Thriller audiobook scripts

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Clean Hands

Spy, mole hunt · Adult (30-45) · Neutral American · 1 minute

The account number on the wire transfer was the same one I'd used to pay the asset in Tallinn. Nobody outside the agency knew that number. Nobody outside the agency and my handler.

I sat in a parked car on a street in Lisbon and thought about the last six years very carefully. Every burned safe house. Every asset who'd gone quiet before we could extract them. Every operation that had fallen apart in the final hour with nobody left alive to explain why. I thought about all of it, and I felt extraordinarily calm, which is what happens to me when the thing I'm afraid of stops being a possibility and becomes a fact.

I called the number. He picked up on the second ring. "How's Lisbon?" he said. I hadn't told him I was in Lisbon. "Warm," I said. "Coming home soon?" "Very," I said. I hung up and removed the SIM. I had perhaps four hours before he'd move. I intended to move in three.

The Wrong Target

Spy, assassin · Adult (30-45) · Neutral British · 1 minute

She was in position at 21:04. The target's light was on, his silhouette predictable, his routine exactly as the file described. She had done this eleven times. She did not allow herself to think of it as routine — routine was how people made mistakes.

At 21:07 the silhouette moved to the window. She adjusted. At 21:08 he turned on a lamp, and in the sudden warm light she saw his face clearly for the first time, and she did not fire. She pulled back instead, slowly, keeping her breathing even. The face in the file was forty-three. The man in the window was perhaps sixty. Different nose. Different jaw. Different man.

She packed her equipment in ninety seconds and walked out of the building she'd spent three weeks positioning herself inside. Someone had given her the wrong photograph. The question was whether that was incompetence or instruction. Either answer had consequences. Neither was acceptable.

The Name I Borrowed

Witness protection · Adult (30-45) · Neutral American · 1 minute

I've been Sara Ellison for four years. I have Sara Ellison's driving license, Sara Ellison's credit history, Sara Ellison's neighbour who waves at me every morning. I have gotten very good at being her. I have gotten so good that some days the person I used to be feels like a show I watched a long time ago — vivid in places, mostly gone.

Then the man at the farmers' market called me by my real name. Not Sara. The other one. The one that doesn't exist anymore. He said it quietly, almost gently, like he was doing me a favour by letting me know he knew.

I bought the tomatoes. I smiled at the woman behind me in line. I walked to my car at a pace that said nothing is wrong, nothing is wrong, nothing is wrong. Then I drove straight past my house and kept going and called the only number I wasn't supposed to ever call. It rang four times. Nobody answered. I kept driving.

The Hill

Political · Mature (55+) · Neutral British · 90 seconds

The Secretary had been warned twice. He had not believed the first warning because he didn't think they had enough, and he hadn't believed the second because he didn't think they had the nerve. Standing in the lobby of his own ministry at half past six on a Tuesday morning, watching the forensic accountants carry boxes out of his office, he revised both assessments.

His aide appeared at his elbow. Twenty-four, terrified, entirely loyal in the specific way that loyalty becomes complicated when the ship is going down. "Sir. Your solicitor is—" "Tell him to come up." "And the press are outside." "How many?" A pause. "All of them, sir."

He straightened his jacket. Thirty-one years he had spent building this. He thought about the morning it had started — a favour, just a small favour, for a man he'd owed — and how clean it had seemed at the time. Nothing was ever just a small favour. He had known that even then. "Get the car," he said. "We'll go out the back." There was no back exit that they hadn't covered. He knew that too.

The Version He Tells

Domestic, gaslighting · Adult (30–45) · Neutral American · 90 seconds

He tells people I'm forgetful. He says it warmly, with that fond exasperation that makes everyone in the room smile.

She'd lose her head if it wasn't attached.

People laugh. I laugh too, because I have learned that not laughing is harder to explain than laughing.

