# True Crime audiobook scripts

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## The Receipt in the Glove Box

Cold case · Adult (30-45) · Neutral American · 30 seconds

For twenty-six years, the only thing anyone knew about Daniel Raske's last afternoon was that he bought gas.

The receipt was in the glove box. Pump four, eleven dollars, 2:14 p.m. Detectives in Varden County read it a hundred times and learned nothing.

Then, in 2019, a records clerk named Paula Stent turned it over. On the back, in pencil, someone had written a phone number.

It was not Daniel's handwriting.

## Eleven Signatures

Financial fraud · Adult (40-55) · Neutral American · 30 seconds

The loan file had eleven signatures on it. Nine of them belonged to people who had never heard of the loan.

That was the detail that stopped the auditor, a quiet man named Gerrit Lowe, on an ordinary Thursday at Kessick Farmers Bank. Not the amount. Not the missing collateral. The handwriting.

"Everybody signed their name the same way," he told me. "Same loop on the letter L. People are not that consistent. One person is."

## What the Mail Carrier Noticed

Missing person · Mature (55+) · Midwestern US · 30 seconds

Nobody reported Harold Vance missing. His mailbox did.

Lorna Peet had carried the route through Dunnock Mills for nineteen years, and she knew Harold collected his mail by ten every morning. On the fourth day it was still there, she knocked. On the fifth, she called the sheriff's office.

"People think I deliver envelopes," she said. "I notice things. That is most of the job."

## The Frame Was Never Empty

Heist, art theft · Adult (30-45) · Neutral British · 30 seconds

The most successful art theft in the history of Tessaly went unnoticed for six years, because the thief was polite enough to leave something behind.

A copy. A good one. It hung in the east gallery of the Halloran Museum, admired by schoolchildren and insured for two million pounds, while the real painting sat in a storage unit forty miles away.

No alarm rang. Nothing was broken. Somebody simply had a key.

## Forty Dollars at a Time

Financial fraud, small town · Adult (40-55) · Neutral American · 45 seconds

Nobody steals three hundred thousand dollars from a volunteer fire department all at once. In Carrowby, it left forty dollars at a time.

A tank of gas. A box of printer paper. A reimbursement for a training course that was never held. Each one too small to question, each one signed by the same treasurer the town had trusted for sixteen years.

"She brought a casserole when my wife was sick," the fire chief, Dale Imhoff, told me. He stopped for a while before he went on. "I keep coming back to that. I think the casserole was real. I think both things were real."

## The Man Who Sold the Marina

Con artist · Adult (30-45) · Neutral American · 45 seconds

In the summer of 2011, a man calling himself Peter Ansley sold the Port Lissel marina to four different buyers. He did not own it. He had never owned so much as a rowboat.

What he had was a blazer, a folder of very convincing paperwork, and a habit of buying lunch. He walked each buyer down the same dock, shook hands with the same harbormaster, and waved at boat owners he had met the week before.

"He knew my dog's name," one buyer recalled. "I checked his references. I never checked whether the references were his."

By September, Peter Ansley was gone. So was one point four million dollars.

## Day Nine, Courtroom Four

Courtroom · Adult (40-55) · Neutral American · 45 seconds

On the ninth day of the trial, the prosecution called a witness nobody in the gallery had heard of: a retired typewriter repairman from Brannock Falls.

His name was Walter Osei, and he spent forty minutes explaining how a worn letter E can identify a single machine. The jury leaned in. The defendant, for the first time in two weeks, stopped taking notes.

Then the prosecutor placed two documents side by side. One was the will. The other was a grocery list, typed in the defendant's own kitchen.

"Mr. Osei," she asked, "were these typed on the same machine?"

He took off his glasses. "Yes, ma'am. I would know that E anywhere."

## The Voicemail Nobody Deleted

Missing person · Adult (30–45) · Neutral American · 45 seconds

Marguerite Ensor's sister has kept the same phone for eleven years. She will not upgrade it. She is afraid of losing a voicemail that is nineteen seconds long.

It was left at 6:52 on the evening of March 3rd, 2014, from somewhere along the coast road north of Tamsin Lake. Marguerite sounds cheerful. She says she is running late, that the light on the water is ridiculous, that she will call back.

She did not call back. Her car was found two days later, locked, with a full tank.

"I do not listen to it for clues anymore," her sister told me. "I listen to it because it is her."

## A Password Called Autumn

Cybercrime · Adult (25–40) · Neutral American · 45 seconds

The breach at Sable Crossing Credit Union did not begin with a hacker in a dark room. It began with a birthday card.

An employee in the loans department received an email on her birthday, with a link to a greeting from a colleague. She clicked it. Anyone would have. Within ninety seconds, someone four time zones away had her login. Her password was the name of her dog, Autumn, and the year she brought him home.

"We spent a fortune on firewalls," the security director admitted later. "The attack cost them one friendly email."

Over the next eleven days, two hundred and six accounts were quietly opened and emptied.

## The Wrong Blue Coat

Wrongful conviction · Adult (40-55) · Southern US · 45 seconds

Three witnesses told police the man who robbed the Quillon Creek pharmacy wore a blue coat. Terrence Mabry owned a blue coat. In 1998, that was most of the case against him.

He served fourteen years. The coat sat in an evidence box the entire time, and nobody looked at the label until a law student did, on a slow afternoon in 2012.

The coat in the security footage had a hood. Terrence's did not. It never had.

"I told them that at the station," he said. "I said, look at it. Just look at it. It took fourteen years for somebody to look."

## The Bookkeeper of Brindle Ford

Financial fraud, small town · Adult (40-55) · Midwestern US · 1 minute

Everyone in Brindle Ford agreed that Joyce Tannehill was the most careful person they had ever met. That, it turned out, was the problem.

For twenty-two years she kept the books at Aldous Grain and Feed. She balanced every account to the penny. She never took a sick day, and she never took a vacation, which her employers considered loyalty.

