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.

The Spare Key

Contemporary, neighbors · Adult (28-40) · Neutral American · 1 minute

I have locked myself out of my apartment six times since March.

The first time was an accident. I want that on the record. Groceries in both arms, door swings shut, keys on the counter. I knocked on 4B because Gus has my spare, and Gus answered in reading glasses with a pencil behind his ear, and said, "Again?"

It was not again. It was once.

The second time was also an accident. Mostly.

By the fourth time I was leaving the keys on the counter on purpose and then standing in the hallway pretending to be surprised. I practiced the surprised face. I am not proud of the surprised face.

Tonight he opened the door before I knocked. He was holding my spare key out on his palm, and next to it, a second key I had never seen.

"That one's mine," he said. "Saves you the acting."

He knew. Of course he knew. He has known since the third time, and he left the porch light on anyway.

Second Violin

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

Adrian had sat second chair for nine seasons and had never once looked at the first violin during a performance. It was a rule. You watched the conductor, you watched your part, and you let the woman to your left carry the solo without the weight of your attention.

Then Imogen joined, and the rule became a full-time job.

She counted under her breath. She tapped her left foot on the off beat, which was technically wrong and somehow always right. In the slow movement of the Dvořák she leaned forward half an inch, as if the music were a person telling her a secret.

Tonight, the oboe went flat in the second bar. Every string player on the stage heard it. Adrian adjusted without thinking, the way you catch a glass before it falls.

And beside him, without turning her head, Imogen adjusted too. Not to the oboe.

She had tuned to him.

He played the rest of the concert looking straight at the conductor, and did not hear a single note of it.

The Planner's One Rule

Grumpy and sunshine, comedic · Adult (30-45) · Neutral American · 1 minute

I have planned two hundred and eleven weddings and I have one rule. Never fall for the caterer.

Caterers are charming. They feed you at three in the afternoon when you have forgotten lunch. They say things like, "Try this, tell me if it needs salt," and look at you while you chew. It is a trap.

Luca Bianchi does not do any of that. Luca Bianchi argues with me about canapé timing. He is the most difficult man in the county and I book him every time because he is never, ever late.

Tonight the generator failed in the middle of the first dance. Ninety people in a dark barn. And before I had my flashlight out, Luca was walking between the tables with candles, lighting them one by one, humming the song so the couple could keep going.

He handed me the last candle and said, "Needs salt."

And I forgot to check my clipboard for the rest of the night.

Night Bus

Contemporary, meet cute · Young adult (22-32) · Neutral American · 1 minute

The number 40 night bus leaves the hospital at twelve-fifteen, and for three weeks it has been me, the driver, and a person in green scrubs who falls asleep against the window by the second stop.

I do not know their name. In my head they are Two Stops, because that is how long they last.

Two Stops has a lunch bag with ducks on it. Two Stops once laughed so hard at something on their phone that the driver looked in the mirror and smiled, and the driver has not smiled at anyone in three weeks.

Tonight they did not fall asleep. They sat down across the aisle instead of by the window and said, "I think we should probably introduce ourselves. You've seen me drool."

I said, "Only twice."

They said, "Three times. I counted the days you looked away."

We missed both of our stops. The driver did not say a word. He just took the long way home.

Allotment Seven

Second chance, older leads · Mature (55-70) · Light British (not plummy) · 1 minute

Allotment Seven had been mine for nineteen years when Raymond Platt took Allotment Eight and planted runner beans along our shared fence.

My runner beans. My fence.

He was a widower, the committee said, as if that excused the beans. He grew dahlias the size of dinner plates and talked to them, which I could hear, every evening, through the fence.

In June the frost came late and took half my seedlings overnight. I went down at seven in the morning to dig them out and found a tray on my side of the fence. Twelve tomato plants. Spares.

I left him a jar of chutney. He left me a dahlia. By August we had taken down a section of the fence so we could share the water butt, and that is what I told my daughter it was for.

He wrote me a note on the back of a seed packet that summer. I have kept it. It said, Same time tomorrow.

The Mapmaker's Apprentice

Historical, Victorian · Adult (25-40) · British (light RP) · 1 minute

Clara had worked in Mr. Ashby's shop for two years before anyone thought to ask whether she could draw.

