



Romance audiobook scripts

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The Last Ferry

Contemporary · Adult (30-45) · Neutral American · 1 minute

I had the ticket in my hand. That is the part nobody believes.

Nine-forty to the mainland, the last one until morning, and I was close enough to hear the engine turning over. Twelve years of saying I would go, and there it was, chugging away like it did not care either way.

Marcus did not chase me. That is not who he is. He stood outside the chip shop with his hands in his pockets and let me have the distance, because he knew something I did not want to know yet.

I would like to tell you there was a moment. Lightning. A gull screaming overhead like the end of a film.

There was a queue. There was a woman with a pushchair asking me if I was getting on, love, because if I was not, could I move.

And I stayed. Not for him. Not yet. I stayed because for the first time in twelve years I could not think of a single honest reason to leave.

Six Feet of Snow

Small town, duet · Adult (25-40) · Neutral American · 45 seconds

Cast: NELL RORY

NELL You said the road was clear.

RORY The road was clear. Past tense. Historically. In the great sweep of time, that road has been clear.

NELL There is a snowdrift on your truck the size of a horse.

RORY There is.

NELL Taller than a horse.

RORY I am not going to argue about the horse.

NELL So we are here.

RORY We are here.

NELL In your grandmother's cabin.

RORY Which has heat, food, and one working bedroom, before you ask.

NELL I was not going to ask.

RORY You were absolutely going to ask.

NELL ...How many beds.

RORY There it is.

The Understudy

Enemies to lovers · Young adult (20-28) · Neutral American · 30 seconds

He is not better than me. He is louder, which in this building is treated as the same thing.

Six weeks of watching him take my blocking, my light, my one good laugh in act two, and smile at me like we are in on something together.

So when they announced he had food poisoning and I would be going on, I did the professional thing. I said what a shame. I meant it for about four seconds.

Then I got to his dressing room and found the note he left for me. Written before he got sick. Just in case.

Break a leg, it said. You have been better than me since September.

Letters From the Front

Historical · Adult (35-50) · Light British (RP-adjacent, not plummy) · 3 minutes

Third of November.

Dearest Eleanor,

They have moved us again, which I am not permitted to tell you, so I will say instead that the mud here is a different colour and leave you to draw your own conclusions about the geography of France.

I have your last letter in my breast pocket. It has been rained on twice, which means I now know it by heart, which was probably your intention. You always did write as though you expected to be memorised.

You asked me what I think about. I will tell you honestly, because you have never once

thanked me for being gallant.

I think about the kitchen. Not the garden, not the church, not any of the places we were photographed being sensible in. The kitchen, at half past five, when you have been up since four and the bread is wrong again, and you look at me over your shoulder with flour on your wrist and say, well, say something then.

I think about saying something then.

There is a boy here, nineteen, from Leeds, who has appointed himself my keeper. He believes that because I am older I must know how any of this ends. I have not corrected him. It seems a small enough kindness to be the man who knows how it ends.

He asked me yesterday whether I had a girl at home. I said I had a wife. He said that was different, and I said yes, it is better, and he laughed at me for a full minute. I let him. It has been a long week and the boy needed a laugh more than I needed to be right.

Eleanor, I am going to write something now that I would not say to your face, so you will have to forgive the coward's method.

If this goes the way it may go, I want you to know that I was not frightened for most of it. I was frightened the day I left. Standing on the platform, watching you decide not to cry in front of the neighbours, I was more afraid than I have been at any moment since, and everything after has been ordinary by comparison.

You gave me the worst day of the war before the war even started. Which means, in a manner of speaking, that you have been protecting me ever since.

Write to me about the bread. Write to me about the leak in the scullery and whether your mother is still not speaking to us. Write to me about nothing at all, at length, in your appalling handwriting.

I remain, in mud and in earnest,

Your Thomas.

Salt and Smoke

Romantic suspense · Adult (30-45) · Irish (light) · 1 minute

The harbour smelled of salt and smoke, which meant the Brennans were burning something they did not want found, which meant Declan had about ten minutes.