An auditor would have called it a warning sign. A bookkeeper who never leaves is a bookkeeper who cannot afford to let anyone else open the ledger.

"We gave her a plaque," the owner's son, Curtis Aldous, told me. He laughed, but not much. "Employee of the Decade. It hung right over the filing cabinet where she kept the second set of books."

When Joyce finally did take a day off, for a dental appointment, a temp opened the wrong drawer. By the time Joyce was out of the chair, the sheriff was in the parking lot.

## Box Fourteen

Cold case · Adult (40–55) · Neutral American · 1 minute

The evidence room in the basement of the Orrin County courthouse floods about once every ten years. In 2009, it flooded on a Friday.

By Monday, deputies were carrying wet cardboard up the stairs and laying it out on the lawn to dry. Most of it was routine. Stolen radios. Old traffic files. And then Box Fourteen, which had no case number on it at all.

Inside was a woman's wristwatch, a bus ticket to a town called Hask Hollow, and a photograph of a man standing beside a green pickup truck.

"I had worked in that building for thirty years," said Sergeant Ines Calloway. "I had never seen that box. Somebody had put it on the top shelf, at the back, behind the Christmas decorations."

She turned the photograph over. On the back was a date, and four words in blue ink: He said he would.

It would take her six years to learn who wrote them.

## A Very Good Listener

Con artist · Adult (40-55) · Neutral British · 1 minute

The woman who called herself Dr. Helena Marsh never asked anyone for money. That was her gift. People offered.

She arrived in the village of Wexmoor in 2015, rented a cottage near the church, and joined everything. The choir. The garden society. The committee to repair the hall roof. She was, by every account, a very good listener.

She listened to widowers talk about their savings. She listened to retired teachers worry about their pensions. And every so often, she would mention a small investment of her own that had done rather well.

"I pressed the cheque into her hand," said Arthur Pym, who is eighty-one. "She told me to go home and think it over. I thought that was the most honest thing I had ever heard."

There was no investment. There was no doctorate. There was not, as far as police can establish, a Helena Marsh. She left on a Sunday, during the service, while the choir was singing.

## The Map Came Back by Mail

Heist, rare documents · Adult (30-45) · Neutral American · 1 minute

In the spring of 2003, someone walked out of the Pell Harbor Public Library with a two-hundred-year-old survey map folded inside a newspaper. Twelve years later, it came back in the mail.

No return address. A postmark from a city three states away. Inside the tube, wrapped in a clean bath towel, was the map, undamaged, and a single typed line: I am sorry. It was never worth it.

Head librarian Nadine Abara opened the package at the front desk, in front of a line of people waiting to renew their books.

"I sat down on the floor," she said. "I am not a person who sits on floors."

Detectives tested the tube, the towel and the paper. They found nothing useful. The case is technically still open, and the question that keeps it open is not who took the map. It is what happened, in year twelve, to change their mind.

## Seven Minutes on the Tape

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

The security camera at the Kessick Road storage yard recorded the entire theft. For two years, that recording was considered useless.

It was dark. The lens was dirty. The figure loading forty thousand dollars of copper wire into a van was a gray smudge with legs.

Then the file landed on the desk of Dr. Priya Nambiar, a forensic video analyst who does not look at faces first. She looks at how people walk.

"Everyone wants the license plate," she explained. "The plate was mud. But this person favored the left knee, every step, for seven minutes. You cannot hide a limp for seven minutes while carrying wire."

She measured the stride. She measured the height against the fence posts. Then she asked the detectives one question: had any employee of the yard filed an injury claim in the past five years?

One had. He still worked the night shift. He had been the one to report the theft.

## The Clockmaker's Apprentice

Forgery · Mature (55+) · Scottish · 1 minute

For eleven years, collectors paid a fortune for the clocks of Ewan Strachan, a master craftsman who died in 1840. The trouble was that Ewan Strachan kept producing new ones.

They came out of a workshop in the harbour town of Dunmere, where a restorer named Callum Reid repaired antique timepieces for museums. He was good at it. He was, the experts agree, slightly too good.

"A forger usually gets caught on a shortcut," said Fiona Baird, the curator who finally raised the alarm. "Modern glue. A machine-cut screw. Callum made his own screws. By hand. He aged the brass in a bucket behind the shed."

What gave him away was not a flaw. It was pride. Inside the case of the fourteenth clock, where no buyer would ever look, he had scratched two small initials. Not E.S.

C.R.

"He wanted somebody to know," Baird said. "Eventually. I think he wanted it very badly."

## Twenty-Two Years of Tuesdays

Wrongful conviction · Mature (55+) · Southern US · 1 minute

Every Tuesday for twenty-two years, Odessa Whitlow drove four hours each way to visit a son the state had declared guilty. She never missed one.

She kept the gas receipts. All of them, in shoeboxes, in a closet in Calder Ridge. When I asked her why, she looked at me as if the answer were obvious.

"Because somebody was going to ask me someday how I knew," she said. "And I wanted to say, I did not just believe it. I showed up for it."

Her son, Raymond, was convicted of a warehouse burglary in 1996 on the word of a single informant. That informant took it back in 2004, in writing. It took another fourteen years for a court to read what he wrote.

Raymond walked out on a Thursday. His mother was annoyed about that.

"I told him, you could not have waited till Tuesday?" She laughed, and then she did not. "I had my whole routine."

## The Trailhead Register

Missing person · Adult (30–45) · Neutral American · 1 minute

Every hiker who enters the Marrow Ridge backcountry is asked to sign a paper register at the trailhead. Name, date, destination, expected return. On the morning of October 9th, 2016, Tobias Lund filled in three of the four.

He left the last line blank.

Search coordinator Gwen Ashby has thought about that blank line for years. Two hundred volunteers walked the ridge that month. Dogs. A helicopter, for six days, until the weather closed in.

"People ask me if I think he meant to come back," she said. "I tell them what I know. I know he packed a lunch. I know he fed his cat and left the radio on for her. Those are not the actions of a man who is not coming home."