She could. She had been correcting his coastlines in the evenings, after the shop was shut, with a pen so fine it might have been a hair. Mr. Ashby, whose eyes were going, signed the plates and never noticed.

His nephew noticed.

Joseph Ashby came down from Leeds to manage the accounts and spent his first week staring at the chart of the Norfolk coast as though it had insulted him.

"This is not my uncle's hand," he said at last.

Clara said nothing.

"It is better than my uncle's hand," Joseph said. "Who taught you to draw water like that?"

Her father, she said. And a great deal of looking.

He did not dismiss her. He had her name engraved, very small, in the lower corner of the next plate. It was hers. And he was the only man in London who knew where to look for it.

Gate Twelve

Forced proximity · Adult (30–45) · Neutral American · 1 minute

Every flight out of Denver is cancelled, and the only person I know in this entire airport is Harriet Cole, who got the promotion I wanted and who is currently eating my pretzels.

In fairness, I offered her the pretzels. I did not expect her to take the whole bag.

We have been at Gate Twelve for six hours. I know she takes her tea with two sugars and pretends it is one. I know she does the crossword in pen and gets the last clue wrong on purpose so she has something to think about. I know she has called her sister three times and said, "No, I'm fine, I'm with a colleague," and every time she said colleague, she looked at me like she was trying the word on.

At two in the morning they turned the lights down. She put her coat over both of us like it was a perfectly normal thing to do.

"For warmth," she said.

"Obviously," I said.

Neither of us slept. Neither of us moved, either.

The Interpreter

Workplace, romantic suspense · Adult (30–45) · Neutral American · 1 minute

My job is to be invisible. I sit half a step behind the person who matters and turn their words into someone else's words, and if I do it well, nobody remembers I was in the room.

Mateo Ferreira remembers.

He is the other side's interpreter, which means we spend every negotiation saying the same sentences in opposite directions, three feet apart, never looking at each other. Professional courtesy.

On the fourth day, his minister made a joke that does not translate. It is a pun about fishing. In my language it would sound like an insult.

I had half a second. I could have rendered it word for word and let the room go cold.

Instead I looked at Mateo. Just once. And he gave the smallest shake of his head.

So I said, in my minister's ear, that the gentleman had made a kind remark about the weather.

Afterwards, in the corridor, Mateo said, "Thank you." He said it in my language, not his.

Wedding Dance Lessons

Fake dating, comedic duet · Adult (25-40) · Neutral American · 1 minute

Cast: FINN ROSA

FINN Okay. Five, six, seven, eight. Step, together, step.

ROSA You're on my foot.

FINN I'm adjacent to your foot.

ROSA You are on it, Finn. I can feel your entire personality through my shoe.

FINN My cousin's wedding is in nine days. You said you could dance.

ROSA I said I could dance at a wedding. That means swaying. This is a box step. There are corners.

FINN Everyone thinks we've been together a year. A year-old couple can do a box step.

ROSA Fine. Again. From the top.

FINN Five, six, seven, eight. Step, together, step, together.

ROSA Better.

FINN Turn. And back. And... step...

ROSA Finn.

FINN Mm.

ROSA You stopped counting.

FINN Did I?

ROSA About a minute ago. We're just standing here.

FINN We're swaying. You said you could sway.

ROSA I did say that.

FINN So we're fine. For the wedding.

ROSA For the wedding. Sure.

Quiz Night at Doyle's

Friends to lovers · Adult (28–40) · Irish (light) · 1 minute

Every Thursday for six years, it has been the same team at Doyle's. Me, Siobhán, her brother Pádraig, and whoever Pádraig is going out with that month.

We have never won. We came second once, in 2021, and Siobhán still has the voucher in her wallet because she says spending it would ruin the memory.

She knows every capital city and nothing at all about sport. I know every county final since 1990 and could not find Lisbon with a map and a guide dog. Between us we make one decent contestant.

Tonight it came down to the tie-break. Doyle himself read it out. Name the person at this table who has written the team name on the answer sheet every week since 2019.

