Urban Fantasy audiobook scripts

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The Clerk of the Night Court

Night court, the clerk · Adult (30-45) · Neutral American · 1 minute

The Night Court of the Fifth Borough sits from midnight to cockcrow in a room behind the parking authority, and I am its clerk.

It's a job. I swear in the witnesses. I check that nobody is carrying iron. I remind the vampires that the building is nonsmoking, and that this includes them personally.

Tonight's docket: a noise complaint against a banshee. A boundary dispute between two river spirits and a car wash. One werewolf, parking.

"All rise," I say, and most of them do. The thing in row three sort of gathers.

Judge Oyelaran comes in with her coffee. She's been on this bench two hundred years and she looks tired tonight, really tired, the human kind.

"Dolores," she says. "What's the first one?"

"The banshee, Your Honor."

"Is anybody actually dying?"

"No, ma'am. She says she's just practicing."

And the judge laughs. First time this month. I write it in the record, though I'm not supposed to.

Three Rules of the Lease

Hedge-witch, the landlady · Young adult (18-25) · Neutral American · 1 minute

My landlady, Mrs. Abernathy-Voss, had three rules, and she went over them the day I signed the lease.

"No smoking. No pets over twenty pounds. And if the radiator in the hall knocks four times, you knock back twice and go about your day."

"What happens if I don't knock back?"

"Then it comes up and asks in person, dear, and nobody wants that before coffee."

The rent was six hundred dollars. For six hundred dollars she could be whatever she wanted.

The first month, the mice left. In a line, like they'd gotten notice. The second month my cough cleared up. There was a little bundle of something green tied over my door.

I knocked on hers.

"Are you a witch?"

She looked at me over her glasses.

"I'm a landlord," she said. "It's far worse. Was there something wrong with the apartment?"

"No, ma'am."

"Then the rent is due on the first."

The Toll at Calloway Street

City creatures, the troll · Adult (40–55) · Neutral American · 90 seconds

The troll under the Calloway Street overpass was named Marguerite, and she had been collecting the toll since before it was an overpass.

It used to be goats. Then pennies. These days she took whatever people had on them: a bus transfer, a button, half a sandwich. She was not greedy. It was the principle of the thing.

So when the man from the Department of Transportation came down the embankment in his good shoes, she held out a hand the size of a manhole cover.

"Toll."

"I'm with the city."

"City pays too."

He patted his pockets. He gave her a breath mint. She examined it and put it somewhere.

"Ma'am, I have to serve you this." He held out an envelope at arm's length. "The overpass is coming down in the spring. They're putting in a roundabout."

Marguerite read the notice. It took her a while.

"A roundabout," she said.

"Yes, ma'am."

"No under."

"No. I'm sorry."

She sat down. The whole embankment shifted a little. She had been under something for nine hundred years, and it had not occurred to her that a city could simply run out of bridges.

The man stood there. He was supposed to be back by four.

"There's a footbridge going in at Larch Park," he said finally. "Over the duck pond. It's small. I don't know who you'd even charge."

Marguerite thought about it.

"Ducks," she said, "have bread."

Hollis and Daughter, All Kinds

Pest control, family business · Adult (25–40) · Midwestern US · 1 minute

The sign on the van says Hollis and Daughter, Pest Control, and underneath in smaller letters, All Kinds. People think that means termites.

Today it's a boggart in a dentist's office. They get into drop ceilings. They like the fluorescent hum.

"You want me to go up?" I ask.

Dad looks at the ladder. Then he looks at his knee, like it's a guy who owes him money.

"I'll foot it for you," he says.

That's new. Thirty years he's gone up first.

I go up. It's dark and it smells like pennies. Something in the corner unfolds itself and shows me a great many teeth, which in a dentist's office, honestly, feels like showing off.

"Talk nice to it first!" Dad calls. "They're mostly just lonely!"

"I know, Dad."

"And watch your fingers!"

"I know."

There's a pause down there.

"I know you know," he says. "I'm just used to saying it."

The Man Who Lost His Shadow

Detective, odd crimes desk · Adult (40-55) · Neutral American · 1 minute

The Odd Crimes desk at the Ninth Precinct is me, a filing cabinet, and a ficus that I'm fairly sure is a witness in protective custody.