He came down the hill the long way, past the dead boat and the caravan with the curtains that never opened, and he did not run, because in this town running was a confession.

She was already on the pier. Of course she was. Coat too good for the weather, shoes entirely wrong for it, standing where anyone could see her.

"You should not be here," he said.

"You wrote to me."

"I wrote to you eleven years ago."

"Well." Maeve looked out at the water, and the wind took her hair across her face, and she did not bother to fix it. "I am a slow reader."

Behind them, up the hill, something caught properly and the smoke changed colour.

Declan took her elbow. "Walk with me and do not look back at the fire."

"Why not?"

"Because whoever set it is watching to see who does."

Tuesday People

Second chance, older leads · Mature (55-70) · Neutral American · 1 minute

We are Tuesday people, Harold and I. Have been since the library moved its opening hours and ruined both our Mondays.

He takes the chair by the window because of his back. I take the one by the radiator because of my everything. We do not sit together, exactly. We sit in the same room with great commitment.

Forty years ago he took me to a dance and stepped on my foot and apologised for eleven minutes, and I married somebody else, and so did he, and both of those people are gone now, and here we are, being extremely careful with the last part.

Last Tuesday he brought two coffees. Held one out. Did not say anything, because Harold has never in his life led with words.

I said, is this a date, Harold, and he said, at our age I would not waste the good mug on a maybe.

So. Yes. It appears I have a Tuesday.

The Dragon's Accountant

Fantasy romance, comedic duet · Adult (25–45) · Performer's choice · 1 minute

Cast: **AUDIT** **VESRAK**

AUDIT You are hoarding at a loss.

VESRAK I am a dragon.

AUDIT You are a dragon with a cash-flow problem. Gold does not appreciate sitting under you. It just gets warm.

VESRAK It is a hoard. It is not supposed to appreciate. It is supposed to be terrifying.

AUDIT It is terrifying. It is also eleven per cent of the regional money supply, which is why bread costs what it costs, which is why villagers arrive here with pitchforks, which is why you eat them, which is why nobody farms, which is why bread costs what it costs.

VESRAK ...

AUDIT I have made a chart.

VESRAK You have made a chart.

AUDIT Would you like to see the chart?

VESRAK I would like to eat you.

AUDIT You have said that every Thursday for seven months. You have never once eaten me.

VESRAK I am pacing myself.

Closing Time

Dual narration (alternating POV) · Adult (25–40) · Neutral American · 90 seconds

HER SIDE.

He wipes the same section of bar for the fourth time, which is how I know he wants me to leave and is too polite to say so. Everyone else went home an hour ago. There is one song left on the jukebox because I put four dollars in it out of spite.

I say, you can tell me to go.

He says, I know.

He does not tell me to go.

HIS SIDE.

She has been nursing the same drink since eleven, which is fine, because the truth is I would keep this place open until the building falls down if she kept sitting there.

She says I can tell her to go. I say I know.

What I do not say: that I have worked every Friday for six years, that the song playing is the one she played the first night she came in, and that she has never once noticed she plays it every time.

The song ends. She looks up like the silence surprised her.

I say, one more?

Both of us know I am not talking about the drink.

Rain Check

Contemporary, voicemail · Young adult (22-32) · Neutral American · 30 seconds

Hey, it's me. Obviously. You have my number, that's how this works.

So, um. I'm outside the restaurant, and I know I said eight, and I know it's eight-forty, and I want to be really clear that the reason I'm late is not a reason. It's a choice. I sat in my car for forty minutes deciding whether to come in.

Which is a weird thing to admit on a voicemail you're going to hear tomorrow, if you hear it at all.

Anyway, I'm coming in now. If you left, that's fair. If you didn't...

Okay, I'm coming in.

The Quiet Part

Grief and romance · Adult (38-55) · Neutral American · 3 minutes

The casseroles stop on day eleven.

Nobody warns you about that. They warn you about the first night, and the paperwork, and the terrible morning when you reach for your phone to tell him something. Nobody mentions that grief has a catering schedule, and that when it ends you will stand in front of a fridge full of other people's kindness and understand, quite calmly, that everyone has gone back to their lives.