Pádraig went very quiet. Pádraig had clearly paid Doyle.

Siobhán looked at the answer sheet, at my handwriting, the same handwriting she has seen every Thursday for six years.

Then she wrote my name, and underneath it, very small, a question mark, and then she crossed out the question mark.

One Umbrella

Contemporary, meet cute · Young adult (20-30) · Neutral American · 45 seconds

The forecast said ten percent chance of rain, which is how I ended up under a bus shelter with a stranger and one umbrella.

His umbrella. Big, black, the kind a funeral director would own.

"I'm going left," he said. "You?"

I was going right. I said left.

We walked four blocks with our shoulders touching, him tilting the umbrella toward me so far that his entire right side was soaked. He did not mention it. I did not mention that I was now going entirely the wrong way.

At the corner he said, "This is me."

And I said, "I lied about left."

He laughed, and turned around, and walked me all the way back.

The Plus-One Clause

Fake dating, duet · Adult (28-40) · Neutral American · 45 seconds

Cast: IRIS JONAH

IRIS Terms. One. No kissing.

JONAH Agreed.

IRIS Two. If anyone asks how we met, it was the library.

JONAH We met at a car wash.

IRIS Nobody falls in love at a car wash.

JONAH I did a little.

IRIS Three. We leave by ten. Four. You do not dance with my aunt.

JONAH What if your aunt asks?

IRIS She will ask. You say you have a knee.

JONAH Which knee?

IRIS Pick one. Five. On Monday we go back to normal.

JONAH Define normal.

IRIS You park at the car wash. I pretend not to look.

JONAH Can I add a clause?

IRIS One.

JONAH Six. You stop pretending.

Fire Escape

Neighbors, slow burn · Adult (25-40) · Neutral American · 45 seconds

All summer, she read on the fire escape across the alley, and all summer I pretended to water a plant that had died in June.

She read thick books with cracked spines. She ate cherries and spat the stones into a coffee mug. When it rained she stayed out anyway, with a tea towel over her head.

In September she held up a piece of cardboard. It said, YOUR PLANT IS DEAD.

I wrote back. I KNOW.

She wrote, THEN WHY ARE YOU OUT THERE?

I did not have enough cardboard for the true answer, so I went down three flights, crossed the alley, and knocked on her door instead.

Rodeo Week

Western, small town · Adult (25-40) · Southern US (light) · 45 seconds

Rodeo week, my daddy's feed store does more business in five days than the rest of the year put together, and I do not have time for a bull rider who cannot read a price tag.

He has been in four times since Monday. Fly spray. Fly spray again. A bag of horse treats for a horse he admits is borrowed.

Today he put a single pack of gum on the counter and paid with a fifty.

"I don't have change for that," I said.

"I know," he said. "I'll have to come back for it."

It was not flirting. It was worse than flirting. It was a plan, and it was working.

Wrong Order

Contemporary, comedic · Young adult (22-32) · Neutral American · 45 seconds

For a month, every food delivery I order goes to apartment 12, and every food delivery apartment 12 orders comes to me.

I have learned a lot about apartment 12. Apartment 12 orders soup when it is sad. Apartment 12 asks for extra pickles and then, I assume, regrets it. Apartment 12 once ordered a single slice of birthday cake on a Tuesday, alone, and I thought about that for days.

Tonight I took their curry up myself. They opened the door holding my noodles.

"You always get the spicy one," they said. "Brave."

"You got cake on your birthday," I said. "By yourself."

"Yeah," they said. "Want to fix that next year?"

The Moving Van

Second chance, duet · Adult (30-45) · Neutral American · 45 seconds

Cast: TESS ARLO

TESS The lamp is yours.

ARLO The lamp was a gift. From your mother.

TESS To you. She liked you more.

ARLO She liked you fine.

TESS Box of mugs. Do you want the chipped one?

ARLO The chipped one is the good one.

TESS I know. That's why I asked.

ARLO You keep it.

TESS The records.

ARLO Yours. I only ever played the one.

TESS The one from the wedding.

ARLO I'll buy my own copy.

TESS The blanket.

ARLO Leave the blanket.

TESS It's half yours.

