Inspirational Fiction audiobook scripts

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The Sixth Loaf

Amish, a new neighbor · Mature (55+) · Neutral American · 30 seconds

Ruth Yoder baked six loaves every Friday and needed only five. The sixth went on the fence post at the end of the lane, wrapped in a clean towel, for the Englishman who had bought the Miller place and waved at nobody.

For eleven weeks the towel came back folded and empty. On the twelfth it came back with a jar of honey in it, and a note. It said only, "I keep bees."

What the Choir Knew

Small church, the choir · Mature (55+) · Southern US · 30 seconds

I have sung bass in the Mount Olive choir for forty-one years, and I cannot read a note of music. Never could. I stand by Harold and go where Harold goes.

Last Sunday Harold was out sick. I opened my mouth, and there was nothing to follow. Then Miss Lottie, at the organ, played my line with one finger, good and loud.

She had known the whole time. Forty-one years.

Second Cup

Second chance, a brother at the counter · Adult (40-55) · Neutral American · 30 seconds

He comes in at six, the way he used to, and sits at the counter like a man waiting to be asked to leave.

I pour the coffee. I do not say where have you been, or eleven months, or you could have called. I set the cup down and turn the handle toward his right hand, because he is my brother and I remember which hand.

He looks at it a long while.

"Thank you, Jo," he says.

The Mending Basket

Family, a grandmother's mending · Adult (25-40) · Neutral American · 30 seconds

You find the mending basket in the hall closet, a week after the funeral, and at the bottom is your own blue sweater. The one you tore at sixteen and threw away, loudly.

She took it out of the trash. She matched the yarn. The mend is so fine you have to feel for it with your thumb.

You never knew. You put it on, right there in the hall, and it still fits across the shoulders.

Sold for a Dollar

Amish, a farm auction · Adult (40-55) · Neutral American · 45 seconds

The auctioneer held up the plow and asked for forty dollars. Nobody in the barn lifted a hand. He asked for thirty. He asked for ten.

Eli Stoltzfus stood at the back with his hat in his hands, watching his father's tools go begging, and he thought, so this is how it ends, with my neighbors too kind to look at me.

"One dollar," called Amos Lapp.

"Sold."

Amos carried the plow across the barn and set it down at Eli's feet. Then the harness went for a dollar, and the wagon, and the team.

By noon everything Eli owned had been sold, and none of it had left the farm.

Wednesday Night Supper

Small church, the midweek supper · Adult (25-40) · Midwestern US · 45 seconds

I went to the Wednesday supper at Grace Chapel for the casserole, and I will not pretend otherwise. It was the end of the month. I had two kids and nine dollars. I planned to eat fast, say thank you, and leave before anybody asked what I believed.

Nobody asked. A woman named Bev asked whether my boy liked corn. A man with a hearing aid asked if I could reach the good platters, since I was tall.

At the door Bev handed me a foil pan, still warm. "We always make too much," she said.

They do not. I have worked in that kitchen since. They make exactly enough, and then one more.

The Letter in the Glove Box

Forgiveness, a father's unsent letter · Adult (30-45) · Neutral American · 45 seconds

My father's truck came to me with a quarter tank of gas and a letter in the glove box. It had my name on it, and a date from six years back, the winter I stopped taking his calls.

I read it in the driveway with the engine off. He was not a writing man. He said he had been wrong about the money and wrong about my wife, and he did not know how to say so. He said he would mail it Monday.

He never did. Six years it rode around with him, next to the tire gauge.

I folded it along his creases. Then I said it for both of us. "All right, Dad. All right."

Opening Day at the Feed Store

Small town, a widow and the feed store · Adult (40-55) · Neutral American · 45 seconds

Marian unlocks the feed store at seven, four months to the day after Walt's funeral, and stands behind his counter not knowing where he kept the pens.

At ten past, the bell rings. It is Orville Tate, who has bought nothing here since 1998. He nods, pours himself coffee, and sits down on the bench by the stove.