The man across from me had lost his shadow.

"Lost or stolen?" I said.

"Does it matter?"

"For the form, it does."

He was maybe sixty, good coat, hands folded tight. I tilted the desk lamp at him. Nothing on the wall. It's a strange thing to look at. Your eye keeps sliding off.

"When did you see it last?"

"I'm not sure I ever looked." He rubbed his face. "My wife noticed. At her sister's wedding. She said, Leonard, you're not all here. She's been saying it for years, but that time she was pointing."

I put my pen down.

In this job, nine times out of ten, nobody took it. It just left. And it goes where the person stopped going.

"Mr. Fine," I said. "What did you used to love?"

The 2:14 from Alder Street

Transit, the late train · Any · Neutral American · 45 seconds

You know the last train leaves Alder Street at one fifty. Everybody knows that. So you have no good explanation for the one that pulls in at two fourteen.

It's an old car. Wooden seats. The other passengers are very polite and slightly see-through.

Don't panic. Sit down. Do not, whatever you do, eat anything the conductor offers you.

"Ticket?" he says.

You show him your phone. He looks at it with real pity.

"Where to, friend?"

You were going to say home. Instead you hear yourself say, "Where does it go?"

He smiles. It has been a long time since anyone asked.

Apartment 4C, Shared

Ghosts, the roommate · Adult (25-40) · Neutral American · 1 minute

Priya Raman has shared apartment 4C with a dead man named Walter for three years, and they have an arrangement.

Walter does not appear in the bathroom. Priya does not move the armchair. On Sundays she leaves the crossword out, and on Mondays it is done, in pencil, in very neat capitals.

Tonight she comes home with a letter from the landlord. The building's been sold. Everybody out by June.

She reads it aloud in the kitchen, because that's where he listens best.

The cupboard door opens. Closes. That means he's thinking.

"I'll find somewhere else," she says. "People do. It's fine."

The refrigerator magnets start to move. It takes him a while.

WHO DOES SUNDAY

Priya sits down on the kitchen floor in her coat.

"I don't know, Walter. I've been wondering the same thing."

A long pause. Then, slowly, two more words slide into place.

TAKE CHAIR

Behind the Lottery Machine

Corner shop, the market · Mature (55+) · Neutral American · 1 minute

I have run Castellano's Market on Fig Street for forty-one years, and I will sell you anything on these shelves except what's behind the lottery machine.

Behind the lottery machine is for regulars. A jar of Tuesday rain. Candles that burn backward. Luck, by the ounce, and I weigh it honest.

The kid who came in was not a regular. Hood up, shaking.

"I heard you sell stuff. For when somebody's sick."

"Who's sick?"

"My mom."

He told me how sick. I've been doing this long enough to know what I can fix and what I can't, and I could feel my face wanting to lie to him.

"Honey, I don't have anything for that. Nobody does."

He nodded like he'd known.

"Wait." I came back with a paper bag. "That's soup. And that little bottle is one good night's sleep, for you, not her. You're no use to her like this."

"How much?"

"Go home," I said.

What the Pigeons Said

City creatures, the pigeons · Mature (55+) · Neutral British · 45 seconds

Everyone in Cambray Square thought Mrs. Achterberg fed the pigeons because she was lonely. In fact she paid them.

A handful of seed bought a morning's gossip. Who had moved in at number nine. Which chimney had something nesting in it that was not a bird.

"And the boy?" she asked. "The one who's been sleeping in the bandstand."

The grey one with the bad foot told her. It took some time. Pigeons are poor at getting to the point.

Mrs. Achterberg listened, and her mouth went thin.

"I see," she said. "No, you did quite right to tell me."

She emptied the whole bag onto the path. Then she went to fetch a blanket, and her stick.

The Gargoyle Takes the Stand

Night court, the witness · Adult (30-45) · Neutral British · 45 seconds

The gargoyle from the old Mercantile Bank takes the stand at ten past two, and the bailiff has to bring a second chair.

"State your occupation."

"I watch."