ARLO Then leave half.

TESS Arlo. You can't cut a blanket in half.

ARLO No. You can't.

TESS ...Put the lamp back on the table.

The Last Slow Song

Second chance, older leads · Mature (55-70) · Neutral American · 30 seconds

The reunion band plays the last slow song at eleven, the way they did in 1985, and Walter Dunn crosses the gym floor like no time has passed at all.

He is gray now. So am I. He still walks like he is late for something.

"You said no last time," he says.

"I had a curfew."

"You don't now."

Forty-one years, and I still know exactly where his hand goes on my back.

Seat 14B

Contemporary, meet cute · Adult (25-40) · Neutral American · 30 seconds

Seat 14B. The middle seat. The armrest war began before the wheels left the ground.

She took the left one. I took the right one. The man in 14C took both of mine.

Somewhere over Ohio she offered me half a cookie as a peace treaty. Somewhere over Indiana I fell asleep on her shoulder and woke up to find she had let me.

At the gate, she said, "Same flight back Sunday?"

I checked. It was now.

The Sous Chef

Enemies to lovers, workplace · Adult (25-40) · Neutral American · 30 seconds

Chef Daniels says there is room for one sous chef in this kitchen, and for eight months, Kit and I have been fighting over the job one sauce at a time.

He over-salts. I said so in front of everyone. He said my risotto had the texture of wet sand.

Tonight he plated my soup when I burned my hand. Plated it perfectly. Then he told the chef it was mine.

He said it tasted like my grandmother's recipe. I have never told him about my grandmother.

The Postcard

Long distance, epistolary · Adult (25-45) · Neutral American · 30 seconds

Dear Jamie,

Lisbon is hot. The trams are yellow. I have eaten a custard tart every day and regret nothing.

There is a man on my street who plays the accordion badly at seven every morning, and I keep thinking you would hate him, and then I keep thinking you would hate him with me, and that I would like that.

Running out of space.

Come next year. Or come now.

Handwriting

Historical, library · Adult (30-45) · British (light RP) · 30 seconds

For two winters, someone left notes in the margins of the library's poetry books. Small corrections. A better word here and there, in pencil.

I should have rubbed them out. I did not. I began to answer them instead.

In March, a woman returned a volume of Keats and asked, rather pink, whether the library objected to people writing in books.

I looked at her signature on the ledger. The same hand.

I said the library had no objection whatsoever.

Parking Ticket

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

Hi. Sorry. This is not a ticket.

I'm the person who parks in front of you on Tuesdays and Thursdays. Blue hatchback, bad dent. You've left me two notes about my parking, both very polite, one with a diagram.

I'm moving my car to the next street. But I wanted you to know I kept the diagram. It's on my fridge.

My number is on the back.

You can tell me if I'm parked badly in person.

The Sleeper to Inverness

Historical, 1950s · Adult (25-40) · Light Scottish · 3 minutes

I was twenty-six in the winter of 1954, and I had a ticket for the night sleeper to Inverness and a ring in my handbag that I did not intend to wear.

The ring belonged to a perfectly kind man called Gordon who sold insurance in Perth and had asked me at the pictures, during the newsreel. I had said I would think about it. I had been thinking about it for three weeks.

The train left King's Cross at a quarter past seven. My compartment was the width of a wardrobe. There was a knock, and a man in a wet overcoat said there had been a mix-up with the berths, and was this, by any chance, number nine.

It was number nine. We both had tickets that said so.

The guard said the gentleman might sit up in the dining car until something could be arranged.

Nothing could be arranged. It was the Friday before Christmas and the train was full of soldiers going home.

So at ten o'clock I went to the dining car myself, because I felt bad, and because I could not sleep with a ring in my handbag making noise.

He was sitting at the last table with a pot of tea gone cold and a notebook full of drawings. Bridges. He built them, or was learning to. He was going north to look at one that had fallen down, to work out why.

"Most people only notice a bridge when it fails," he said. "Which is a shame. The good ones are holding something up every minute of the day and nobody thanks them."

I told him about Gordon. I do not know why. I told him about the newsreel and the three weeks and the fact that Gordon's mother had already bought a hat.