The register is kept in a county archive now, in a plastic sleeve. Ashby visits it once a year. She says she is not looking for anything. She is keeping an appointment.

## Follow the Rounding

Forensics, forensic accounting · Adult (40-55) · Neutral American · 1 minute

I have been a forensic accountant for nineteen years, and I can tell you that nobody has ever been caught by a big number. Big numbers get checked. It is the small, tidy ones that give people away.

Real expenses are messy. Forty-three dollars and seventeen cents. Two hundred and six dollars and ninety-one. When I opened the travel claims for the Ellmont Housing Trust, I found four years of invoices that ended in zero. Five hundred even. Twelve hundred even.

Human beings invent round numbers. The world does not produce them.

So I stopped reading the amounts and started reading the dates. Every one of those invoices was approved on a Friday afternoon, after four o'clock, when the second signer had already gone home.

I remember sitting back in my chair. It is a strange feeling, the moment a spreadsheet turns into a person. You are no longer looking at numbers. You are looking at somebody's Friday.

## The Juror in Seat Six

Courtroom · Adult (40-55) · Neutral American · 1 minute

The fraud trial of Leland Moss lasted five weeks, and for most of it the jury looked bored. All except the woman in seat six.

Her name was Bernadette Kowal. She was a retired school secretary, and she took notes in shorthand, which nobody under sixty in that courtroom could read.

The defense had built its case on confusion. Shell companies. Wire transfers. Charts with so many arrows that the judge once asked for a recess to study one.

"They wanted us to give up," Kowal told me after the verdict. "I ran a school office for thirty-one years. I have been lied to by experts. Eight-year-olds."

In the jury room, she tore four pages from her notebook and laid them on the table. She had followed one single payment, start to finish, through every company on the chart.

It began in a pension fund. It ended at a boat dealership.

The jury was back in under three hours.

## The Invoice from Nowhere

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

At 4:51 on a Friday afternoon, the accounts clerk at Dunnock Mills School District received an email from the district's roofing contractor. New bank details. Please update before the next payment.

It looked right. The logo was right. The signature was the name of a man she had spoken to a dozen times.

She updated the details. On Monday, the district paid an invoice for three hundred and eighty thousand dollars to an account that had existed for nine days.

"The email address was off by one letter," said investigator Tomas Reyes. "One. An R and an N pushed together to look like an M. On a small screen, at five to five on a Friday, you would not see it. I did not see it, and I was looking for it."

The money moved four times before breakfast. What interested Reyes was not where it went. It was the timing. Somebody had known exactly when the roof was finished.

## The Quietest Robbery in Orrin County

Heist, bank · Mature (55+) · Neutral American · 1 minute

Nobody knows what day the Hask Hollow Savings Bank was robbed. That is how well it was done.

There was no mask, no note, no car idling at the curb. The vault was never forced. Sometime between 2008 and 2013, the contents of thirty-one safe deposit boxes simply stopped being there.

It came to light when a farmer named Elias Brandt came in to collect his late mother's wedding ring and found an empty tin drawer.

"He did not shout," the branch manager remembered. "He held the box upside down and looked at me. I would have preferred shouting."

Safe deposit boxes are private by design. The bank keeps no list of what is inside them. So when investigators asked the obvious question, what exactly is missing, nobody could answer except the owners. And some of the owners had been dead for years.

To rob that vault, you needed only two things. A key. And patience.

## The Reporter Who Stayed

Investigative journalism · Adult (25-40) · Irish · 1 minute

When the national papers lost interest in the Ballycorran credit union, one reporter stayed. She was twenty-four, she worked for a weekly with a staff of three, and she had nowhere else to be.

Aoife Tierney covered cattle marts and parish notes. She had never investigated anything bigger than a disputed raffle. But she had noticed something the visiting journalists missed.

"They all interviewed the manager," she said. "Nobody interviewed the cleaner. The cleaner had been emptying those bins for twenty years. She knew who stayed late. She knew who shredded."

Tierney spent eleven months on the story. She was threatened with a solicitor's letter twice and offered a cup of tea by nearly everyone.

"That is the thing about a small town," she said. "Nobody will tell you anything, and then everyone tells you everything, usually at a funeral."

Her report ran on a Thursday. By Friday the board had resigned.

## The Charity That Never Met

Financial fraud, charity · Adult (30–45) · Neutral American · 1 minute

After the Tamsin River flooded in the spring of 2019, donations poured in from all over the state. Within a week, the Tamsin Valley Relief Fund had collected over six hundred thousand dollars.

It had a website. It had a logo, a blue wave over a pair of hands. It had a board of five directors with reassuring titles.

What it did not have was a single meeting. Not one. Three of the five directors did not know they were directors.

"I found out from my neighbor," said Ruth Okonkwo, a retired nurse whose name appeared on the letterhead. "She thanked me for my service. I said, what service?"

The fund's founder would later insist that every dollar was accounted for. In a sense that was true. Investigators accounted for all of it: a lease on a truck, a kitchen renovation, and eleven thousand dollars in sandbags that were delivered, in August, to a town that was already dry.

## Detective Okafor's Notebook

Cold case, detective interview · Mature (55+) · Neutral American · 1 minute

Detective Samuel Okafor retired in 2011 with a pension, a bad shoulder and one case he could not put down. He keeps it in a spiral notebook in his kitchen drawer, next to the takeout menus.

The case is the disappearance of a night watchman named Gene Hollis from the Varden County rail yard in 1989. No witnesses. No note. A thermos of coffee still warm on the desk.

I asked Okafor what he wrote in the notebook.

"Questions," he said. "Not answers. Young detectives write down what they know. That fills up about a page. What you do not know, that is the whole book."

He opened it. The first line, in faded pencil, read: Why was the gate locked from the inside?

"Thirty-some years," he said. "I have maybe forty theories about that gate. I only need the one."

He closed the notebook and put it back in the drawer. He did not close the drawer.