"What do you watch?"

"The corner of Ninth and Dray. A hundred and forty years."

The lawyer checks his notes. "And on the night in question, did you see the defendant leave the bakery?"

"Yes."

"With the cash box?"

The gargoyle is quiet. Stone takes its time.

"With bread," it says. "Every night, with bread. He leaves it on my ledge for the old woman at the bus stop. He thinks nobody sees." It turns its great head toward the judge. "I am nobody. But I see."

Notes for New Hires, Night Maintenance

Transit, comedic · Adult (25-40) · Neutral American · 30 seconds

Notes for new hires, Transit Authority, night maintenance.

The rats are just rats. Leave them alone.

The thing on the express track at Canal is not a rat. Leave it alone faster.

If you hear your name from a tunnel, it's not your supervisor. Your supervisor doesn't know your name.

And if you find a little door at the end of platform six, that's Edna. Knock first. She'll have coffee on. She worries about you guys.

A Knack on Tanner's Row

Hedge-witch, the launderette · Mature (55+) · Irish · 1 minute

I'm not a proper witch. A proper witch has a familiar and opinions. I have a launderette on Tanner's Row and a knack.

It's small work. You bring me a shirt with a bad interview in it, I'll wash that out for you. Grief, I can get most of, on a hot cycle. Smoke, I can't shift.

The girl today has a wedding dress in a bin bag.

"Can you take him out of it?" she says. "All of him. I want to sell it."

I hold the dress up. Oh, he's in there all right. Every seam. But so is she, laughing, the whole day stitched through with it, and you can't pull the one thread without the other.

"I can," I say. "But you'd lose the dancing as well. You'd lose your father's face."

She stands there with her jaw going.

"Leave it with me a week," I say. "Sometimes it's only the lining wants doing."

Too Clean on Route Nine

Pest control, the house spirit · Adult (40-55) · Southern US · 1 minute

Earl Dupree had been clearing haints and critters out of Bellamy Parish for thirty years, and he had never once been called out because a house was too clean.

"It does the dishes," the young man said. "At night. This morning it had ironed my socks."

"And you want it gone."

"It's creepy, Mr. Dupree."

Earl found it behind the water heater, about a foot high, holding a dishrag to its chest like a baby.

"Now, don't take on," Earl said. He got down on one knee, which cost him. "They're new folks. They don't know what you are."

It said nothing. Its ears were flat.

"I could put you out in the woods. That's the job." He scratched his neck. "Or. I got a place on Route Nine. Wife passed two years back. I'll be honest with you, it's a disgrace."

One ear came up.

"There's a skillet in that sink," Earl said, "I am frankly afraid of."

The Red Mitten

Detective, the sergeant's knack · Adult (30-45) · Scottish · 1 minute

Detective Sergeant Calum Baird had one useful trick, and the force did not have a form for it. If he held a thing, he could tell you the last strong feeling it had been near.

Knives were bad. Car keys were mostly irritation.

The evidence bag on his desk held a child's mitten, red, found on the towpath at Harrow Lock. The girl had been missing nineteen hours.

"Go on, then," said the Inspector. She did not believe in it. She had never once failed to ask.

He closed his hand.

He was braced for fear. He had held enough of it. What came instead was so far from that, he nearly laughed.

"She's fine," he said.

"You can't possibly..."

"She was happy, ma'am. Daft with it. She took this off to stroke something." He turned the mitten over, and there were short white hairs all down the thumb. "Who on that street has just had puppies?"

A Voice in a Cigar Box

Corner shop, the pawnbroker · Mature (55+) · Neutral American · 45 seconds

We take most things at Abelman's Pawn. Guitars, rings, a first kiss if it's in good condition. I give a fair price and thirty days to buy it back.

This fella comes in with his father's voice. Just the voice, in a cigar box. Says he can't stand to hear it in his head anymore.

I open the lid a crack. An old man, saying a name, the way you'd say it calling a kid in for supper.

I shut the box.

"I can't give you anything for that."

"It's worthless?"

"No, son." I slide it back across the glass. "I couldn't afford it. Nobody could. Take it home."