He listened to all of it. He did not give me advice. When I had finished he turned his notebook round and showed me a drawing of a small stone bridge over a burn, and said it had been standing since 1702 because whoever built it had not been in a hurry.

We talked until Pitlochry. I remember the snow starting outside the window, and the waiter asleep by the urn.

At some point he said his name was Alasdair. At some point I stopped feeling bad about the berth.

I posted the ring back to Gordon from Inverness station, with a letter I was not proud of, and a cheque for the hat.

Alasdair wrote to me every week for a year, about bridges mostly.

I still have the drawing of the one from 1702. It is in a frame by our front door. People ask about it, and I tell them it was built by someone who was not in a hurry, and he laughs from the kitchen every time.

What Bees Know

Small town, slow burn · Adult (35-50) · Neutral American · 3 minutes

I kept bees on the hill behind my house for eleven years before anyone asked me to teach them.

Most people in Haldane think bees are for honey. They are not, really. Honey is what bees make when you leave them alone long enough to get on with things, which, if you think about it, is good advice for most of life.

Lena moved into the old Pruitt place in April. Two weeks later she knocked on my door

with a cardboard box held at arm's length, and inside the box was a swarm that had settled in her mailbox. She had put the entire mailbox in the box.

"I didn't know who else to call," she said. "The internet said you."

I took the swarm. I gave her back the mailbox. She asked if she could watch me hive them, and I said yes, and she stood about forty feet away the whole time.

She came back the next Saturday. And the one after that.

I gave her an old veil and a pair of gloves that were too big. I showed her how to move slowly, how bees read your breathing, how a calm person can open a hive in June and not get stung once.

"They can tell if you're nervous?" she said.

"They can tell if you're in a hurry," I said. "Same thing, mostly."

She was in a hurry about everything. She had left a job in the city that she would not talk about. She talked about everything else. She talked to the bees, which I had never done, and which I started doing after she left each week, out of habit, and then out of something else.

In July, she was stung for the first time. On the wrist, through the gap in the glove. She did not drop the frame. She stood there holding it, very still, breathing the way I had shown her, until she could set it down.

Then she burst into tears. Not from the sting. She said it was the first time in two years she had been in a hurry and stopped.

I said nothing, which bees appreciate. I think she did too.

We harvested in September. Her first jar of honey, her name on the label in her own handwriting, crooked. She held it up to the light for a long time.

The next morning there was a jar on my porch. Coffee beans, the good kind. And a note under the lid.

It said, Thank you for not being in a hurry. I'm not in one either. Supper on Friday?

I read it twice. Then I went up the hill and told the bees, which is an old custom. You are supposed to tell them the important news.

They did not seem surprised.

The Rehearsal Dinner

Second chance, wedding · Adult (30-45) · Neutral American · 3 minutes

My sister is getting married tomorrow, and I have been given three jobs. Hold the rings. Give a short speech tonight. Do not, under any circumstances, make it weird with Noah.

Noah is the best man. Noah is also the man I nearly married seven years ago, before I took a job in Chicago and he stayed, and we both said it was fine. Nobody in my family has said his name in front of me since.

The rehearsal dinner is at an Italian place with a back room and a wobbly microphone. I am seated at the head table, two chairs from Noah. He has a beard now. I hate that it suits him.

He says, "Hi, Ruthie."

Nobody has called me Ruthie in seven years. I say hello in a voice I have never used before, somewhere between a news anchor and a flight attendant.

Dinner is fine. Dinner is lovely. I eat a breadstick with the focus of a surgeon so I do not

have to look to my left.

Then it is time for the speeches.

I had notes on three numbered cards. I stand up, tap the microphone, and realize I have brought the wrong cards. These are my grocery cards. The first one says eggs, coffee, lemons, call Mom.

There is a silence in the room. My sister is looking at me with real fear.

So I improvise. I talk about when we were kids and she cut my bangs with kitchen scissors. I am doing well. People are laughing in the right places.

And then I say, "And I know she's found the right person, because she's not scared. And I've been scared of the right person before, and it's..."

And I stop. Because I am looking straight at Noah.