I threw out four of them. I want that on the record, because I have been very good about everything else.

Owen comes on day twelve, which is either thoughtless or deliberate, and with Owen it is never thoughtless.

He does not bring food. He brings a ladder.

"Your gutter," he says, by way of greeting. "It has been wrong since spring. He was going to do it in April."

And that is how I find out that my husband talked to his brother about the gutter. That there was a conversation, somewhere, in some car park or kitchen, in which the two of them agreed that April was the month. That life was being planned out loud in rooms I was not in, the way it always is, the way I never thought about once.

I stand in the doorway while Owen sets the ladder against the house. It is October. The light goes early now.

"You do not have to do that," I say.

"I know."

"I can pay someone."

"I know."

He climbs. I watch. Somewhere down the street a dog is losing an argument with a bin.

Here is the part I have not said to anyone, and I am going to say it now, in my own kitchen, to nobody, while my husband's brother clears leaves out of a gutter eleven days after the funeral.

I am not only sad. I am furious. I am furious that he left the gutter. I am furious that he left the lightbulb in the hall and the thing with the car insurance and the way the boiler needs the switch flicked twice. I am furious that being loved by him meant being handed a list of small unfinished chores, and that I will now do every one of them alone, badly,

for the rest of my life, and that this is what the books mean when they say love.

Owen comes down the ladder with his hands full of wet leaves, and he looks at my face, and he does not ask.

He says, "There is a gate hinge too."

I say, "I know."

He says, "I could come Thursday."

And I hear myself say yes, before I have decided anything at all.

Fake Dating the Best Man

Fake dating, comedic · Adult (28-38) · Neutral American · 45 seconds

The plan was simple. Four days, one wedding, one fake boyfriend, zero questions from my mother.

The plan did not account for Ben announcing, to a table of eleven people and one microphone, that we met when I rescued his dog.

I do not like dogs. Ben knows I do not like dogs. Ben was looking directly at me when he said it, with the face of a man who has decided the bit is the point.

So I said, "It was a very small dog."

And he said, "It was a Great Dane."

And my mother said, "Sweetheart, you're afraid of geese."

Four days. I am going to marry him or bury him and I genuinely could not tell you which.

The Night Shift

Medical, slow burn · Adult (30-45) · Neutral American · 1 minute

Bay four was a nineteen-year-old with a collapsed lung and a mother who kept apologising for being in the way.

Nadia took the mother. That is not a small thing. Anyone can put in a chest tube by year four. Almost nobody remembers the person standing behind you, saying sorry, sorry, I'll move.

I watched her crouch down so they were eye level, and say something I did not hear, and the woman's shoulders came down about two inches.

Four in the morning, we ended up in the corridor with the bad coffee, and she said, "You were good in there."

I said, "You were better."

She said, "I know," and drank her coffee, and did not leave.

Seven years I had worked nights. That was the first one that went quickly.

Enemies at the Farmers Market

Enemies to lovers, duet · Adult (25-40) · Neutral American · 45 seconds

Cast: JUNE OWEN

JUNE You moved your table.

OWEN I moved my table four inches.

JUNE Onto my side.

OWEN There are no sides. It is a field.

JUNE There is a rope. The rope is the side.

OWEN The rope is decorative.

JUNE The rope is the whole system.

OWEN Your jam is blocking my honey.

JUNE My jam is not blocking your honey, your honey is sitting in front of my jam, which is different.

OWEN Is it.

JUNE Materially.

OWEN Have dinner with me.

JUNE ...Move the table back.

OWEN Have dinner with me and I will move the table back.

JUNE Fine.

OWEN Fine.

What the House Kept

Second chance, literary · Adult (40-55) · Neutral American · 3 minutes

The house sold in nine days, which the agent called a triumph and I called a verdict.

I came back to clear the last of it on a Tuesday, because Tuesdays are cheap and I have become the kind of person who books flights on cheap days. Twenty-two years in that kitchen. Two children raised. One marriage that did not so much end as run out of road

somewhere around the second recession.