Then Lyle. Then the Purdy brothers. Not one of them needs feed.

"Walt always had the radio on," Orville says, to the stove.

She finds it under the counter and turns the dial. Farm report. The men settle like hens.

Nobody says a word about why they came. Marian finds the pens.

After the Water

Community, after the flood · Mature (55+) · Australian · 45 seconds

The water went down on the Thursday and left the whole of Wattle Creek looking like the bottom of a teacup. I stood in my front room in gumboots, looking at the tide mark on the wallpaper, and could not think where a person was meant to start.

Then I heard a ute pull up. Then another. Dot Callaghan came through the door with a mop and two blokes I'd never met, carrying a generator.

"We've done ours," she said. "Mine only got to the step. Where do you want us?"

I said I didn't know. I said I couldn't pay anyone.

"Good," said Dot. "Because nobody's selling. Kev, start with the carpet."

The Front Door Key

Second chance, a job after prison · Mature (55+) · Southern US · 45 seconds

Mr. Abernathy read the application twice. It was only half a page. Name. Address, the halfway house on Front Street. And in the box about convictions, the young man had written yes, and the year, and then, smaller, I can explain.

"You don't have to explain," said Mr. Abernathy.

"Sir, most folks want me to."

"Most folks never ran a hardware store. Can you tell a man he's buying the wrong size bolt without making him feel like a fool?"

Dewayne thought about it. "I can try."

"That's the whole job. Seven tomorrow." He slid a key across the counter. "That's the front door. Don't make me regret the key."

The Porch Light on Alder Street

Small town, coming home · Adult (30-45) · Neutral American · 1 minute

I drove into Harlan Falls after dark on purpose. Twelve years gone, and I did not want to be looked at through anybody's kitchen window.

My mother's house was the last one on Alder Street. I had the key the lawyer mailed me and a plan. Sell the furniture. Sign the papers. Be gone by Sunday.

The porch light was on.

I sat in the car and stared at it. The power had been shut off in March. I had shut it off myself, by telephone, from six hundred miles away.

"It's on an extension cord," said a voice. Mr. Petrakis from next door stood at the hedge in his slippers. "Runs from my garage. Your mother asked me, before. She said you'd come at night."

"That was twelve years ago."

"I know it. I've changed that bulb four times." He turned back toward his house. "Welcome home, Annie. There's soup. Don't argue."

The Gate Sticks

Amish, a daughter comes back · Young adult (18-25) · Neutral American · 1 minute

Hannah walked the last mile because she wanted the time. Two years. She had a suitcase with a broken wheel and a speech she had practiced since Ohio.

Her father was mending fence by the road. He did not look up when she stopped. He set a staple, drove it, and reached for the next.

"Datt," she said. The speech was gone. "I don't know if I'm staying. I don't know what I am. I only know I couldn't not come."

He drove one more staple. Then he straightened, slowly, the way he did everything, and looked at her suitcase and her cut hair.

"The gate sticks," he said. "You have to lift it."

"I remember."

"Your mother set a place for you. She has set it every night." He picked up the hammer again, and his voice was not quite steady. "Go on in. The soup will not wait, and neither will she."

The Substitute Organist

Small church, a village Sunday · Young adult (18-25) · Neutral British · 1 minute

Mrs. Pettifer has broken her wrist, and so on Sunday morning I am sitting at the organ of St. Aldhelm's with nine people looking at the back of my head.

I am seventeen. I know exactly three hymns, and one of them is a Christmas carol. It is June.

"Just play what you can," the vicar whispers. "Slowly. Everything sounds holy if it's slow."

So I play the carol. Nobody blinks. I play the other two. Then comes a silence that needs filling, and in a panic I play the only other thing my hands know, a song off the radio, at a quarter of the speed.

It sounds magnificent. Old Mr. Dray closes his eyes.

