two for a parent, and one for anybody else, and it was Nora Whitlock's job to stamp the forms.

She was good at it. Window Four had the shortest line in the building.

The man in front of her had filled out his form in pencil. Spouse. Three days. In the box marked Extension Requested he had written a number, rubbed it out, and written it again.

"Sir, you've put forty years."

"Yes, ma'am."

"The maximum extension is one additional day. With a doctor's note."

"I understand that." He had his hat in both hands. "I only figured I'd ask for what it is. You can cut it down however you have to."

Nora looked at the form. She looked at the line behind him, eleven people, every one with a paper in their hand.

She had stamped her own form in March. Parent. Two days. She had been back at Window Four on the Thursday, and people had said how well she was doing.

"There is a category," she said slowly, "for clerical error."

"Ma'am?"

"If a clerk misreads a form. It takes about six weeks to catch. Sometimes longer, if she files it wrong as well." She brought the stamp down hard, right over the number. "I'm very careless, Mr. Hale. Everyone says so. Next."

The Gratitude Circle

Corporate state, comedic · Adult (25-40) · Neutral American · 1 minute

Every morning at Dunmore Consolidated we stand in a circle and say one thing we are grateful to the company for. It is not optional. Gratitude is in my contract, between dental and death.

Brent is grateful for the lighting. Brent is always grateful for the lighting. Kayleigh is grateful for the opportunity to grow, which is what she said yesterday, and I see the team leader make a small note.

Then it's me.

I have used the cafeteria. I have used the parking. Last week, God help me, I was grateful for the stapler.

"Whenever you're ready, Joanne."

I look around the circle. Eleven tired people in lanyards, every one of them silently willing me to come up with something, because if I can't, we all stay late.

"I'm grateful for these guys," I say.

It just comes out. And the awful part, the part I will not be putting in my review, is that I mean it.

Delivery for Level Forty

Walled city, the tower · Young adult (18-25) · Neutral American · 45 seconds

Teo has lived his whole life below Level Ten, where the light comes from tubes and the air comes from a pipe.

Today he has a delivery for Forty. One crate, signature required. The elevator takes six minutes and his ears pop twice.

The doors open on a room made of glass. And beyond the glass, going on forever, is something enormous and blue.

He knows the word. He has seen pictures. He just did not know it would be so high up, or that it would move.

"First time?" says the woman signing his slip.

Teo nods. He can't seem to stop.

"Take your time," she says, and holds the door.

Uncle Hamish Biscuit

Rationing, the dog · Adult (30-45) · Scottish · 1 minute

There was no ration for dogs. The Ministry was clear about it from the start. A dog was a luxury, and luxuries were to be surrendered at the depot on Marchbank Road.

I did not surrender Biscuit. I registered her as my uncle.

Uncle Hamish Biscuit, aged eighty-one, housebound. It was a wee bit of forgery and I'm not proud of it. But the card came through, and every Friday I queued for an old man's oats and an old man's tin of fish.

Two years, that went on. Then one Friday the clerk leaned over the counter.

"Your uncle. How's he keeping?"

"Fair. He sleeps a lot."

"Does he." She was writing something. "Only we've a lot of housebound uncles on this street. Thirty-odd. Very healthy appetites."

I could not feel my legs.

She slid the bag across. There was a bone in it, wrapped in newspaper.

"Tell him that's from my aunt," she said. "She's a spaniel."

Six O'Clock, No Bulletin

Aftermath, the silent loudspeaker · Mature (55+) · Neutral American · 1 minute

The loudspeaker on our corner has played the morning bulletin at six o'clock every day for thirty-one years. This morning, at six, it plays nothing.

I stand at the window in my undershirt. All down Fenner Street there are faces at windows, doing what I'm doing. Listening to a pole.

Six-oh-five. Six ten. A dog barks, and somebody hushes it out of pure habit.

My wife comes up beside me. "Is it broken?"

"Could be."

"Or it could be..."

"Could be."

We don't say it. We learned a long time ago not to say things. Thirty-one years of good morning, citizens, and I find I don't know what my own street sounds like.

Then the Kowalczyk boy from number nine walks out into the middle of the road. He looks up at the speaker. He looks at all of us.

And he starts, very badly, to whistle.

Paid in Full

Corporate state, the company store · Adult (40-55) · Southern US · 1 minute

Lorena Tubbs paid on her mama's account at the company store the first of every month, same as her mama had paid on her granddaddy's.

Eleven dollars. She'd paid it so long her hand counted it out without her.

"Hold on, now," said the clerk. He was new, with a clean collar. He ran his finger down the ledger and back up. "Miss Tubbs, this says you're clear."

"Clear of what?"