## The Landlord with Nine Names

Con artist, rental scam · Adult (25-40) · Australian · 1 minute

Between 2014 and 2018, at least sixty people in Corrimba Bay paid a deposit on a rental house to a landlord they never met. The landlord had nine names. The houses were real. None of them were his.

The method was almost lazy. He copied genuine listings, lowered the rent by a third, and explained that he was working overseas. Send the bond, and the keys will be in the post.

"You feel stupid," said Kirra Doyle, who lost two thousand dollars and a week of her life. "But I was a nurse on night shift with a toddler. I did not have time to be suspicious. He was counting on that."

Detective Alan Pike traced all nine names to one laptop in one caravan park.

"People picture a mastermind," Pike said. "He had a camp chair and a prepaid phone. The clever part was not the technology. The clever part was knowing who is too tired to check."

## The Lake House Keys

Missing person · Adult (40-55) · Neutral American · 90 seconds

When Rosalind Achterberg left her house on the morning of June 14th, 2007, she took three things: her car keys, a library book, and the keys to a lake house her family had sold four years earlier.

Nobody can explain the lake house keys.

She was fifty-three. She taught piano to half the children in Ellmont. She had a lesson booked at four that afternoon. Her car was found the next day in a gravel turnout on Route 9, eleven miles from the lake, with the library book on the passenger seat. It was open, face down, the way you leave a book when you mean to come right back.

Her younger sister, Colette, met me at the turnout. She comes every June.

"For years I was angry about the keys," she said. "I thought, if I could just understand the keys, I would understand everything. Why take them? The locks had been changed. She knew that."

She was quiet for a moment. A truck went by.

"Then one day I found my own set. In my coat. I had been carrying them around for four years without knowing it. So maybe there is no mystery there. Maybe she just never cleaned out her purse."

Colette does not expect an answer anymore. What she wants, she says, is smaller than that.

"I would like to return the library book," she said. "It is very overdue. Rosalind would be mortified."

## The Water District

Financial fraud, small town · Adult (40-55) · Southern US · 90 seconds

The Calder Ridge Water District serves nine hundred homes, employs four people, and has always been the least interesting institution in the county. Then, in the fall of 2018, the pumps stopped.

Not because of a storm. Because the electric bill had not been paid in seven months.

Customers had paid. Rates had gone up twice. The district's clerk, a soft-spoken man named Wendell Pruitt, had presented a balanced budget every year for eleven years, and the board had approved it every year in under ten minutes.

"We met at the diner," board member Lucille Hargis told me. "Wendell would hand out the pages, somebody would say looks fine, and we would order pie. I am not proud of that. I am telling you how it was."

What the pages did not show was a second account. Over eleven years, a little under four hundred thousand dollars had moved through it. Investigators expected a boat. A beach house.

They found none of that. Wendell Pruitt drove a fourteen-year-old sedan. The money had gone to keeping his brother's failing hardware store open. Payroll for six employees. A new roof.

"That is what I cannot get past," Hargis said. "He robbed nine hundred families to save six jobs. And if he had asked us, honestly, I think half this town would have chipped in."

She shook her head.

"He never asked. That is the whole crime, right there. He never asked."

## The Silver in the Attic

Cold case, detective interview · Mature (55+) · Neutral British · 90 seconds

In January of 1987, someone broke a vestry window at St. Oswin's church in the village of Cawdrey Fen and took everything that shone. Two candlesticks. A chalice. A silver plate given to the parish in 1702.

Detective Inspector Marian Slade was a constable then, six weeks into the job. It was the first crime scene she ever attended. She remembers the cold, and the vicar offering her a biscuit.

"We had nothing," she said. "A boot print in a flower bed. I made a plaster cast of it, very proudly. It sat in a cupboard for twenty-eight years."

The case was never closed. It was simply forgotten, the way small cases are.

Then, in 2015, a woman rang the station and asked for whoever handled old burglaries. Her father had died that spring. She had been clearing his attic. There was a suitcase.

"She was crying before she finished the sentence," Slade recalled. "She said, I think my dad did something. And I knew. I actually said it out loud: is there a plate?"

There was a plate. There was all of it, wrapped in pillowcases, never sold, never even polished.

Slade drove the silver back to St. Oswin's herself.

"People ask why I bothered, for candlesticks," she said. "But that woman could have put the suitcase in a skip. She picked up the phone. Somebody had to make that worth doing."

## Sentencing Day

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

On the morning Graham Tolliver was sentenced, the courthouse in Brannock Falls ran out of chairs.

He had taken money from two hundred and fourteen people over nine years. Retirement savings, mostly. A college fund. The proceeds from the sale of a family farm. Thirty-one of those people had asked to speak, and the judge had said she would hear every one of them.

It took all day.

A retired machinist named Stan Wyrick walked to the podium, looked at the defendant for a long moment, and said only, "You came to my daughter's wedding." Then he sat down.

But the statement people still talk about came near the end, from a woman named Doris Kemp. She was seventy-nine, and she did not raise her voice once.

"I am not here to tell you what you took," she said. "You know what you took. You kept very good records. I am here to tell you what you did not take. I still have my garden. I still have my Thursday card game. I still trust my neighbors, and I worked hard to keep that, because you made it difficult."

She folded her paper.

"I wanted you to know that you were not as thorough as you thought."

The judge gave him eighteen years. In the hallway afterward, somebody asked Doris

Kemp whether that was enough.

"I did not come for the number," she said.

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## The Letters Postmarked Tuesday

Anonymous letters · Adult (30-45) · Neutral American · 30 seconds

Between March and November of 1998, forty-one anonymous letters arrived at homes in Lindell Falls. All typed. All postmarked on a Tuesday.

They named affairs, debts, a teenager's shoplifting, a deacon's drinking. The police called it harassment and filed the envelopes in a shoebox.

What frightened the town was not the cruelty. It was that, as far as anyone could check, every one of them was true.