Afterwards he presses my hand at the door. "Lovely, that last one. My Jean would have liked it. What's it about?"

I look him in the eye. "I think it's about love, Mr. Dray."

"Well," he says. "Aren't they all."

A Table at Rosalind's

Second chance, a chef in a church basement · Adult (40-55) · Neutral American · 1 minute

For nineteen years I owned a restaurant with my name over the door. For the last three I have cooked in a church basement for whoever comes down the stairs.

The restaurant went under, and so did I, a little. A friend said they needed somebody Tuesdays. I said I'd do one.

That first night I made what I was told to make. Canned beans. White bread. I plated it like I was ashamed of it, because I was.

A man with a duffel bag looked at his tray, and then at me. "You're a cook," he said.

"I used to be."

"No. You wiped the rim of that plate. Nobody wipes the rim down here." He smiled. "Feels like eating out."

The next week I brought my own knives. The week after, tablecloths, and a girl of about six asked if it was somebody's birthday.

"Yes," I told her. I do not know why. It felt true.

What Nuala Planted

Grief and hope, a widower's garden · Mature (55+) · Irish · 1 minute

Dan Brennan did not go into the garden that winter. It had been Nuala's, every inch. He could not tell a weed from a wallflower, and he was not about to learn now.

So he let it go. He watched it from the back kitchen with his tea going cold, and he thought, well, that's the pair of us.

It was the second week of March when he saw the yellow.

He went out in his slippers. Crocuses, along the wall. Then daffodils, hundreds of them, where there had never been daffodils before. Up the path. Round the shed. In a ring about the bench where he took his pipe.

She had been out there in October. October, with the hospital bag already packed in the hall, on her knees in the cold, and never a word to him.

"Ah, Nuala," he said. "You bold article."

He went back in for his boots, and came out to learn.

Casserole Season

Grief and hope, the hot dishes · Mature (55+) · Midwestern US · 1 minute

When Gene passed, I received fourteen casseroles in six days. I counted, because counting was something to do.

Nine had noodles. Four had tater tots on top. One was from Arlene Voss, and I could not tell you what was in it, and I have been cooking for fifty years.

On the seventh day I stood in my kitchen looking at a wall of other people's dishes, every one with a strip of masking tape and a name, and I got angry. Good and angry. What was I supposed to do with all this?

Then I understood. I was supposed to bring the dishes back.

Fourteen dishes. Fourteen front doors. Fourteen people saying come in, Peg, sit a minute, have you eaten.

It took me till April. I think that was the idea. Nobody up here will tell you they love you. They will hand you a hot dish and make you return the pan.

The Bench at Three in the Morning

Grief and hope, a hospital corridor · Adult (30-45) · Neutral American · 1 minute

At three in the morning I was on the bench outside the surgical ward, holding a cold paper cup of coffee.

A man sat down at the other end. Sixties, work boots, a cap in his hands. He did not say anything, and I was grateful.

After a while he asked, "Who've you got in there?"

"My wife."

He nodded. "My boy. Motorcycle." He turned the cap around once. "I don't pray much. I'm not sure I'm any good at it."

"Me neither."

"Seems a poor time to start."

"Seems like the only time anybody does."

He laughed, surprised. "Tell you what. I'll do yours, you do mine. Might count for more, coming from a stranger."

So we sat there, two men who did not know how, each asking for the other one's person. I never got his name. His boy walked out in June. I know because my wife saw them in the lobby, and waved.

Mrs. Okafor's Tomatoes

Community, the new fence · Adult (40-55) · Neutral American · 1 minute

The new people next door have put up a six-foot fence, and Mrs. Okafor takes it personally.

For thirty years there was chain-link between the yards, and over it went zucchini, gossip, a borrowed ladder, somebody's lost cat. Now there are cedar boards and silence.

"Let them have their privacy," her daughter says on the phone.

"I am not stopping them."

"Mama. What did you do?"