But I know I locked the back door. I know because I do it every night in the same order — bolt, chain, handle check — and have done for three years. I know I put my keys on the hook by the stairs. I know the photograph on the mantelpiece used to face a different direction. These are small things. That is the point of them.

"You seem tired," my sister said on the phone last week. I wanted to say: I am not tired. I am being made to feel like I am losing my mind, and there is a significant difference, and I need you to come here, right now, and tell me what you see. What I said was: "I'm fine. Just a lot on." She said okay. I am going to call her again tomorrow. I am going to say the other thing.

The Talker

Hostage negotiation · Adult (40-55) · Neutral American · 1 minute

Hour seven. He's still talking, which is good — people who are talking are people who haven't decided yet. I've worked forty-one of these. The ones who go quiet are the ones that end badly.

"You're stalling," he said through the door. "I'm listening," I said. "There's a difference." A long pause. "Nobody listens." "I know it feels that way." "Don't do that." His voice sharpened. "Don't do the thing where you validate my feelings. I know what that is." I adjusted. "You're right. That was a technique. I'm sorry." Another pause. Longer this time. "Why are you sorry?"

"Because I'd rather just talk to you like a person." Silence. Then, very quietly: "There are three people in here." "I know." "They're scared." "I know that too." My commander was in my ear telling me the tactical team was in position. I pressed the earpiece tighter and said nothing about that at all. "Tell me their names," I said through the door. "If you want."

The Third Ledger

Corporate, whistleblower · Adult (40-55) · Neutral American · 90 seconds

The journalist met me in a parking structure on the third level because I'd read enough about this kind of thing to know that open spaces have line of sight problems and restaurants have ears. She was younger than I expected. She had a recorder, a notebook, and the look of someone who has been waiting for exactly this conversation.

"How much can you prove?" she asked, before I'd even sat down. "Everything," I said. "The offshore accounts, the routing through the Luxembourg shell, the board minutes that don't match the ones filed publicly. I have the third ledger." She went very still. "Vantage has a third ledger?" "Vantage has always had a third ledger. I kept it."

"Why are you coming forward now?" I thought about the right answer and then gave her the true one instead. "Because they promoted the wrong person to cover it up and that person is my friend and I'm not going to let her go down for something she doesn't know she's standing on top of." The recorder was running. Good. I wanted all of it on tape.

The Bratislava Run

Spy, extraction · Adult (30-45) · Neutral American · 90 seconds

They were three blocks from the crossing when Kovač stopped walking. Reeves felt it before she saw it — a shift in the air beside her, the particular stillness of someone who has made a decision. "Keep moving," she said quietly. "You said Prague," he said. "You said the crossing was at Prague." "The route changed." "When?" "Forty minutes ago." "You didn't tell me." "I'm telling you now."

He turned to look at her for the first time since the safe house. His face was doing the calculation she'd seen men do when they were deciding whether they'd been saved or sold. "Who changed it?" "London." "Why?" "I don't ask why. I ask where and when." A long beat. Behind them, two streets over, a car had slowed to a crawl. She didn't look. He did.

"If this goes wrong," he said, "I had a family." "I know." "You should know their names." "Kovač—" "Marta. Elise. The boy is Tomáš. He's seven." She held his gaze. "We're not going to need that," she said. She began walking. After a moment, he followed. The car behind them turned off. She allowed herself one quiet breath and did not slow down.

Someone Is in the House

Domestic, home invasion · Adult (30–45) · Neutral American · 90 seconds

The sound was small. That's the thing I keep coming back to — it was such a small sound. A creak, the kind old houses make, the kind I'd stopped hearing years ago the way you stop hearing a clock. Except it was two in the morning and I was already awake and the creak came from the room directly below my bedroom and it had a weight to it. A human weight.

I did not move. I did not turn on the light. I reached for my phone with the hand that wasn't under my body and I did it slowly because slow is quiet and quiet is the only advantage I had. The screen said 2:11. I opened messages and typed to the only contact that mattered.

Someone in the house. Not calling. Don't call back.