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## Two Tickets, One Winner

Lottery fraud · Adult (40-55) · Southern US · 30 seconds

In 2006, a gas station clerk in Tilford Gap, Georgia, named Royce Palmer cashed a state lottery ticket worth two hundred and ten thousand dollars.

It was not his ticket. A regular customer had handed it over the counter to be checked, and Royce told him it had lost.

The customer kept his receipt. It showed the time and the date. He had bought it on a Sunday.

Royce had not worked a Sunday in eleven years.

## The Dog Who Wouldn't Leave

Missing person · Adult (40-55) · Neutral British · 30 seconds

When Keith Brierley failed to come home from his evening walk in October 2013, his collie, Nell, came back without him.

She would not settle. For three days she slipped out through the garden gate and ran to the same spot on the Hollins canal towpath, where she lay down, facing the water.

On the fourth day, a constable decided to sit down beside her.

## Paint on the Bumper

Hit and run, forensics · Adult (30-45) · Neutral American · 30 seconds

The only evidence left on Carver Road was a fleck of paint no bigger than a fingernail, caught in the victim's bicycle reflector.

Under the microscope at the state lab, it had four layers. A factory grey. A primer. A darker grey. And then, on top, a coat of bright marigold yellow that had never come from any factory.

Someone had painted their car by hand. There was only one car in the county that color.

## Counting Twenties in Halbrook

Counterfeit currency · Adult (40-55) · Midwestern US · 45 seconds

In the spring of 2002, the Farmers Bank of Halbrook, Iowa, began to see more twenty-dollar bills than usual. Not a lot more. Just enough that a teller named Bernice Kowal started paying attention.

Bernice had counted cash for thirty-one years. She did not test the bills with a pen or hold them to the light. She simply said they felt wrong.

"Real money feels like cloth," she told investigators later. "These felt like a magazine."

Over six weeks, she set aside two hundred and forty of them. Every one had the same serial number. And every one had come in through the same small business account, belonging to a man who printed church bulletins.

## The Heir from Nowhere

Con artist, false heir · Adult (30-45) · Neutral American · 45 seconds

When the timber investor Warren Etheridge died without a will in 2015, his estate was valued at a little over four million dollars. Within a month, a woman named Celia Marchetti had come forward as his daughter.

She had a birth certificate. She had photographs of a young Warren holding a baby. She knew the name of his first dog.

I met her twice. She was gentle, careful with her words, and she cried at the right moments. I believed her for about a week.

Then a retired photographer in Oregon recognised one of the pictures. It was his own nephew, and the man holding the baby was his brother.

## The Locksmith's Ledger

Burglary ring · Mature (55+) · Neutral American · 45 seconds

For nineteen years, Elmer Groat ran the only locksmith shop in Dorrow. If you were locked out, if you bought a new house, if your son lost his keys at the county fair, you called Elmer.

Elmer kept a ledger. Every customer, every address, every lock. He was proud of it. He showed it to the newspaper once, for a story about small-town craftsmen.

Between 2004 and 2009, eleven homes in Dorrow were burglarised. There was never a broken window or a forced door.

When investigators finally searched his workshop, they found the ledger. Beside it, in a cigar box, they found a second set of keys. He had copied every key he ever cut.

## Called In at 11:52

Emergency call analysis · Adult (30-45) · Neutral American · 45 seconds

The call came into Raeburn County dispatch at 11:52 p.m. on January 9th, 2012. It lasted four minutes and seven seconds.

I have listened to it more than fifty times.

The caller was Martin Hoyle. He said his wife had fallen down the basement stairs. He said she wasn't breathing. And then, before the dispatcher had asked a single question about her, he said she was gone.

Gone, not hurt. Not unconscious. Gone.

A dispatcher named Lynette Fry noticed it too. She typed one word in the notes field before the ambulance even left the station. It said, "Check."

## Cattle Count at Dry Fork

Cattle rustling · Mature (55+) · Southern US · 45 seconds

Over the winter of 2017, the Dry Fork Ranch in Coyle County lost forty-three head of cattle. No fences were cut. No tracks were found. The herd just kept getting smaller.

The ranch manager, a man named Cody Ruhl, said it must be coyotes. Coyotes, he said, were very bad that year.

The state brand inspector, Lyle Dennard, had been checking cattle for thirty years. He drove out, walked the pasture, and counted. Then he drove to the sale barn in Whitcomb and counted there.

"I've known coyotes to take a calf," he wrote in his report. "I have never known one to sell it at auction, under its own name."

## The Vintage That Never Was

Wine fraud · Adult (25-40) · Irish · 45 seconds

By 2019, Declan Furey had sold nearly two million euro worth of rare wine to collectors across Europe. His bottles came with beautiful labels, careful histories and the dust of old cellars.

His downfall came at a private auction in Kilcarra, where a buyer named Siobhán Hart was looking at a bottle from a small French vineyard, dated 1911.

She had written her university thesis on that vineyard.

She knew that in 1911 it had grown no grapes at all. It had been a dairy farm, and would stay one for another twenty years.

## The Night Nurse at Fenwright Memorial

Medical impostor · Adult (40-55) · Neutral American · 1 minute

For six years, the night shift on the third floor of Fenwright Memorial Hospital ran a little more smoothly when Dana Whitcombe was on duty.

She was calm, she was quick, and when a patient was frightened in the small hours, she was the one who pulled up a chair.

She was not a nurse.

Dana had worked as a hospital aide for nine years. She had watched, she had learned, and in 2008 she had borrowed the name and licence number of a retired nurse who had moved to Florida.

Nobody checked. The licence was real. It just belonged to someone else.

She was discovered when the real nurse applied for a part-time job at a clinic near her new home and was told she already worked at Fenwright.

At the trial, three former patients asked to speak in Dana's defence. The prosecutor did not dispute anything they said. The patients loved her.

The court sentenced her to eighteen months.