What she did was plant her tomatoes along the fence, the tall kind, the kind that climb. By August they are over the top and hanging down the other side, heavy and red, entirely on the neighbors' property.

On a Saturday there is a knock. A young man stands on her step with a colander of her own tomatoes, looking guilty.

"Ma'am, these are yours. We didn't want to just take them."

"Then you had better come in," says Mrs. Okafor, "and I will show you what to do with them."

The Snow Day Route

Community, a school bus in the snow · Mature (55+) · Midwestern US · 1 minute

They called off school at five in the morning, and by six I was warming up the bus anyway.

Here is a thing you learn driving Route Nine for twenty-two years. For some kids, a snow day is a holiday. For some, it is a day with no lunch. I knew which stops were which. I am not supposed to know.

Darlene from the cafeteria met me at the garage with eleven sacks. Peanut butter, an apple, a carton of milk each.

"This isn't in my contract," she said.

"Isn't in mine either."

"You get stuck, I never saw you."

I did not get stuck. I ran the whole route with no children on it, the first time in my life, and stopped at eleven mailboxes. At the last one a boy of about eight came out in his sister's coat.

"Mr. Lund? There's no school."

"I know it," I said. "I just missed you all. Here. Don't tell."

Sorry Is a Short Word

Forgiveness, two sisters in a bus shelter · Mature (55+) · Scottish · 1 minute

My sister Isobel and I had not spoken in nine years when we found ourselves alone in the same bus shelter in Pitlochry, in the rain, with forty minutes until the Perth bus.

It was about a ring. Our mother's. I will not go into it.

She looked at the timetable. I looked at my shoes. A lorry went by and soaked us both to the knee, and Isobel said a word our mother would not have liked.

I laughed. I could not help it.

"Don't," she said.

"I'm not."

"You are. You've a face on you like Dad at a wedding."

"Isobel. I'm sorry. I've been sorry since about the second year. I just didn't know how to get down off the horse."

She was quiet a long time. The rain came on harder.

"It's a short enough word," she said at last. "You'd think we could have managed it." And she moved her bag off the bench.

Sunday Shoes

Family, a father learns to braid · Adult (30-45) · Neutral American · 1 minute

On the Saturday before Easter, Marcus Bell stood in his bathroom with a comb, a spray bottle, and a seven-year-old who had opinions.

"Mama did it tighter."

"I know she did."

"And she did the part straight."

"I'm working on the part." He had watched four videos. He had practiced on a mop. None of it had prepared him for a head that moved.

It took an hour and ten minutes. The braids were not straight. One barrette was upside down. He looked in the mirror and felt every bit of what he could not give her.

Nia turned her head left, then right. He braced.

"They're crooked," she said.

"I know, baby."

"I like them." She touched one. "They look like you did them." She said it the way you would say they look like gold.

He put the comb down. He had to, for a second.

"Now do my shoes," said Nia.

Till It Looks Right

Family, a grandmother's recipe · Young adult (18-25) · Neutral American · 1 minute

My grandmother's recipe for rolls is written on an index card in pencil, and it is useless.

Flour, it says. No amount. Butter the size of an egg. Milk till it looks right. Bake in a good oven until done.

My first Thanksgiving is coming, and she has been gone since spring. I have made these rolls four times this week. They have come out like doorstops, like sponges, and once like soup.

Till it looks right. Looks right to who?

On the fifth try I stop measuring. I close my eyes and put my hands in the bowl. And my hands know. I was six, on a step stool, and she had her hands over mine, saying feel that, too sticky, a little more, there.

There.

She did not write it down because she had already put it somewhere better. The rolls come out fine. I leave the card on the fridge anyway. I like her handwriting.

The Doctor Takes Pie

Small town, the new doctor · Adult (30-45) · Neutral American · 1 minute

Dr. Leila Haddad had been in Pickett three weeks when Mr. Coombs tried to pay for his blood pressure with a rhubarb pie.

"I can't accept that," she said. "There's a billing office. They send a statement."