The creak again. Closer. The bottom of the stairs. I slid out of bed on the far side, put my feet down without sound, and took stock of the room with the specific clarity that I have since learned is not courage but its practical cousin. There was one door. One window. My daughter was asleep down the hall. None of what happened next was really a choice.

The Reliable Narrator

Psychological, unreliable narrator · Adult (30-45) · Neutral American · 90 seconds

I am going to tell you exactly what happened, in order, without omitting anything. I want you to understand that I am a credible person. I have a job. I have a therapist. I have a file of documentation going back eight months that proves every single thing I am about to tell you, and I would like you to look at it before you make the face you're currently making.

"I'm not making a face," said Detective Okafor. "You are. It's the face that means you've already decided." "I haven't decided anything. Walk me through it again." "From which part?" "The part where your neighbour is dead, Mr. Ferris." A pause. "Right." Another pause. "She wasn't my neighbour. We'd spoken. Quite a bit, actually. She—" I stopped. "She what?" "She knew something about my wife. About what happened to her. She told me she had proof." The detective wrote something down. "And where is that proof now?"

I looked at my hands. Both good questions. "I don't know," I said. The detective wrote that down too. I watched the pen move and thought about everything I had not yet said and tried to calculate, as precisely as I could, which omissions were protecting me and which were going to bury me.

The Chosen One

Corporate · Adult (40-55) · Neutral American · 90 seconds

The board had been unusually unanimous about appointing her. That was the first thing she should have questioned, and hadn't, because she'd wanted it too much to look at it clearly. Unanimity, in her experience, meant someone had already done the math.

She understood it now, sitting across from the federal investigator with the company's acquisition documents spread between them, seeing — clearly, finally — that her signature was on every piece of paper that mattered and conspicuously absent from every piece of paper that would have given her standing to object. She had been built into this structure before she'd ever walked into the boardroom. They had chosen her the way you choose a door to exit through.

"Ms. Reeve," the investigator said carefully, "I need to ask you about the Meridian transfers." "I know," she said. She also knew something the investigator didn't yet: she had kept copies. Of everything. Not because she'd suspected this specifically. Because she had learned, a long time ago in a different company with different men and the same essential architecture, to always keep copies. "Where would you like to start?" she said.

Phase Three

Medical, whistleblower · Adult (40-55) · Neutral American · 90 seconds

The adverse event data was clean. Too clean. Fourteen hundred participants over thirty months and a cardiac event rate of zero point three percent — which was not only better than placebo, it was better than the population baseline, which was statistically impossible.

I pulled the raw files. Then I pulled the patient registries. Then I sat in my office at eleven at night and compared the two, and what I found was not fraud exactly — fraud would have been simpler, fraud leaves gaps. What I found was more elegant and considerably worse: the participants who'd had cardiac events had been retrospectively reclassified. Not removed. Reclassified. As non-cardiac. Each one with a different secondary diagnosis, filed by a different physician, in a different city, all within the same six-week window eighteen months ago.

I sent nothing. I saved everything locally. I went home and did not sleep and in the morning I called the one person in regulatory affairs I was still certain I trusted. She picked up and said, before I'd spoken: "I know why you're calling." "How long have you known?" "Long enough," she said quietly, "that I'm glad you found it and not someone else."

After the Island

Survival, aftermath · Adult (40-55) · Neutral American · 90 seconds

People ask what it was like. They want it in clean sentences with a beginning and an end. They want the part where we were rescued and the part where we got home and they want those two things to be the same thing, and they are not. They are not even close to the same thing.

What I tell them: eight days. Seven of us down to three. A coast guard boat. A hospital. My mother's face in the doorway of the room. What I don't tell them: which choices I made and in what order and what I told myself at the time to make them survivable. I don't tell them that because they don't actually want to know. They want to believe that survival is clean. That the people who come back are the same people who left. I let them believe it. It's kinder.

