



WRITER'S DIGEST *presents*

A YEAR OF

WRITING PROMPTS



STORY IDEAS FOR HONING YOUR CRAFT

— AND —

ELIMINATING WRITER'S BLOCK

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

First and foremost I'd like to thank my wife, who supports me no matter how crazy I sound or how big I dream. She puts up with a lot—thankfully I reward her with being so handsome. I'd also like to thank my mom and dad (I miss you dad). Never did they stand in the way of me following my heart and, because of that, I am forever grateful.

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And finally, I'd like to thank my kids. They may be young, but every day they inspire me to work harder, be a better person and stay creative. I hope I do the same for them.

—B.K.

To my muses. You know who you are.

—Z.P.

INTRODUCTION

Sometimes, our beloved characters can be disobedient little monsters.

Come on, you know what we're talking about—we've all had those characters who do amazing things without much help from us, and we've all had those characters who like to ... *take it easy* from time to time. For instance, they're off and running in the second act of their quest, but then they randomly take a nap on a bench in the middle of a chase through Central Park (the nerve!). Or, they refuse, despite five months of outlining, to do anything but sip Coca Cola, eat ladyfingers and watch sitcoms (if that!).

Writer's block strikes hard, and it strikes fast. We know. It's happened to us a thousand times over. So that's why we started doing writing prompts and exercises—and started writing them for *Writer's Digest*.

The amazing thing about the art of writing is that it's entirely possible to write yourself out of any hole: When you grab a prompt and pick up the pen, more often than not, you'll find it opens up a universe of potential—it destroys writer's block, sharpens your skills, gets your characters moving, and it might even lead you to an entirely new novel by taking your work in unexpected directions galore.

With this collection of prompts (often written during bouts of our own writer's block, anywhere and everywhere, from the WD offices to Eurostar trains in Italy), we're hoping to help you do exactly that.

So here's to you and your writing ... and to getting those characters off the park benches and off the ladyfingers, and out into the bright universes we've so carefully crafted for them.

—Zachary Petit

January 1

Your Resolutions

What are your New Year's resolutions? Take one and create a fictional story surrounding it.

January 2

High Stakes Holidays

"That's not a New Year's Resolution. That's a death wish." Use this as a first line and run with it!

January 3

A Cold Where You (Fill in the Blank) Instead of Sneeze

You've developed a cold, only to discover that instead of sneezing, you (fill in the blank) every time you feel like you have to sneeze. This side effect proves to create a fairly entertaining scene at the office during your weekly budget meeting.

January 4

365 Days

Something life-altering happened. As a result, you've decided to give something up for an entire year. Write a scene detailing the cataclysmic event, or the struggle to keep the vow you made.

January 5

Power Outage

Storms have knocked out the power. You find the flashlight and make shadow bunnies on the wall, but you can tell the kids are not amused. So instead you decide to tell a scary story. Create a story that would scare even the toughest of teenagers.

January 6

I Will Consider Myself Successful When ...

Finish this sentence: As a writer, I will consider myself successful when ...

January 7
High Time

Write a story that takes place somewhere extremely high—space, an airplane, a tower—but that features two characters doing the lowest things for what they believe is a worthy cause.

January 8
Treasure Awaits

You receive a letter in the mail from an out-of-town relative asking you to drop everything and meet him in Boston ASAP. He doesn't say why, but signs off on the letter with the phrase: "Treasure awaits."

January 9
Matchup!

Write a scene featuring a cruise ship or boat, a sudden change in weather, and the idiom "Fools rush in."

January 10
Snow Day

Write about a day during your elementary school years when school was cancelled due to snow. Remember waking up to the "good" news? How did you fill your newfound free time?

January 11
Literary Roadshow – J.D. Salinger Edition

(Literary Roadshow is a series of prompts in which you write a story inspired by or including a bit of classic literature—in this case, *The Catcher in the Rye*. Will one author's stray lines become your source of inspirational gold?)

"C'mon, I'll take ya home. No kidding."

"I can go home by myself, thank you. If you think I'd let you take me home, you're mad. No boy ever said that to me in my entire life."

January 12

Neighbor + Pet = Bad News

Your neighbor has taken in an unusual pet and it does something unpleasant to your house/yard. Confront your neighbor.

January 13

Matchup!

Write a story featuring an author, the ocean, and an antique weapon.

January 14

A Broken (Deadly) Resolution

Only two weeks had passed into the New Year and Tim had already broken his first resolution: Don't kill anyone. Write this scene.

January 15

Lost Translation

She'd passed him the note years ago, when he was studying abroad. He'd never had it translated. Until now.

January 16

One More Chance—Talking to Someone Who Has Died

You are given the opportunity to talk to one dead person and tell him/her one thing that you didn't get to before they passed away. Who would you pick and what would you tell him/her?

January 17

No Pain, No Gain

An unexpected injury leads to an equally unexpected family discovery.

January 18

Changing Your Childhood

Pick an event from your childhood that you wish would have gone differently. Write it as though it had happened ideally.