## Last Seen at the Ferry Terminal

Missing person · Adult (30–45) · Scottish · 1 minute

At 6:48 on the morning of the 3rd of February, 2010, a camera above the ticket office at the Port Ardnish ferry terminal recorded a man in a dark green jacket buying a single ticket to the island of Fennay.

His name was Robert Gilchrist. He was forty-four, a maths teacher in Dunlarig, with no known connection to the island.

The footage shows him on a bench with a paper cup of tea. He checks his watch twice. He writes something in a small notebook.

At 7:15, the ferry is called. Thirty-one people board. The camera on the gangway records every one of them.

He is never seen boarding.

He is never seen leaving the terminal either. The paper cup was found on the bench, half full. The notebook was never found.

His ticket, unused, turned up two weeks later, folded in half inside a hymn book in the waiting room.

## The Pour Pattern

Arson investigation · Adult (40-55) · Neutral American · 1 minute

I was a state fire investigator for twenty-two years, and most fires are boring. A bad wire. A pan left on the stove.

The fire at Pettigrew Seed and Supply, in August of 2014, was not boring.

The building was a total loss. The owner, Gerald Pettigrew, told us he'd locked up at six and gone home to watch the ballgame. He kept saying how much the store had meant to his father.

The next morning, I walked the floor. Under the ash, there was a line burned into the concrete. A long, narrow, dark line, running from the back door to the office, then turning, and running to the storeroom.

Fire does not walk in a straight line. It climbs. It spreads out. It goes where the fuel is.

That line was where somebody had walked, pouring something from a can, before he struck the match.

Mr. Pettigrew had increased his insurance coverage in June.

## Room 211

Cold case, motel witness · Adult (40-55) · Neutral American · 1 minute

In June 1994, a salesman named Kenneth Bales checked into Room 211 of the Starlite Motor Inn outside Fallon Springs. He was found there two days later. The case was never solved.

Twenty-six years later, I found the woman who had worked the front desk that week. Her name is Loretta Mayberry. She's seventy-eight now, and she lives in a trailer park ten miles from the old motel, which is a car wash today.

She remembered Room 211 straight away.

"He asked for a room at the back, away from the road," she said. "And he asked if I could tell him when anybody else checked in. Anybody at all. He gave me a twenty for it."

Did she tell anyone? I asked.

"One other man came in that night," she said. "Real polite. Paid cash. I told Mr. Bales, like he asked."

She folded her hands.

"I told the police all that. Well. I would have. Nobody ever asked me."

## The Getaway Driver Who Came Back

Bank robbery, confession · Mature (55+) · Neutral American · 1 minute

In September of 1979, three men robbed the Lusk Ferry Savings Bank in Ohio, and drove away with ninety-one thousand dollars. Two of them were caught within a week. The driver never was.

In 2021, a man named Walter Bixby called the newspaper where I worked and asked to speak to someone about it. He was eighty-one. He met me at a diner and ordered coffee he never touched.

"I was the driver," he said. "I was nineteen. My cousin said all I had to do was keep the engine running."

He had buried his share in a coffee can behind his mother's garage and waited three years to dig it up.

"I bought a gas station with it," he said. "Put two kids through college."

He looked out the window for a while.

"Of the three of us, I was the only one who ever spent it. I've been paying for that every day."

He turned himself in the following Monday.

## The Ringer at Wandilla Park

Racing fraud · Adult (30-45) · Australian · 1 minute

On a hot Saturday in January 2008, a seven-year-old gelding called Dusty Promise lined up for the third race at Wandilla Park. He had never finished better than sixth. The bookmakers had him at forty to one.

He won by four lengths.

A small group of punters collected more than a hundred and eighty thousand dollars. One was the trainer's brother-in-law, who had spread his bets across six bookies.

The stewards were suspicious, but the horse's papers were in order. His colour was right. His markings were right.

Almost.

A racing photographer named Kerry Maddox had taken pictures of Dusty Promise the year before. In every one of them, he had a white sock on his left hind leg.

The horse that won the third race at Wandilla had a white sock on his right.

The winner was later identified as a much faster horse called Bright Harvest, who had been sold, on paper, to a farm in New Zealand.

## Two Wives in Two Towns

Con artist, bigamy · Adult (40-55) · Southern US · 1 minute

For eleven years, Lyle Gentry sold fertiliser and seed across three states, and he was on the road four days a week.

His wife, Darlene, lived in Pruden, Alabama, with their two daughters.

His wife, Patrice, lived in Tollerton, Mississippi, with their son.

Neither knew about the other. Lyle kept two cell phones and two calendars, in different colors of ink.

The whole thing came apart at a church bake sale in 2016, when Patrice's son, visiting a friend, saw his father's truck parked outside a house in Pruden.

The two women met for the first time that weekend, in a diner exactly halfway between their towns. They had been told to expect a fight.

Instead, a waitress later said, they sat in a booth for three hours, compared his habits, and laughed so hard one of them had to go outside.

They both filed for divorce on the same day.

## The Fingerprint That Wasn't

Forensics, wrongful arrest · Adult (25-40) · Neutral American · 1 minute

In March 2011, a fingerprint found on a broken window at a jewellery store in Ashlund Park was run through the state database. It came back with a match: a twenty-six-year-old warehouse worker named Marcus Teague.

Marcus had never been to Ashlund Park. He told the officers that, and the judge. He spent seven weeks in the county jail.

His public defender, Elena Ruiz, asked for one thing. She wanted to see the print that the database had matched it against.

It turned out that Marcus had been fingerprinted two years earlier, after a minor traffic stop. A clerk had accidentally saved his prints into the file for the jewellery store case.

When the examiner compared the window print to the database, the computer had pulled up Marcus's own card from that same file.

They had matched him to himself.

Compared properly, the print belonged to a man already in prison for another burglary. Marcus was released that afternoon, with a bus ticket and an apology.

## The Lighthouse Log

Historical disappearance · Mature (55+) · Neutral British · 1 minute

The Skerrow Point lighthouse stands on a rock a mile off the coast of Northumberland. In the winter of 1962, it was kept by one man, a former naval officer named Edwin Thorley.