What I tell my therapist is different. Closer. I'm still not all the way there yet. We have, she says, time. I appreciate that she says this without checking her watch. I am learning, slowly, that there is a version of what happened that I can live inside. I haven't found all the walls of it yet. But I'm still looking, which is something.

Reasonable Doubt

Legal, courtroom · Adult (40-55) · Neutral American · 90 seconds

She had delivered closing arguments in forty-seven trials. She had won thirty-nine of them. The eight she'd lost still lived in her in specific, textured ways — she could describe each juror's face at the moment the verdict was read. This case would not be one of the eight. She had made sure of it.

"Ladies and gentlemen," she began, and the room settled in the particular way courtrooms settle when someone is about to say something that matters. "The prosecution has given you a story. It is a compelling story. It is coherent and emotionally satisfying and it fits neatly onto the timeline they've constructed." She paused. Let it land. "It is also missing one witness. One witness they chose not to call. And I want you to ask yourself, for the next hour while you deliberate, why a prosecution with this much evidence — their words, not mine — would leave that chair empty."

She watched the jury. She was looking for the two or three who were already leaning. There — the woman in seat four, something shifting behind her eyes. There — the older man in the back row, frowning at the prosecution table. She had her two. She just needed them to find each other in that room. She was very good at giving people the tools to do that.

Root Access

Techno-thriller, hacker · Adult (25-40) · Neutral American · 90 seconds

I was forty minutes into the Halcyon network when I found the partition that wasn't on the architecture diagram. Not hidden exactly — hidden implies effort. This had just been left unlabelled, the way you leave a door unlabelled when nobody is supposed to go looking.

I went looking. Inside was a folder structure with no file names, only dates going back eleven years. I opened the oldest. It was a video — grainy, internal, a conference room — and in it were three people I recognised from public record and one I recognised from my own childhood because he had sat at my father's kitchen table and eaten Sunday dinner and then, apparently, spent the next decade doing whatever this was.

I closed the file. I sat for exactly sixty seconds doing nothing. Then I copied everything, planted the cover I'd come in to plant, and exited the network clean. The job was supposed to be a data pull for a competitor dispute. It was not going to stay that. I called my client and before she could speak I said: "We need to renegotiate the scope." A pause. "How bad?" "Depends on who you're working for," I said. "And whether that's still the same person it was this morning."

Perfect House

Domestic · Adult (30-45) · Neutral American · 90 seconds

It wasn't one thing. That's what I've tried to explain to people who want a single moment, a single red flag, a single scene where I should have known. It was a texture. A cumulative wrongness that I had talked myself out of over and over again because the alternative — the thing it pointed toward — was something I wasn't ready to look at directly.

The night I finally looked at it directly was the night I found the second phone. Not hidden — left in a jacket pocket, the way you leave something when you've forgotten you're hiding it. The screen was locked but the notifications weren't, and in thirty seconds I read enough to understand that the life I thought I was living and the life I was actually living were two different maps of the same house.

"Are you okay?" my husband said from the doorway. He'd heard me come in. I turned around with the jacket still in my hands and made the decision — not to confront him, not yet. To know more first. To know everything before he knew I knew anything. "Fine," I said. "Just looking for the dry cleaning receipt." I hung the jacket up. He went back to bed. I stood in the dark hallway and began, very calmly, to plan.

Sanction

Spy · Adult (40-55) · Neutral British · 90 seconds

"I need you to understand what I'm authorizing," said the Director. She was not looking at the screen. She was looking at her hands on the desk. "If this goes wrong, there's no retrieval. No official acknowledgment. We don't bring you home." "I understand." "Do you?" She looked up. "You've always come home, Callum. I need you to understand that this time I cannot guarantee—" "I understand," he said again, more quietly.

A long pause. Across the secure line, she could hear the ambient sound of wherever he was — traffic, wind, the particular hollowness of a phone call made outside. "The target," she said. "The file is complete." "Is there anything in it I should know before I go in?" She thought about the photograph on page twelve. "No," she said.