There is a particular sound a house makes when nothing is left in it. Not silence. Bigger than silence. The rooms give your footsteps back to you at a slightly wrong angle.

I found things, obviously. That is what these days are for. A tooth in an envelope, unlabelled, which could belong to either child and which I have kept, and will keep, and will never be able to explain. A recipe card in my mother's handwriting for a cake she never once made well. Three of my husband's ties in the back of a cupboard, still knotted, because he took them off like a man escaping.

And under the stairs, in a box marked simply KITCHEN, the mugs.

We had two. Green for him, cream with the chipped lip for me, bought in our first month here, for two pounds each, in a shop that is now a phone repair place. For twenty-two years those mugs came out every morning without either of us saying a word about it.

I sat down on the floor with them in my lap and I did not cry, and then I did.

Here is the thing nobody warns you about. The marriage ending was a decision. Two adults, one long conversation, a lot of paperwork. I have made peace with the decision. The mugs are not a decision. The mugs are just a fact that used to be true.

At four, Daniel knocked.

He does that, still, in a house neither of us owns any more. He stood in the doorway in his terrible gardening coat, holding a flask, looking at the empty rooms with his mouth doing the thing it does when he is not going to say the sentence he came to say.

"I brought tea," he said. "There is no kettle."

"There is no anything."

"I know. I checked on Sunday."

Which is how I found out he had been coming here, on his own, to sit in an empty house.

We drank tea out of a flask, on the floor, in the room where we had every important conversation of our adult lives, and he did not ask me to come back and I did not offer, because we are both too old to confuse a feeling with a plan.

But when I stood up to go, he said, "Same time next Tuesday?"

And I said yes before I understood what I had agreed to.

Callsign

Military romance · Adult (28-40) · Neutral American · 30 seconds

Comms went down at 0400. Standard. Weather, probably, or the array again.

What was not standard was the eleven hours after, when I sat in a tin room in a country I cannot name and did the arithmetic on how long it takes a person to assume the worst.

I thought about her in the hallway at Fort Bragg saying, do not do the brave voice with me, Rivera. I hate the brave voice.

When the line came back the first thing I heard was her breathing.

She said, "Say something."

I said, "It was the weather."

She said, "I know."

Neither of us hung up for an hour.

The Understudy's Note

Enemies to lovers, epistolary · Adult (25-35) · Neutral American · 30 seconds

If you are reading this, I am face down somewhere with a bad oyster and you are going on.

I have written four versions of this note. The first three were funny. This one is not, so read it once and throw it away.

You have been better than me since September. Everyone in that building knows it. I have been louder, which in our industry is often mistaken for talent, and I let it be mistaken, because I was afraid of exactly this night.

Take the second act slower than you think. The laugh in the wardrobe scene is yours, it always was, I have been stealing it for eleven weeks.

Break a leg. Not metaphorically. I need my job back on Thursday.

Two Dogs, One Hallway

Contemporary, meet cute · Adult (25-40) · Neutral American · 45 seconds

The dogs met first, which is how Priya later insisted the whole thing should be credited.

Hers was a greyhound with the personality of a filing cabinet. His was whatever had happened when a terrier made a series of poor decisions. They met in the third-floor hallway at seven in the morning and immediately conducted themselves like old colleagues at a funeral.

"Sorry," the man said, doing nothing to shorten the lead.

"You're not sorry."

"I'm not sorry," he agreed. "He's been talking about this for weeks."

Priya looked at the dog, who was now lying down in the middle of the corridor with the serenity of the recently retired.

"He's blocking my door."

"He is."

"Is this going to be a daily thing?"

The man considered it. "Depends how you feel about seven o'clock."

She did not answer, and she was late for work, and for the rest of the week she left at seven exactly.

Small Hours at the Bakery

Small town, slow burn · Adult (30-45) · Neutral American · 1 minute

Three in the morning is not romantic. Three in the morning smells like yeast and burnt sugar and the inside of my own head.

I have been proofing bread in this room since I was nineteen, which is either devotion or a failure to leave, and most days I could argue it either way.