The room goes very quiet. Somewhere a fork touches a plate.

I say, "...it's a long story. To the happy couple." And I sit down.

Afterwards, on the back steps by the kitchen door, Noah comes out with two glasses of water and sits one step below me, the way he used to.

"That was a good speech," he says.

"It was a disaster."

"It was a good disaster." He turns the glass in his hands. "For the record. I was scared too. I just stayed scared in the same town."

I tell him the truth then. That I was not over it. I was just busy. That every time I came home, I took the long way around so I did not drive past his street.

He laughs, very quietly. "I moved," he says. "Four years ago. You could have driven past."

He does not try to kiss me. He asks if he can call me after the wedding, when the rings are safely handed over.

I say yes. Then I go home and write a new speech on the back of the grocery card.

Across the Garden Wall

Dual narration (alternating POV) · Adult (30-45) · Neutral American · 3 minutes

PIA.

The wall between our gardens is four feet high, which is low enough to talk over and high enough to pretend you cannot see someone. I pretended for most of May.

He moved in with a lawnmower older than me and a cat called Bishop who sits on the wall all day like he owns it. He might.

My new neighbor says good morning at exactly seven-thirty. Every day. Not seven twenty-five. I have tested this.

GRANT.

The woman next door talks on the phone in her garden in the evenings. I do not listen. But a person cannot help hearing that her mother is unwell, that her job is ending in August, and that she has been trying, for six weeks, to grow a lemon tree in a climate that does not want one.

The lemon tree is in the wrong place. It needs the south side. I did not say anything. It is

not my tree.

PIA.

In June, Bishop knocked a pot off the wall and my lemon tree fell over. I went out in my bathrobe to find a man I barely knew kneeling in my flower bed, re-potting it.

He said, "It wants the south side."

I said, "Excuse me?"

He said, "The tree. It wants more sun. Sorry. Bishop has no manners."

He had soil up to his elbows. He looked like he was apologizing to the tree.

GRANT.

She made lemonade in July from shop lemons and passed a glass over the wall. It was terrible. I drank all of it and asked for more, which I believe is called lying.

She talked for an hour. About her mother. About the job. About how she makes a list every night of everything that could go wrong tomorrow so she can be ready for it.

I told her I make one list a day. It has one thing on it. Say good morning at seven-thirty.

She laughed so suddenly that Bishop fell off the wall.

PIA.

My job ended on the third of August. I came home and sat on the back step and did not make a list. I did not know where to start.

At seven-thirty the next morning, he did not say good morning. Instead there was a knock on the gate I had never noticed in the wall, a little wooden one, hidden under ivy.

He said he had not opened it in twelve years, and he had oiled the hinge last night.

GRANT.

I did not know what to say to her that morning, so I brought two cups of tea and the cat, and we sat on her step and looked at the tree.

There was a lemon on it. One. Small and green and absolutely there.

BOTH.

We picked it in September. Together. It was too sour to eat.

We kept the gate open after that.

The Map in the Glovebox

Friends to lovers, road trip · Adult (28–40) · Neutral American · 90 seconds

Joss refuses to use her phone for directions. She says it ruins the journey. So for nine hundred miles, from Austin to her brother's wedding in Tucson, I was the navigator, with a paper map from the glovebox that was older than both of us.

We got lost in a town called Pecos twice. Once on purpose, because she wanted pie.

She drives with her shoes off and sings every song wrong, with total confidence.

On the second night we stopped at a motel with a pool that had no water in it. We sat on the edge with our feet hanging into the deep end and ate gas station sandwiches, and she asked what was written on the back of the map.

I said nothing was written on the back of the map.

She turned it over.

In the corner, in blue pen, there was a tiny drawing of a car with two stick people in it, and a heart over the passenger side. I had drawn it four years earlier, on our first road trip, when she was asleep and I was supposed to be finding a turnoff.

She looked at it for a long time.

"You've had this in my glovebox for four years," she said.

"You never use the map," I said. "It was the safest place I knew."

She folded it up and put it in her jacket pocket instead.

We were an hour late for the wedding. Her brother took one look at us and said, "Finally."