It was not the first time she had made this kind of decision. It would be, she thought, looking at the photo after the line went dead, the one she would carry longest. The target had a daughter. The daughter was seven. She closed the file. The operation had a sanction. Sentiment did not.

The Long Game

Con artist · Adult (30–45) · Neutral American · 90 seconds

The rule is: don't feel anything. Not disdain, not affection, not pity, not guilt. Feeling anything is how you make mistakes, and mistakes are how you end up in places you can't walk out of. I have broken this rule exactly once in twelve years. I am currently breaking it again and I cannot seem to stop.

She laughed at something her daughter said across the restaurant and it was the most unguarded thing I'd seen from her in four months of careful proximity. I looked away. I looked back. She was still laughing. My partner's voice came through the earpiece: "You're off schedule." "I know." "Is there a problem?" I watched her. "No," I said. "There's no problem."

The con closes in nine days. Sixteen million moves out of an account she built from nothing over twenty years, into an account owned by a man who will be unreachable by morning. I have done this eight times. I have never once wanted to stop. I sat in that restaurant for another hour after I should have left and I thought about what it means that I do, very suddenly, want to stop. And what it means that I won't.

On the Record

Journalist, conspiracy · Adult (30-45) · Neutral American · 90 seconds

My editor told me to drop it. My lawyer told me to drop it. The man who called my personal number at midnight and said nothing for thirty-seven seconds before hanging up told me to drop it in a different way but with roughly the same clarity.

I did not drop it. I want to be precise about my reasons: it wasn't bravery. It was the interview I'd done with a woman named Celia Voss three weeks before she stopped returning calls. She'd sat across from me in a diner in Ohio and said: "If I go quiet, that's the story. The going quiet is the story." And then she had gone very quiet indeed.

I filed the first piece at six in the morning from a hotel room I'd booked under a different name, off a laptop I'd bought cash, through a VPN I'd had my IT contact set up without explaining why. My editor called twenty minutes after it went live. "You were supposed to drop this." "I know," I said. "We need to talk about protection." "I know," I said again. "Also," he said, and his voice had changed, "it's very good." I looked out the window at a parking lot going grey with dawn. "I know that too," I said. "That's why I didn't drop it."

What It Cost

Whistleblower, aftermath · Adult (40–55) · Neutral American · 90 seconds

The right people went to prison. That's true. I want to say it clearly before I say anything else, because what I'm about to say could sound like regret and it isn't, exactly. It's more like a precise accounting of what a thing costs when you decide it's worth doing anyway.
It cost me my marriage — which had been failing before any of this, so perhaps I can only charge half of that. It cost me two years I spent looking over my shoulder at things that weren't there and one year I spent in a kind of grey flatness that a doctor called depression and I called the bill coming due. It cost my daughter a version of her mother she deserved and didn't get during those years. That one I don't discount.
What it bought: three convictions. A Senate inquiry that changed four oversight laws. A woman named Celia Voss who was found alive in a town in New Mexico she'd retreated to and who called me six months after the verdicts to say thank you in a voice that sounded like someone who'd stopped waiting to be found. I think about that call on the hard days. I think: that is what an invoice looks like when you've settled it. That is the receipt. It doesn't make the cost smaller. It just makes it legible.

Cross-Examination

Legal, courtroom · Adult (40-55) · Southern US · 90 seconds

Never ask a question you do not know the answer to. First thing they teach you, and the first thing you forget when a witness is lying to your face.

Mr. Harlan Dees has been lying to my face for forty minutes, with great politeness, in a very good suit.

"You were at home on the night of the ninth."

"All evening. My wife will tell you."

"Your wife has told us." I let that sit. Juries like a pause. It gives them time to lean. "And you did not leave the house at any point."

"Not once, ma'am."

Now here is the thing. I know the answer to my next question. I have known it since Tuesday, when a boy at a car wash out on Route 9 told my investigator that a man in a very good suit tipped him twenty dollars and asked for the trunk done twice.