Marcus comes at four, because the delivery is at four-fifteen and he has decided, without ever saying so, that I should not be the one carrying flour sacks in the dark.

He does not knock. He takes the crates. He puts the kettle on wrong, every time, too much water, and I have never once corrected him because a man who makes your tea badly at four in the morning is a man who is coming back at four in the morning.

Tonight he leaned on the counter and said, "You look wrecked."

I said, "You look worse."

And he laughed, once, quietly, the way you laugh in a town where the neighbours are asleep.

That is all. That is the whole thing that happened. I have thought about it eleven times since.

The Offer

Workplace, high stakes · Adult (30–45) · Neutral American · 1 minute

The offer was on the table for eleven minutes before Eva understood what it actually was.

Not the salary. The salary was fine, the salary was more than fine, the salary was the kind of number you read twice and then keep your face still about.

It was the reporting line.

"You'd report to me," Callum said, as though it were a detail, as though they had not spent four years being very careful in lifts.

"I'd report to you."

"Structurally."

"Structurally," Eva repeated.

He turned his pen over once. It was the only nervous thing she had ever seen him do, and she had been watching for four years.

"Say no," he said, "and nothing changes. Say yes, and everything changes, and I will hand this account to Priya so that it can change properly."

Eva looked at the number on the page, and at the man who had just made it less important than it was ten seconds ago.

"Give it to Priya," she said.

Ghost in the Wallpaper

Paranormal romance · Adult (25-40) · Neutral American · 1 minute

The estate agent said character features, which I now understand to be a legal term.

The ghost is in the hallway wallpaper, mostly. He is not frightening. He is about six inches to the left of where you expect a person to be, which is worse, because your body notices before your mind does and you spend the whole day feeling watched by furniture.

In week one I tried salt, sage and shouting. In week two I tried a podcast about it, which made everything worse. In week three I started saying good morning, because I am British and could not keep ignoring someone in my own hall.

He did not say anything back, obviously. He is a smudge.

But the temperature in that hallway rose about half a degree, and it has stayed there since, and last Tuesday when the pipes went and I was crying on the bottom step with a torch in my teeth, the light in the hall came on by itself.

I am not saying it is a relationship.

I am saying I have started leaving the radio on for him.

Rivals in the Bidding War

Enemies to lovers, comedic duet · Adult (30-45) · Neutral American · 45 seconds

Cast: AUCTIONEER MARA HOLT

AUCTIONEER Two hundred.

MARA Two-fifty.

HOLT Three.

MARA Three-fifty.

HOLT Four.

MARA You do not even want it.

HOLT I want it enormously.

MARA You do not know what it is.

HOLT It is a...

MARA Yes?

HOLT ...a lamp, of some description.

MARA It is a butter churn.

HOLT It is a beautiful butter churn.

MARA Five hundred.

HOLT Six.

MARA This is a charity auction, you lunatic.

HOLT Then we are both doing extremely well.

AUCTIONEER Six hundred, going once...

MARA ...Seven. And you are buying me dinner with the money you just saved.

HOLT Deal. Eight.

MARA Stop bidding!

The Long Way Round

Friends to lovers · Adult (30-45) · Neutral American · 90 seconds

We had eleven years of nearly, which is the most expensive thing I own.

Nearly at her brother's wedding, when the band was bad and we were the last two upright. Nearly in the car park of a hospital in February. Nearly on a Tuesday, in a Sainsbury's, over the question of whether I needed a bigger flat, which is not a romantic conversation and was absolutely a romantic conversation.

Every time, one of us was seeing somebody, or had just stopped seeing somebody, or had a job in another city, or had an excuse that sounded like a reason.

Here is what I learned, and I am telling you because I do not want you to learn it the way I did: there is no version of this where the moment arrives properly. The moment does not arrive. There is only a Tuesday, in a supermarket, with a man holding a basket, deciding whether to be brave.

I was not brave on that Tuesday.

I was brave eleven months later, in the rain, outside a house that was not hers any more, which is a stupid and cinematic place to finally be brave.

She said, "You are eleven years late."