The Lifeguard Chair

Summer romance, young adult · Young adult (18-25) · Australian (light) · 90 seconds

Every summer since I was sixteen, I have sat in the red chair at the north end of Kellet Beach, and every summer since I was sixteen, Ollie has sat in the yellow chair at the south end, and we have communicated entirely by whistle.

One whistle means swimmer drifting. Two means come here. Three, according to Ollie, means he is bored, which is not an official signal and which he uses forty times a day.

We are not friends. We were in the same year at school. He sat behind me in maths and kicked my chair. I have not forgiven him for maths.

This morning a kid got caught in the rip between the flags. Small kid in a yellow cap. I was down the chair before I knew I was moving, and Ollie was already in the water on the other side, and we got to him at the same time, from opposite ends, like we had practised it.

We had not practised it. We had just been watching the same stretch of water for four years.

Afterwards, wrapped in towels on the sand, Ollie sat down next to me.

"Good swim," he said.

"You too."

"I'm sorry about maths," he said.

And I laughed, not because of the rescue, but because he had been carrying that around for six years, too.

Tonight, for the first time, he walked up to my chair instead of whistling. He asked if I wanted to get chips.

I said yes before he finished the sentence.

The Thursday Choir

Second chance, community · Adult (40-55) · Light British (not plummy) · 90 seconds

After the divorce, my sister signed me up for a community choir. She said it would get me out of the house. She did not mention it was in a church hall with no heating and a conductor who shouts at the altos.

I am an alto. I have been shouted at for eight months.

The basses sit behind us. There are four. Three retired, and Hugh, who is my age and sings so quietly the conductor has twice asked if he is there.

He is there. He brings a flask of soup every week and offers it round at the break, and nobody takes it but me.

He was widowed four years ago. We talk at the break, about soup and books and our grown-up children. He knows about the divorce. He has never once said he is sorry about it, which is why I like him.

Last week, at the Christmas rehearsal, the conductor stopped us. He said, the basses are lost, I want to hear the line on its own.

And Hugh sang it. Alone. In that freezing hall. Low and clear, as if he had been saving his voice for something worth it.

Even the conductor put his baton down.

At the break, he poured me soup and said, "I only sing loud when I'm sure."

I asked what he was sure about.

He did not answer. But he walked me to the bus stop after rehearsal, and the bus came, and I let it go.

Jury Duty

Contemporary, meet cute duet · Adult (25-40) · Neutral American · 90 seconds

Cast: DANA FELIX

DANA Is anyone sitting here?

FELIX Only my hopes and dreams. Go ahead.

DANA How long have you been waiting?

FELIX Since eight. They said we might be called by nine. It is now twelve-forty.

DANA Have they called anyone?

FELIX They called a man named Gerald at ten. Gerald has not returned. We assume Gerald is happy now.

DANA I brought a crossword.

FELIX I brought a crossword too. I finished it at nine-fifteen.

DANA Show-off.

FELIX I cheated on four across.

DANA How do you cheat on a crossword?

FELIX I asked the woman next to me. She left at ten-thirty. Excused. She has a dentist appointment.

DANA Do you want to do mine?

FELIX Together?

DANA You can have the down clues.

FELIX I'm better at across.

DANA Fine. Across. One across. Eight letters. Without a plan.

FELIX Impulsive.

DANA That fits. Two down. Five letters. What a juror gives.

FELIX Verdict is seven. Oath?

DANA Four.

FELIX Ugh. Ears.

DANA Ears. Very good.

FELIX Can I tell you something?

DANA Is it about the crossword?

FELIX I finished mine at nine-fifteen and I've been pretending to work on it since ten, because you came in at ten and sat across the room and I thought you might come over if I looked busy.

DANA ...That's a very long sentence for a man doing across.

FELIX I know.

DANA For the record, I sat across the room because there was a seat by the window.

FELIX Oh.

DANA And I moved because there's a seat next to you.

FELIX Seven letters. Coffee after this.

DANA That's not seven letters.

FELIX I'll make it work.

Practice with these, record them, post them as demos or reels, use them in auditions. Please do not resell them as scripts. © VO Journey Academy · avosjourney.com