"Mr. Dees. Where did you have your car washed on the morning of the tenth?"

And there it is. Not a flinch. Something smaller. A man checking, very quickly, which of his stories he has already told.

"I don't recall."

"That's all right," I say. "Somebody does."

I sit down. I do not look at the jury. I do not need to.

Filed Under Seal

Legal, conspiracy · Young adult (18-25) · Neutral American · 1 minute

Theo had been clerking for Judge Amberley for six weeks, and in that time he had learned three things. The coffee was terrible. The judge read everything. And nobody, ever, opened the grey cabinet.

He opened the grey cabinet on a Friday night, looking for a stapler.

There was no stapler. There were four files, sealed, each marked with a case number he recognised, because he had typed those numbers himself that week, on a list of cases the judge had asked him to reassign.

Reassign, the judge had said. Quietly. No need to note why.

Theo stood in the empty chambers with the lights humming, and read the name on the top file, and read it again.

It was the judge's brother-in-law.

He put the files back exactly as they were. He did not take a photograph. He was twenty-four, and he did not yet know what kind of person he was.

He found out on Monday.

The Mother's Letter

Legal, judge · Mature (55+) · Neutral British · 1 minute

The defendant's mother has written to me. They often do. Most of the letters say the same thing: he is a good boy, he fell in with the wrong crowd, there is a job waiting.

This one does not. This one says that he did it, that she knows he did it, and that she would like me to be fair to him anyway, because nobody else has been, including her.

I have been a judge for twenty-two years. I have read perhaps four thousand of these letters. I have never been asked for fairness by someone who agrees with the prosecution.

My clerk knocks. "They're ready for you, my lord."

"One minute."

I read it again. Careful handwriting. The handwriting of someone who wrote it out twice to get it right.

I put on the wig. I fold the letter into my pocket instead of the file, which I have never once done.

Then I go in.

Three Knocks

Psychological · Adult (25-40) · Neutral American · 45 seconds

There is a knock on my apartment door at three every morning. Three knocks, evenly spaced, like someone who was raised with manners.

I have checked the peephole. Nobody.

I have set up a camera in the hall. Empty, all night.

I have asked the neighbours. Mrs. Aldana across the hall sleeps with the television on. The man upstairs laughed, not unkindly, and said old buildings talk.

So last night I did something different. I sat on the couch with the camera feed open on my phone, and at three exactly I heard the knocks, loud and clear and polite.

The hallway on the screen stayed empty.

The knocking was not coming from outside the door.

Your Seat

Psychological, therapist · Adult (30-45) · Scottish · 90 seconds

My client is early, which he never is, and sitting in my chair, which nobody is.

"You're in my seat, Daniel."

"Am I?" He does not move. "Sorry. Habit."

It is not a habit. In fourteen months he has sat on the couch every single week, left end, coat on, as if he might need to leave quickly. I sit down on the couch. I keep my face pleasant. I have done this job for sixteen years, and I know a test when one sits in my chair.

"How has your week been?"

"Busy. I went to Portobello on Sunday. Nice day for it." He smiles. "You were there."

I was. With my daughter, on the beach, with a flask of tea, for about an hour.

"Was I?"

"Blue coat. You bought her an ice cream and she dropped it. You laughed."

There is a protocol for this. A phone number, and a colleague down the hall who will come if I press the button under the desk.

The button is under the desk. The desk is behind the chair. He is sitting in the chair.

"Daniel," I say, as evenly as I have ever said anything, "why don't we talk about why

you're sitting there."

He nods, as if I have finally asked a good question.

The Third Bench from the Lock

Spy, retired agent · Mature (55+) · Neutral British · 1 minute

I retired eleven years ago. There was a cake. Somebody gave a speech about my discretion, which was accurate and very dull.

Since then I have kept bees, badly, and walked the dog along the same stretch of canal every morning, and not once looked under the third bench from the lock.