Every day, Thorley wrote in the log. The weather. The state of the lamp. The ships that passed.

On the 14th of December, he wrote, "Wind north-east, strong. Lamp lit at four. Two trawlers passed southbound."

On the 15th, he wrote, "Wind easing. Lamp lit at four. Supply boat due Tuesday."

The supply boat arrived on Tuesday, the 18th. The lamp had been lit every night. The kettle was on the stove. Thorley's coat and boots were by the door.

He was never found.

Investigators read the log many times. It was neat, complete and entirely ordinary.

But on the last page, below the entry for the 17th, in the same careful handwriting, there was one more line.

It said, "Visitor."

## Notes from the Jury Room

Courtroom, jury tampering · Adult (40-55) · Neutral American · 1 minute

The fraud trial of developer Russell Kane lasted nine weeks, and the jury deliberated for less than two hours. They found him not guilty on every count.

It might have ended there, except for a cleaning crew.

The morning after the verdict, a cleaner at the Halloway County courthouse found a spiral notebook wedged behind a radiator in the jury room. Inside were a juror's notes, written over the full nine weeks.

Most of it was dates and witness names. But on the last page was a list of the other eleven jurors, and beside each one, a number.

The notebook belonged to juror number four, a retired schoolteacher named Glenda Price.

The handwriting on the list was not hers.

It took investigators eight months to trace it to an associate of Kane's, who had met Glenda Price, quite by chance, at her grandson's soccer game.

Kane was retried two years later. That jury took three days.

## The Stamp Collector's Widow

Fraud, collectibles · Mature (55+) · Neutral American · 1 minute

When Osvald Lindqvist died in 2017, he left his wife, Margit, a house in Port Esterly, a cat named Biscuit and forty-two albums of stamps.

Margit had never understood the stamps, but she knew they mattered.

So when a dealer named Philip Sorrel drove out and offered her twelve thousand dollars for the lot, she thought it was kind of him.

"He drank my coffee," she told me. "He petted Biscuit. He said Osvald's collection was mostly sentimental."

Eight months later, a single stamp from Osvald's fourth album sold at auction in New York for three hundred and forty thousand dollars. It was an error print, an upside-down ship, one of only six known.

Margit read about it in the paper.

"Osvald would have known in a second," she said. "He'd have taken one look at that man and put the kettle back on the stove."

She sued, and she won. Most of the money, she told me, went on cat food.

## A Ransom Note in Crayon

Kidnapping hoax · Adult (30-45) · Midwestern US · 1 minute

On a Thursday morning in November 2005, the Elk Coulee sheriff's office received a frantic call from a dairy farmer named Duane Holt. His wife had been kidnapped. There was a ransom note on the kitchen table.

The note demanded fifty thousand dollars in a feed bucket at the end of the drive.

It was written in blue crayon.

Deputies searched the farm and the fields around it. Then, on the back of the note, an investigator noticed something faint, pressed into the paper from a page that had been on top of it.

It was a drawing of a house and four stick people. At the bottom, in a child's writing, it said, "By Ella, age 6."

The Holts had no children.

Mrs. Holt was found that evening at her sister's house, safe and well. She had left her husband two days before.

Duane Holt had borrowed the crayon from his niece. He said he only wanted his wife to come home.

## The Night Deposit Bag

Insider theft · Adult (40-55) · Neutral American · 1 minute

Every night at ten, the manager of Hagen's Family Market in Kessen Mills locked the doors, counted the day's cash, sealed it in a canvas deposit bag and drove it to the night drop at the bank.

For two years, between 2013 and 2015, about four hundred dollars a week went missing between the store and the bank.

The manager, Glenn Oster, blamed the bank. The bank blamed the store. A private investigator watched the drop for a month and saw nothing.

What finally caught him was the weather.

On a stormy night in March 2015, the bank's camera above the night drop recorded Glenn arriving in a downpour. He was soaked to the shoulders. But the canvas bag he dropped through the slot was perfectly dry.

Glenn had a second bag, identical and already sealed, waiting on the passenger seat. The real one went home with him.

He was arrested at the store the following morning, during the Saturday sale.

## Every Sunday at Nine

Prison escape · Adult (40–55) · Neutral American · 1 minute

Every Sunday at nine in the morning, a laundry truck backed up to the loading dock at Garrow State Correctional Facility. It dropped off clean linens and took away the dirty ones.

It had done this for sixteen years. Every Sunday at nine.

An inmate named Thomas Reddick worked in the laundry. He was quiet, he was polite, and he had eleven years left on his sentence.

For fourteen months, he watched the truck. He noted how long the driver stayed inside, and which guard checked the bins. He noted that the Sunday guard always talked football with the driver.

On the first Sunday in October 2009, the driver and the guard were talking about a playoff game. They talked for four minutes.

It was enough.

The truck left Garrow at 9:22, carrying linens and one man curled inside a laundry bin.

Reddick was found three weeks later, working at a car wash two hundred miles away. He had given his real name.

## The Woman Who Answered the Ad

Con artist, lonely hearts · Adult (30–45) · Neutral American · 1 minute

In the 1990s, before dating apps, there were personal ads. Three lines in the back of the newspaper. Retired widower, enjoys gardening and long drives, seeks kind companion.

The man who wrote that ad, again and again, in papers across four states, called himself Edward Lane.

He wrote long, charming letters. And after a few months, there was always a problem. A sick brother. A business loan that was nearly through.

By 1999, at least nineteen women had sent him money.

The one who stopped him was a sixty-three-year-old retired court clerk in Cotter Plains, Kansas, named Beverly Haas. She answered the ad in April and wrote back warmly.

"He asked me for eight thousand dollars," she told me. "And I'd been a court clerk for thirty years. I knew exactly what a con man looked like on paper."

She sent him a cheque for eight thousand dollars. Then she drove to the post office box where he collected his mail.

And she brought the sheriff.