"The account. It zeroed out in April. You've been overpaying since." He turned the book around. "Company owes you thirty-three dollars."

She looked at the number. It was a small number. It had three generations behind it, bent over in the mill.

"I don't know," Lorena said, and that was the truth. She had never in her life stood in that store and not owed. "I don't know what a person does next."

"Well. Most folks buy something."

"No," she said. "I believe I'll just walk out."

Page Thirty-One

Quiet resistance, the typist · Adult (40-55) · Neutral American · 90 seconds

For fourteen years I typed the Ministry's weekly Report on Public Wellbeing, and for the last six of them, I put one true sentence in each.

Only one. I was not a brave woman. I had a mother to keep and a bad hip.

The report ran to forty pages. Harvests exceeded, morale high, the usual. Somewhere around page thirty, where nobody's eyes were still open, I would type something small. The bread in Sector Four is half sawdust. There are no children in the Ashby Street school anymore. It rained on Tuesday and people stood out in it.

Nobody ever noticed. I'll admit that hurt a little.

Then one spring a new Deputy came in. Young, sharp, read everything. On his third Friday he called me to his office, and my report was on his desk, open to page thirty-one.

"Miss Corrigan. Did you type this?"

"Yes, sir."

"This line. About the school."

"Yes, sir."

He was quiet. I looked at his window and thought, well, it was a good six years.

"I've read back through the files," he said. "There are three hundred and nine of these." He closed the folder gently, the way you'd close a door on a sleeping child. "I grew up on Ashby Street. I wondered where everybody went."

He handed the report back.

"Page thirty is too easy to find," he said. "Try twenty-two."

Your Daylight Subscription

Corporate state, comedic · Any · Neutral American · 30 seconds

Good morning, valued resident. Your daylight subscription has expired.

To restore your windows to clear, please say "renew." To hear our premium sky options, including Sunset Plus, say "sky."

I'm sorry. I didn't catch that. It sounded like a word that is not available on your current plan.

One moment.

I shouldn't tell you this. The bathroom window is on a different circuit. Go and look. It's a beautiful morning.

Four Minutes at the Grate

Walled city, the speaking grate · Young adult (18-25) · Neutral American · 1 minute

Once a year they open the speaking grate in the Meridian Wall, and you get four minutes.

I have been practicing mine for weeks. I am going to tell my sister about the job, and the apartment, and the cat. I am going to sound fine. I've written it on my hand.

The grate is the size of a paperback. You can't see through it, only hear. The guard starts the clock.

"Lena?"

"I'm here. I'm here. Say something."

And every word goes clean out of my head. I look at my hand and it might as well be in another language.

"Dani, are you there?"

"I'm here," I say. "I don't know what to say."

"Me neither." She laughs, and it's the same laugh, exactly, nine years and a wall and it's the same. "Just breathe, then. I'll listen to you breathe."

So that's what we do.

The Ninth Dry Year

Climate, the farm · Adult (40-55) · Midwestern US · 30 seconds

Roy Lindqvist planted corn in the spring of the ninth dry year, and his neighbors came out to the fence to watch him do it.

Nobody said he was a fool. They were polite people. They just stood there in the dust with their arms folded.

He got to the end of the row and straightened up.

"Well," he said. "I'd sooner be wrong out here than right on the porch."

One by one, they went home for their seed.

Something Real by Monday

Surveillance state, the informer · Mature (55+) · Neutral British · 1 minute

Everybody in Linden Court knew that Mr. Pym on the second floor was the building's informer, and so we were all extremely nice to him.

I had him to tea on Thursdays. I gave him things to report. Mrs. Okafor's wireless was a touch loud. Somebody on the fourth floor had been feeding pigeons. He would write it all down, and his quota was met, and nobody was taken away.

It worked for nine years.

Then one Thursday he did not take out the book. He sat with his cup, turning it round.

"They've asked for more," he said. "Something real. By Monday, or they will send someone who is better at it than I am."

I looked at him. A small grey man, with a darn in his cuff that he had plainly done himself.

"Well," I said. "We can't have that. Have another biscuit, Mr. Pym. We shall simply have to invent somebody dreadful."

Lunch on the Plinth

Aftermath, the empty plinth · Adult (25-40) · Australian · 45 seconds

When the Chairman's statue finally came down, it left a plinth in the middle of Founders Square, and the town of Wirra Creek spent a whole winter arguing about what to put on it.

A fountain, said some. A soldier. A very large clock.

Old Bev Tranter listened to four months of meetings without a word. Then she walked out one morning with a kitchen chair, climbed up, and sat down on the plinth to eat her sandwich.

"What's that supposed to be?" somebody yelled.

"Lunch," said Bev. "Up here where I can see you all."

By spring there were six chairs. Nobody ever did vote on it.

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