An Apology to the Minnow River

City creatures, the buried river · Adult (30-45) · Southern US · 1 minute

The Minnow River has run under downtown Garrity in a concrete pipe since 1911, and once a year somebody from Public Works has to go down and apologize to it.

This year it was me. I'd been on the job three weeks.

"What do I say?" I asked my boss.

"You say sorry. You pour the bourbon. You don't promise anything."

So I climbed down the ladder at Mill Street with a flashlight and a pint bottle, and I stood over that black water feeling like an idiot.

"The City of Garrity regrets the inconvenience," I read.

The water stopped. I mean it stopped, flat as a table. And then it spoke, not loud, right up against my ear.

"A hundred years of regrets. Girl, do you know what I looked like?"

"No, ma'am."

"There were willows."

I was not supposed to promise anything.

"I'm on the parks committee," I said. "I can get you willows."

I Am Not a Pet

Hedge-witch, comedic · Any · Neutral British · 30 seconds

I should like it noted that I am not a pet. I am a familiar. There is paperwork.

I guard the threshold. I advise on matters of the unseen. Last Tuesday I stared at a corner for two hours and something left.

She calls me Mr. Biscuits. In front of the coven.

I have considered resigning. But she leaves the heating on when she goes out, and she has never once shut a door on me.

One makes allowances.

Last Stop, Clement Road

Transit, the night bus · Adult (40-55) · Neutral British · 1 minute

I drove the night bus out of Harrow Vale depot for eleven years, and for nine of them I had the same last passenger.

She got on at the hospital stop at ten to four. She never tapped a card and I never asked. She got off at Clement Road, and by the time I looked in the mirror the pavement was empty.

You don't mention that sort of thing at the depot. You'd be on days by Monday.

My last shift, I pulled up at Clement Road and I didn't open the doors.

"Listen," I said. I didn't turn round. "I retire tonight. It's a lad called Dev from tomorrow. He's all right, but he's a talker."

Nothing. The engine ticking.

"I only wanted to say. It's been nice, having the company."

When I opened the doors, she stopped on the step.

"Mind how you go, Jean," she said.

I had never told her my name.

It's Not Possums

Pest control, the quote · Adult (40-55) · Australian · 45 seconds

Right, I've had a look, and it's not possums.

You've got a nest of sprites in the roof, that's the scratching. They're harmless, they're after the insulation. I can shift those for eighty bucks.

The cold spot in the hall is a different matter. That's a person. Or it was.

No, don't look at it. They hate that.

She's not doing any harm, mind. She just stands there. From the dress, I reckon she's waiting on somebody who was meant to come home about 1919.

I can move her on. It's two hundred, and it's quick.

Or you could do what my nan did with hers. Say good morning. Leave the hall light on.

That one's free.

Counsel for the Ghoul

Night court, the public defender · Adult (30-45) · Neutral American · 1 minute

I'm a public defender in the Night Court, which means my clients are guilty, broke, and frequently nocturnal.

Tonight's was a ghoul named Stanley. Trespassing, Greenlawn Cemetery, third offense.

"Stan. You've got to stop going in there."

"I know."

"The deal is ninety days, community service. Take it."

"I know." He was looking at his hands. Ghouls have terrible hands. "It's just my mother's in there."

I stopped writing.

"Buried?"

"Section C. I wasn't always this, you know. I was a florist." He shrugged, and something in his neck clicked. "They lock the gates at dusk. I can't go out in the day. So when exactly am I supposed to visit?"

Eleven years I've done this job. I have defended things with too many mouths. I don't rattle.

I closed the file.

"Okay," I said. "We're not pleading. We're going to go in there and ask that judge for a key."

First Day, Bureau of Unlikely Affairs

Detective, the rookie · Young adult (18-25) · Neutral American · 45 seconds

My first day at the Bureau of Unlikely Affairs, they hand me a badge, a flashlight, and a small bag of salt.

"What's the salt for?"

"You'll know," says my partner. Her name is Inez and she has been here since before I was born.

Our first call is a missing person. A man went down to his own basement and didn't come back up.

I stand at the top of the stairs. They're ordinary stairs. There are just a great many more of them than the house has room for.