## Season Ticket Holder

Sports, match fixing · Adult (25-40) · Neutral American · 1 minute

Ray Mendel had held a season ticket for the Hollin Valley Bobcats, a minor league baseball team, for twenty-three years. Section C, row four.

And for twenty-three years, Ray had kept score of every pitch, in pencil, in notebooks he stacked in his garage.

In the summer of 2018, Ray noticed something about a relief pitcher named Danny Cole. When the Bobcats were winning by a lot, or losing by a lot, Danny pitched normally. But in close games, in the late innings, he had a strange habit.

His first pitch to the third batter was always a ball. Always. Twenty-two times in a row.

Ray thought about it for a week. Then he wrote a letter to the league office, enclosing photocopies of his notebooks.

A small group of gamblers had been betting on exactly that pitch. Danny Cole was paid a few hundred dollars each time.

The team gave Ray a plaque. He hung it in the garage, next to the notebooks.

## What the Snowplow Driver Saw

Cold case, missing person · Adult (40-55) · Neutral American · 90 seconds

On the night of February 2nd, 1996, a nineteen-year-old college student named Amy Lindgren left a friend's apartment in Graniteview at about eleven o'clock. It was snowing hard. She had a twenty-minute walk home.

She never arrived.

For twenty-four years, there were no witnesses and no suspect. Her family never moved house, in case she came back.

In 2020, writing an anniversary piece, I asked the county roads department if anyone who had worked that night was still around. They gave me the name of Harlan Voss.

Harlan was seventy-six. He had driven a county snowplow for thirty-one years, and he remembered that storm.

"I was clearing Route 7, near the old grain elevator," he said. "About quarter past eleven, I saw a girl standing by a pickup truck. Red truck, white topper. The driver had his window down, and she was leaning in, like she was asking for a ride."

He slowed down as he passed.

"I thought she was waving at me," he said. "I waved back."

I asked him if he had ever told anyone. He looked at me for a long time.

"Nobody ever said she was walking that way," he said. "I thought she was getting a ride from her boyfriend. I didn't know."

Within a month, the red truck was traced to a man who had lived three miles from the

grain elevator in 1996.

Harlan Voss attended every day of the trial. He sat at the back.

## The Ledger in the Wall

Historical crime, bootlegging · Mature (55+) · Neutral American · 90 seconds

In 2014, a contractor renovating the old Ashgrove Hotel in Cassel Bend, Illinois, knocked through a plaster wall on the second floor. Behind it, wrapped in oilcloth, was a leather ledger.

It dated from 1927.

During Prohibition, the Ashgrove had been a respectable place, with white tablecloths and a ballroom where the town held its Christmas dances.

The ledger told a different story.

On every page, in neat brown ink, were names, dates and amounts. Cases of whisky, delivered by night from across the river. Payments to drivers. Payments to a dock foreman. And payments, every month, to a man identified only by the initials "C.B."

For a long time, historians assumed C.B. stood for "Cassel Bend", a payment to some kind of town fund. But in the last few pages, there was a change.

In March of 1929, the hotel's manager, a man named Augustus Fenn, had written a note in the margin. It said, "C.B. demands double. Refused."

The next entry was dated nine days later. It was in different handwriting. It said, "A.F. accounts closed."

The newspaper archive showed that Augustus Fenn had died that same week. The local paper said he had fallen from a dock while fishing. It was called an accident.

Inside the back cover, someone had written a full name in pencil and then tried to rub it out. Under a magnifying lamp, it could still be read.

It was Clement Bryce.

In 1929, Clement Bryce was the county sheriff.

## The Long Con at Harrow Bay

Investment fraud · Adult (40-55) · Neutral American · 90 seconds

Harrow Bay is a fishing town of about two thousand people. In 2010, many of them believed they had finally found a way to stop worrying about money.

The man who offered it was Neville Whitlock. Well dressed, softly spoken, he said his company bought shares in cargo ships. You put money into a ship, the ship carried cargo, and every three months you got a share of the profits.

He showed them pictures of a ship called the Northern Grace, with shipping schedules and glossy quarterly reports.

And the money came in. Retired fishermen. Widows. A couple who ran the bait shop.

For three years, the payments arrived like clockwork, and people told their friends.

I started looking into Whitlock in 2013, after a reader sent me a brochure and asked if it was too good to be true. It took me about two hours.

There was a Northern Grace. It was a rusting trawler in a harbour in Maine, and it hadn't left the dock in eleven years. The ship in the brochures was a different vessel with the name changed.

The payments had come from new investors' money.

About four million dollars passed through his accounts. Less than half a million was recovered.

A year later, the couple from the bait shop were still working seven days a week. The

husband told me he didn't blame himself any more.

"He was very good," he said. "That's his job. Ours was fishing."

## The Last Witness

Courtroom, cold case trial · Adult (40-55) · Neutral American · 90 seconds

The trial of Dennis Garrick for the 1979 murder of a gas station attendant in Stone Mill took place in the spring of 2018, thirty-nine years after the crime.

Most of the original witnesses were gone. The defence argued that after so long, nobody could be sure of anything.

Then the prosecution called Margaret Oyelaran.

She was eighty-four. She sat down and folded her hands in her lap.

In 1979, she told the court, she had stopped at the station on Route 12 on her way home from a hospital night shift. As she pulled in, a man came out of the office, walking fast, and got into a blue sedan. He looked at her for a second.

The defence lawyer asked her, kindly, how she could remember a face from a single second, nearly forty years ago.

She said she didn't remember his face very well at all.

"But I remember his car," she said. "Because I thought something was wrong. So I wrote the licence plate on my hand, in pen. And when I got home, I wrote it in my diary."

She opened her handbag and took out a small, worn diary from 1979.

The plate in her diary matched a car registered, in 1979, to Dennis Garrick's father.

Asked why she hadn't come forward at the time, she said that she had. She called the

police the next morning and gave them the number.

"I suppose they lost it," she said. "I didn't."

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