"Doc Hensley took pie."

"Dr. Hensley," she said carefully, "retired."

Mr. Coombs looked at her a while. He was eighty-one and in no hurry. "You're lonesome," he said. "I can always tell. You eat your lunch in that car."

She opened her mouth and had nothing to put in it. She had come here for a two-year contract. She had not planned on being seen.

"The pie isn't for the blood pressure. The pie is an invitation. My wife sets supper at six on Thursdays, and you can't say no to a man once you've taken his pie."

Leila took the pie. It was still warm underneath. "I'm a vegetarian," she said, a little helplessly.

"So's rhubarb," said Mr. Coombs.

Amnesty Week

Small town, the library fine · Mature (55+) · Southern US · 1 minute

I have run the Dell County Library for thirty-one years, and I never did collect a fine from Tommy Ray Biggs.

He checked out a book on small engine repair in 1994. He was fifteen. He did not bring it back, and he did not come back, and I understood why. Fines add up. Shame adds up faster.

So last spring I declared Amnesty Week. Bring it back, no questions, no charge.

On the Friday, a big man in a mechanic's shirt came in and set a book on my desk like it might go off.

"Miss Edna. I've had this thirty years."

"I know you have, Tommy Ray."

"I used it. I've got my own shop now."

"I know that too."

He looked at the floor. "What do I owe?"

"Not a thing. That's the point of the week." I slid a new card across the desk. "Although we have got a better one on diesels now."

The Coffee Can

Farm, waiting on rain · Adult (40–55) · Southern US · 1 minute

It has not rained on this farm in sixty-three days, and my daughter has decided to do something about it.

She is nine. She has set a coffee can out in the yard, right in the middle of the dust.

"What's that for, June bug?"

"To catch the rain, Daddy." Like I'm slow.

I do not tell her the forecast. I do not tell her about the bank, or the well. I have been carrying all that around for two months like a sack of wet feed, and I am tired.

"You pray for it?" I ask.

"No, sir. I already did that. Now I'm getting ready."

I stand there a good while. Already did that. Now I'm getting ready.

Then I go and do what I have been putting off since July. I clean the gutters. I check the cistern. I get ready.

It rains on the sixty-sixth day. The can is still out there. She makes me measure.

The Boat in the Garage

Family, two brothers and a boat · Adult (40-55) · Neutral American · 1 minute

The boat had been in their father's garage for twenty-six years, half finished. Now the house was sold, and neither brother had a garage.

"We could burn it," said Pete.

"We are not burning Dad's boat."

"It's not a boat, Carl. It's a pile of cedar with an opinion."

They stood on either side of it. They had not agreed on anything since about 1989, and both knew this was really about who had visited more.

Carl ran his hand down the hull and stopped. Under the dust, in carpenter's pencil, were two columns of marks. Dates. Initials. P, then C, then P, then C, each beside a plank.

"He was keeping score," said Pete.

"No." Carl looked closer. "He was taking turns. One for you, one for me. So neither of us would have more boat."

Nobody said anything for a while.

"I've got a driveway," Pete said finally. "And a tarp."

"I've got Saturdays," said Carl.

The Building Fund

Small church, the roof envelope · Adult (40-55) · Neutral American · 90 seconds

For three years, somebody had been putting a hundred dollars a month in the offering plate at Shiloh Community Church, in cash, in a plain white envelope marked Roof.

We are sixty people on a good Sunday. I knew what every one of them could spare, and it was not that. I am ashamed to say I had theories. The dentist. The Hallorans, who sat in front.

I found out on a Saturday night, when I came back for my reading glasses.

Mr. Whitlow was in the sanctuary with his mop bucket. He had cleaned our church for twenty years, at a wage I would not like to say out loud. He took a white envelope from his shirt pocket, tucked it under the plate, and patted it, twice, the way you would a child's head.

"Pastor," he said. He looked a little put out. "You weren't supposed to see that."