"Inez?"

"Yep."

"I think I know what the salt is for."

"Good," she says. "Now you're ahead of where I was."

A Refund for Mr. Tully

Ghosts, comedic · Adult (30-45) · Neutral British · 1 minute

Mr. Desmond Tully had been haunting the customer service desk at Pettifer and Lowe since 1987, and what he wanted, he said, was a refund.

"For the toaster," he explained to the new girl. "The one that did for me."

Aisha looked at the till. She looked at the pale gentleman standing slightly inside the counter.

"Have you got the receipt?"

"I have." He produced it. It was see-through, but it was all there. "Fourteen pounds ninety-nine."

Three managers had told him it was out of warranty. One had sent for a vicar.

Aisha was nineteen and had been on the desk four days. She read the receipt. Then she read him.

"Mr. Tully," she said. "On behalf of Pettifer and Lowe, I'm so sorry. That should never have happened to you."

He stood still.

"Nobody's said that. Thirty-odd years. They only ever talked about the toaster."

She opened the till. He was already fading, and he was smiling.

Rent Day on Marrow Street

Hedge-witch, the landlord · Mature (55+) · Neutral American · 90 seconds

On the first of the month Odessa Pike went door to door through her own building with a ledger and a jar of salt, because some of her tenants paid in cash and some paid in kind.

The Kowalskis in 1A paid by check. The thing in 1B paid in dry cellars. There had not been a flood on Marrow Street in fifty years. Mr. Abiodun in 2A paid in weather. If you wanted sun for a wedding, you saw him.

At 3B she knocked twice.

The girl was sitting on the floor among boxes she had never unpacked. The plants on the sill were leaning toward her like she was a window.

"I don't have it, Miss Pike. I lost the job at the diner. Things kept, I don't know. Happening. Around me."

"What kind of things?"

"The coffee pot boiled when I was mad. A man was rude and all his buttons came off."

Odessa wrote that down. She had not laughed at a tenant in forty years and she did not mean to start.

"I'll be out by Friday."

"You'll do no such thing." Odessa capped her pen. "Honey, who taught you?"

"Taught me what?"

So nobody had. Odessa remembered being nineteen in a rented room, sure she was

going crazy, with every clock in the house running backward.

"Rent's waived till spring," she said. "You'll pay in work. Be downstairs at six. Bring the plants."

Undeliverable

Ghosts, the mail carrier · Mature (55+) · Midwestern US · 1 minute

There's a slot at the Carver Falls post office marked Undeliverable, and I'm the one who delivers it.

Thirty-four years. Letters to the dead, mostly. People write them, they don't know what else to do, they put a stamp on. Somebody's got to carry the mail.

I don't read them. I take them out to Riverside, and I find the stone, and I set the letter down, and I say, "Mail." Just so they know.

Mostly that's the end of it.

Last November I set one down for a Harold Brecht. From his daughter. Thick envelope, the kind that took a few tries.

I said, "Mail." I turned to go.

And there was a letter on my bag. Old paper. Fountain pen. Addressed to her, with no stamp.

Now, I have never once in my career carried a thing without postage.

I stood there a while. Then I got out my own wallet, and I bought that man a stamp.

Pest and Presence, Leave a Message

Pest control, comedic · Any · Neutral American · 30 seconds

You've reached Tran Brothers Pest and Presence. We're out on a job.

For rats, roaches or raccoons, leave a message. For anything that knows your name, leave a message and leave the house.

Do not describe it. It likes that.

If this is Mrs. Petrakis again, ma'am, we've been over this. He's not haunting you. He's your husband, he's alive, and he's just quiet.

Maybe ask him about his day.

Never Say Thank You

City creatures, the food truck · Adult (25-40) · Neutral American · 1 minute

The best dumplings in the Garment District come out of a silver food truck that only parks there on a Thursday, and you should not, under any circumstances, say thank you.

Mina knows this. Everybody on the block knows. You pay in cash, exact change, and you say, "That's the right price." You never thank them. A thank-you is a debt, and they collect.

She has done it right for two years.