I said, "I know."

She said, "You had better be very good at this now."

Reader, I am trying.

Two Weeks in the Cabin

Forced proximity · Adult (25–38) · Neutral American · 30 seconds

The snow took the road on Thursday, the generator on Friday, and by Saturday it had taken most of Cass's opinions about Ellis Hart.

He was still insufferable. That was not in dispute. He alphabetised the tinned food. He had views about kindling.

But he had also, at some point in the night and without mentioning it, put his own blanket over her while she slept in the chair, and then sat up until four feeding the fire in a room cold enough to see his breath.

Cass lay very still, under a blanket that smelled of him, and thought: this is going to be a problem.

Coming Home to Cedar Street

Single parent romance · Adult (32-45) · Neutral American · 1 minute

Milo asked about him on a Wednesday, in the car, in the way eight-year-olds ask the enormous questions: sideways, while looking out of the window.

"Is Sam your boyfriend."

I did the thing where you take a corner very carefully to buy four seconds.

"Sam is my friend."

"He fixed the gate."

"He did fix the gate."

"Friends don't fix gates."

Which is, I would like to note, the single most devastating piece of social analysis I have received in my adult life.

So I said, "Would it be okay if he was?"

And he thought about it for two streets, and then said, "Does he know about Dad?"

And there it was. The real question. Not is this man nice, or is this man staying, but does this man know that we have already lost one, and has he agreed to be careful with us anyway.

"He knows," I said.

Milo nodded once, and went back to the window, and said, "Okay."

I drove the rest of the way home with my hands at ten and two, crying about a garden gate.

The Duet

Romance, duet scene · Adult (28-45) · Neutral American · 90 seconds

Cast: NOOR SAM

NOOR You did not call.

SAM I know.

NOOR For nine days.

SAM I know how long it was.

NOOR Do you.

SAM Two hundred and something hours, and I could tell you what I was doing in most of them, so yes. I know how long it was.

NOOR Then why.

SAM Because on day one I had something to say, and on day three I had a speech, and by day six the speech had got so big that I could not fit it through a phone.

NOOR That is not a reason. That is a description of being frightened.

SAM ...Yes.

NOOR Say it now then.

SAM Here? In the car park?

NOOR You had nine days to pick a location.

SAM Fair.

NOOR Sam.

SAM I do not want the version of this where we are careful. I have done careful. Careful is how I got to thirty-eight with a very nice flat and nobody in it.

NOOR ...

SAM That was the speech. It was better on day three.

NOOR It was fine.

SAM It was not fine.

NOOR It was fine, Sam. Get in the car.

Regency: The Letter She Did Not Send

Historical (Regency) · Adult (20-35) · British (light RP) · 1 minute

I wrote to him in March and burned it in April, which I mention only because it was the single most sensible act of my twenty-third year.

In it, I said that I had understood his silence in the garden, and that I did not require an explanation, and that he might consider himself free of any obligation formed by a dance, a glance, and one unfortunate conversation about the harvest.

All of which was a lie so complete that I was almost proud of it.

What I meant, of course, was: I have thought of nothing else since Tuesday. I have invented eleven reasons for you to call at this house and dismissed each as transparent. My sister has begun to look at me with pity, which I find intolerable, and which she is entirely justified in feeling.

I burned it because a woman may be ridiculous in her own drawing room, but she may not be ridiculous in ink.

He called on the seventh of May.

He said, "You did not write."

And I said, "No."

And he said, "I waited."

Reader, I have never in my life been so glad of a fire.

The Barn at Half Past Five

Western / ranch romance · Adult (30-50) · Light Western American · 45 seconds

Wes had the mare's foot between his knees when Delia came in with the lamp.

He did not look up. He had thirty years of not looking up at the wrong moment, and he was not going to waste them on a woman in a doorway at half past five in the morning.

"She throw it again?" Delia asked.

"Left fore."

"I told you about that farrier."

"You did."

She set the lamp on the post and stayed. That was the part he did not know what to do with. Everybody in this county had an opinion about his horses. Almost nobody stayed in the cold to hold a light while he worked.