"Mr. Whitlow. That's a quarter of what we pay you. Why?"

He leaned on the mop and considered the ceiling, and the brown stain over the third pew that we had all learned to sit around.

"Because I'm the one who empties the bucket," he said. "Folks who sit under a roof think about it on Sunday. I think about it every time it rains." "It's not your business who loves this place. Go home, Pastor."

I went home. I have never told a soul, until now.

Three Hundred Sixty-Five

Second chance, one year sober · Adult (40–55) · Neutral American · 90 seconds

Tonight I get a coin. It is about the size of a poker chip, and it is the most expensive thing I have ever owned.

The meeting is in a church basement, with coffee that could strip paint. A year ago I sat in the back by the door with my coat on, and I did not give my name.

"Ray," says Gloria, who runs the thing. "You want to come up?"

I do not, particularly. I come up.

I had a speech. It was about my truck, which I wrecked, and my job, which I lost, and my daughter, who told me eleven months ago that she would believe it when she saw it. I was going to be funny about the coffee.

Then the door at the back opens. And it is her. Callie. Twenty-four, in her work scrubs, with her car keys still in her hand like she might need to leave fast.

She does not sit. She stands by the door with her coat on.

I know that spot. I know exactly what it costs to stand there.

"I'm Ray," I say, and my voice goes. I try again. "I had a whole speech. I'm not going to do it. Somebody told me she would believe it when she saw it." I hold up the coin. "So. Here. Look."

Callie does not cry. She is tougher than me. But she takes off her coat.

The Fence Line

Forgiveness, two old farmers · Mature (55+) · Midwestern US · 90 seconds

Nobody in Tolliver County could tell you anymore what the Ostrander and Greer feud had been about. Eleven feet of pasture, in 1961.

What they could tell you was that Walt Ostrander and Arvid Greer had farmed side by side for forty years without a word. They buried their wives in the same churchyard, a year apart, and stood on opposite sides of the same grief.

The ice storm came through in February. It took down a mile of fence between them, and by morning forty head of Greer's cattle were standing in Ostrander's winter wheat.

Walt saw them from the kitchen. He put on his coat. He was eighty-one, and he had been waiting half his life for a good reason to be angry.

He found Arvid already out there, alone, trying to set a corner post with hands that would not close around the digger.

"You're doing that wrong," he said. First words in forty years.

"I know it."

"You always did set a post like you were mad at it."

Arvid let the digger drop. "I can't grip, Walt. It's the arthritis. I can't hardly button a shirt."

Walt looked at the cattle. He looked at the eleven feet of ground, which had never grown anything worth having.

"Well, move," he said, and took up the digger. "And put the line wherever you want it. I'm too old to walk the extra."

Lambing Night

Farm, a daughter home for lambing · Adult (25-40) · Neutral British · 90 seconds

Kate had not meant to be home for lambing. She had meant to come up on the Friday, take her father to lunch, mention the sheltered flats in Skipton, and be back in Leeds by Monday.

Instead it was two in the morning. She was on her knees in straw, and her father was shouting instructions from a kitchen chair in the barn doorway, because his hip would not let him kneel.

"She's breech. You'll have to turn it."

"I can't, Dad. I work in insurance."

"You did forty of these before you were twelve. Get in."

She got in. It came back, the way swimming does. The heat, the small hard knot of a hoof. She turned it. She drew it. It landed in the straw like a wet glove and did nothing at all.

"Dad."

"Rub it. Harder than feels kind."

She rubbed. And the lamb sneezed, shook its ridiculous ears, and bawled.

Kate sat back on her heels and found she was crying, which was absurd.

Her father said nothing for a while. Then, "You came up to tell me to sell."

"Yes."

"I know. You left the leaflet in the car." He nodded at the lamb, already hunting for its mother. "I can't do this another year, Kate. I'm not daft. I just wanted one more with you in it. I wanted you to remember you were good at it."

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