Today she has been up all night with her daughter's fever, and she has four dollars instead of six, and she is standing at the window counting it for the third time.

The woman in the truck watches her with eyes the color of a traffic light.

"It's short," Mina says. "I'll put them back."

A long, green pause.

Then the woman slides over a second carton. Soup. Mina didn't order it.

"I didn't see you today," the woman says. "So nobody owes anybody. Go home to her."

A Light at 40 Wren Street

Detective, the empty house · Adult (40-55) · Neutral American · 90 seconds

Nobody had lived at 40 Wren Street for six years, so when the neighbors reported a light in the attic, the call came to Inspector Dalia Reyes, who handled the ones that did not fit on the form.

She did not draw her weapon. She took off her shoes at the door. With an old house, it was only manners.

"Police," she said, to the hallway. "I'm not here to make trouble. I just need to know who's upstairs."

The house said nothing. But the hall light came on by itself, and then the one on the landing, like someone showing her the way.

The attic was warm. That was the first wrong thing. The radiators had been drained since the bank took the place.

A boy was asleep on a pile of dust sheets. Eleven or twelve, a school backpack for a pillow. Beside him sat a cracked plate with a sandwich on it, and Reyes did not want to think too hard about where an empty house had found bread.

The floorboard under her foot creaked. Just once. Low.

She knew a warning when she heard one.

"I'm not taking him anywhere bad," she said. "I promise you. But he can't stay. He needs a doctor, and a school, and people."

The warmth in the room wavered.

"You did well," Reyes told it. "Better than most of us would."

Downstairs, gently, the front door unlocked itself.

Showing Apartment 6F

Ghosts, the real estate agent · Adult (25-40) · Neutral American · 90 seconds

I have shown apartment 6F eleven times this month, and every time, the ghost has ruined it.

It's a great unit. South light, original moldings, laundry in the building. And one dead woman named Mrs. Feingold, who has opinions.

The finance guy, she ran the taps brown. The couple with the sound system, every door in the place slammed at once. Yesterday a man said "gut renovation" and the oven turned itself on.

So today I'm not expecting much. The client is a nurse, mid-fifties, works nights. She walks in and stands in the kitchen without saying anything.

I wait for the taps.

Nothing.

"It's quiet," she says.

She opens the cabinet over the stove, and there's one teacup in it, blue, that I have personally thrown out six times.

"Somebody left this."

"I can get rid of it."

"No." She turns it over. "My mother had these. I've got the saucers and no cups." She laughs, embarrassed. "Sorry. Long shift."

Behind her, on the fogged-up window, a line is being drawn by nobody. Then another. It takes me a second to see what it is.

It's a check mark.

"Is there a lot of interest?" the nurse says.

I think about my commission, and eleven showings, and a woman who has waited who knows how long for somebody who would keep the cup.

"Honestly," I say, "I think it's been waiting for you."

Open Twenty-Five Hours

Corner shop, the extra hour · Adult (40–55) · Australian · 1 minute

The sign in the window of Singh's Convenience says Open 25 Hours, and most people take it for a joke.

It isn't. The twenty-fifth hour is on the bottom shelf, past the instant noodles, in a plain brown box.

People use them how you'd think. To finish an essay. To sleep. One bloke bought an hour every Friday for a year and spent it sitting in his car.

Tonight it's a woman in scrubs with a taxi running outside.

"I need one. My dad's at St. Brennan's, they said he won't see morning. And I've still got forty minutes of road."

Mr. Singh looks on the shelf. He knows already.

"I sold the last at nine."

Her face does a thing he will remember.

"Wait," he says. And he takes out his own, the one he has kept in the till since 1994, for an emergency he never could picture.

"No charge. Drive carefully. You have time."

I Don't Sell Love Potions

Corner shop, the florist · Adult (30–45) · Southern US · 30 seconds

Honey, I don't sell love potions. I sell flowers. People get the two confused.

Now, I've got a rose that'll make him listen. I've got a lily that says sorry so you don't have to. Those work on anybody.

But a thing that makes a person love you? That's not magic, that's theft. I won't stock it.

Take the daisies. Three dollars. Tell him the truth and see what he does.

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