This morning the dog looked for me.

A tin, taped under the slats, the old way. Nobody uses the old way now. Nobody under fifty even knows it.

Inside, one index card. A name I had not heard since nineteen eighty-nine, the name of the café on the corner, and today's date.

The dog sat down, the way she does when she knows the walk has changed.

I could put it back. I could post it to the office with a polite note. I could go home to the bees.

I put the card in my pocket and went to see what the café was like these days.

Ours or Theirs

Spy, interpreter · Young adult (18-25) · Australian · 90 seconds

My job at the trade talks was simple. Sit behind the minister. Put the Portuguese into English and the English into Portuguese, as fast and as boring as possible. A good interpreter is furniture. Nobody remembers the furniture.

Day three, eleven in the morning, we were on shipping tariffs, which is as dull as it sounds, when the other side's deputy leaned over to his colleague and said something in Portuguese that was not about tariffs.

"The girl behind the Australian. Is she ours or theirs?"

And his colleague said, "Neither. She's new. Leave her."

I kept interpreting. I want you to understand that. I did not stop, I did not look up, I put the minister's sentence about container fees into perfect Portuguese without a pause, because I am very good at my job and because every part of me had gone cold.

Ours or theirs. Which meant that behind every delegation at that table there was supposed to be one of somebody's.

Which meant that the woman who had this chair before me, who left so suddenly, who was so friendly on my first morning, had been one.

At lunch the minister said I was doing splendidly.

I thanked him, went to the bathroom, was sick, and came back for the afternoon.

Motion Detected, Nursery

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

I installed the camera for the nanny. I want that on the record. I am not a paranoid woman. Every parent on our street has one.

Rosa is wonderful. The camera proved it in a week. She sings, she does the voices, she cuts sandwiches into triangles because Lily will not eat squares.

So I stopped watching.

This morning I saw the alert from two a.m. Motion detected, nursery. Rosa goes home at six.

It was my husband, in the dark, standing very still by Lily's bed. Not checking on her. Just standing. Then he turned, looked straight into the camera, and held up his phone, as if he were reading something off the screen.

As if he were checking whether it was recording.

At breakfast he poured my coffee, kissed the top of my head, and asked whether the camera app had been playing up.

He thought it might need resetting.

The Van at Number Twelve

Domestic, suburban · Adult (40-55) · Southern US · 45 seconds

The new people at number twelve do not mow their lawn, and I have decided not to hold it against them.

What I do hold against them is the van. White, no markings. Backs into their drive at eleven every night, leaves at eleven twenty, and nobody gets out that I can see.

My wife says I retired from the sheriff's office, not from being nosy.

Last night I wrote down the plate.

This morning the man from number twelve knocked on my door. First time in three months. Friendly as anything. Brought a pie.

He said, "Evening walks are real nice round here. You ought to take one tonight. Around eleven."

The pie was still warm.

Apple, Table, Penny

Psychological, elder · Mature (55+) · Neutral American · 90 seconds

The doctor is very kind. He speaks slowly, writes things down, and tells me the test is nothing to worry about. Three words to remember. Apple. Table. Penny. I have them.

My son is waiting outside. He has brought me to every appointment since spring, since the business with the stove, and the car keys in the freezer, and the Tuesday I rang him at work because I could not find my own street.

I do not remember putting the keys in the freezer. That is the part that frightens everyone.

What I have not told the doctor, or my son, or anyone, is that I keep a notebook now. Every morning, before anything else, I write down where I put things. Keys on the hook. Glasses by the kettle. And every afternoon I check.

Some afternoons, not all of them, things have moved. Things I wrote down. Things I checked.

On those days, my son has been round to visit.

"Three words," says the doctor. "Can you tell me the three words?"

"Apple. Table. Penny."

He smiles and writes something down. "Very good."

I would like to tell him about the notebook. But the door is open an inch, and my son is sitting just outside it, and my son has always been a very good listener.

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