When he finally straightened up, she was looking at him the way you look at weather coming in.

"Say it," he said.

"I sold the north field."

"I know."

"To you."

Wes put the hoof pick in his back pocket, very slowly, and said, "Then I guess we better talk about the fence."

Grief Group, Tuesdays

Grief and romance · Adult (35-55) · Neutral American · 90 seconds

There is a biscuit hierarchy in grief group and nobody tells you about it.

The custard creams go first, then the digestives, then, around week four, you notice that nobody ever takes the pink wafers, and you begin to feel for the pink wafers a tenderness that is frankly out of proportion.

I said this out loud in week six. To the group. In my turn. Fourteen people waiting for me to talk about my wife, and I talked about biscuits for ninety seconds.

Afterwards a man called Errol said, "You were funny in there."

I said, "I was avoiding."

He said, "Sure. But you were funny."

We have had coffee every Tuesday since. Not a date. The post-grief-group coffee, which is its own category and does not appear on any form.

Last week he said, "At what point does this become a date?"

And I said, "I do not know. I have never done this before."

And he said, "Neither have I. I was married thirty-one years."

And we sat there, two enormous idiots in a garden centre café, both crying slightly, both quite happy, while somebody's grandchild screamed about a fish.

I am not over her. I want to be clear about that, because everyone keeps hoping I am.

I am just also, apparently, available on Tuesdays.

Two Lines in a Group Chat

Contemporary, epistolary · Young adult (20–30) · Neutral American · 30 seconds

Okay so. Group chat. Six people. One of them is him.

I type: are you coming Friday.

I delete it, because in a group chat "are you coming" reads like a register, and I do not want to be the register.

I type: Friday?? with two question marks, which is worse, two question marks is unhinged.

I type nothing for nine minutes.

And then he types: are you going Friday

And I look at my phone in a Tesco car park like it has personally insulted me, because he did it. He just did it. He typed the sentence I deleted twice and he did not even capitalise it.

I type: yes

He types: good

And that is the whole thing. That is what I have got. Four words and a car park.

It is going to be a very long Friday.

The Lighthouse Keeper's Daughter

Historical, coastal · Adult (20-35) · Light Irish or Scottish · 3 minutes

My father kept the light for thirty-one years and spoke of it exactly twice.

The first time was to tell me how the wick must be trimmed, which he did on my ninth birthday, in the tone other fathers use for prayers. The second was the night of the wreck, when he came down the stairs with his hands burned and said, "It was not the light."

He was right. It was not the light. The light never failed him. The sea simply did what the sea does, which is arrive.

I have lived on this rock my whole life. I know the difference between the sound of weather that will pass and weather that will not. I know that gulls go quiet before the worst of it. I know that a man walking up from the harbour in the wrong boots has come with bad news, because good news waits for better weather.

That is how I knew about Tom before he opened his mouth.

He came up the path in his brother's boots, in March, with his cap in his hand, which is a thing men only do at funerals and proposals, and it was not a funeral.

I put the kettle on. There are three kinds of silence in a lighthouse kitchen and I chose the third, the one that makes a man speak.

He said, "They are giving me the boat."

I said, "I heard."

He said, "It is a good boat."

I said, "It is a very good boat, Tom."

And then neither of us said anything for the length of time it takes water to come to the boil in a room where nobody is willing to go first.

Here is what I did not say, though I have said it in my head every day since, in this kitchen, in this weather, to this window.

I did not say: I have watched you come up that path four hundred times and I have counted every one of them.

I did not say: my father will die on this rock, and I will keep the light after him, because there is nobody else, and because he taught me the wick on my ninth birthday, and because that is a promise even if nobody ever called it one.

I did not say: ask me anyway.

What I said was, "You will want to be away before the tide."

He looked at me for a long moment, and put his cap back on, and said, "Aye."

And he went down the path, in his brother's boots, and I stood at the window with two cups on the table and watched him the whole way down, because I have never once been able to stop.

The light went on at eight, the way it does.

He came back in October. But that is a different chapter, and I have a wick to trim.

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