January 19

The Tweets That Never Were

Write the tweets of your dead hero, a dead historical figure, or a long-passed literary great.

January 20

Illegal Download

Your best friend has been arrested for illegally downloading music. While in jail, he asks you to go to his house and clear everything off his computer. As you start deleting files, you notice a folder with your name on it.

January 21

Matchup!

Craft a story featuring a cell phone, a lost-and-found box, and a blizzard.

January 22

Breaking Up With Writer's Block

It's time for you and Writer's Block to part ways. Write a letter breaking up with Writer's Block, starting out with, "Dear Writer's Block, it's not you, it's me ..."

January 23

Ripped From the Headlines!

Without using Oprah, write a fictional scene about a writer who receives something innumerable authors might kill for—but, for reasons of his own, rejects it.

January 24

Apologize to Your Conscience

Write a letter apologizing to your conscience. Or reverse it and write one where your conscience apologizes to you.

January 25

Romeo and Juliet, Derailed

You watch the play. “I don’t remember *Romeo and Juliet* going like this,” you whisper to your companion.

January 26

Your Favorite Fictional Character

Write a scene where you and your favorite fictional character meet accidentally.

January 27

Two Thumbs Up

Your character takes his or her obsession with a hit movie one step too far.

January 28

Fine Young Cannibals

You have been captured by cannibals. How do you try to convince them not to eat you? If that fails how do you attempt to get away?

January 29

Defriending

After decades of friendship, it doesn’t seem possible, but she realizes she won’t ever speak to her best friend again. Explain why.

January 30

Your Last Line

Write the last line to an unwritten novel that’s so intriguing that others won’t help but want to read the book.

January 31
The Fog

He'd never been in her bathroom before. As he turned on the hot water to wash his hands, the mirror, which was prone to fogging, fogged. And he saw what was written there.

February 1
Next Time, Chew

At dinner, you choke. Something flashes before your eyes, only it's not exactly your life.

February 2
Groundhog Obit

It's Groundhog Day! Just as the groundhog comes up to decide whether or not winter is over, he keels over. You've been charged to write a nice news article/obituary paying tribute to him, his life and his family.

February 3
Losing the Faith

At a tour of the headquarters of one of your favorite products, you lose all faith in it.

February 4
No Cracker for Polly

A man buys a parrot and is horrified when he discovers the only thing it can say is, "If you ever tell anyone what you saw, I'll kill you."

February 5
Poor Cell Phone Reception

You're talking on your cell phone while driving into work one morning. All of a sudden your signal gets crossed and you start picking up another conversation. What is said in that conversation?

February 6

Matchup!

Write a scene featuring a red truck, an asthma inhaler, and the word “fate.”

February 7

Underutilized Words

Choose five words that you feel are underrated, underappreciated or underused, and write a short piece in which you challenge yourself to use them as much as possible.

February 8

Memorable Memoirs

Every great memoir has a catchy title. What would the title of yours be?

February 9

The Chairman

Your father made the chair when he was a boy, and it’s gotten rickety. Preparing to finally throw it away, you flip it over to carry it to the trash, and notice a message etched in with a knife.

February 10

Literary Roadshow – Kurt Vonnegut Jr. Edition

(Write a story inspired by or including one of the following, from Vonnegut’s *Breakfast of Champions*—)

1. “On judgment day, when they ask me what bad things I did down here, I’m going to have to tell them, ‘Well, there was a promise I made to a man I loved, and I broke it all the time.’”
2. “I’m going to ask you to do something I have never asked you to do before. Promise me you’ll say yes.”
“I promise,” she said.
3. The fan letter came much too late. It wasn’t good news.

February 11
Matchup!

Write a scene featuring a frightened animal, a civic leader, and a small audience.

February 12
Redefining Love

In a scene, define love.

February 13
Love Letter

Write a love letter to someone you care about (it doesn't have to be romantic). If you prefer, you can write it from the point of view of one of your characters.

February 14
A Day of Valentines

Take your best—or worst—Valentine's Day experience and reveal it in a scene.

February 15
The One That Got Away

You bump into an ex-lover on Valentine's Day—the one whom you often call “The One That Got Away.”
What happens?

February 16
A Third Day of Valentines

It was Valentine's Day. You took your date to a movie—only it wasn't the Valentine's Day epic you had imagined, and what happened in the seat in front of you only reinforced that.

February 17
Sarcastic Love Poem

Write a sappy love poem to a distant personage, then go back and change/add words to make it sarcastic.

February 18

Tunes as Muse

Take two of your favorite songs, and match up a line from the chorus of one with a line from the chorus of the other. Then, write a scene that starts with the first lyric, and ends with the second.

February 19

Timequake

Write a story about a character who digs up a time capsule—and within it, a powerful memory.

February 20

George Washington on Twitter

What if George Washington were running for president today? Write several tweets of 140 characters or fewer from his point of view. They can be serious about issues, humorous about his adjustment to 21st-century social media—anything you want.

February 21

Lovely Meal Gone Wrong

You and a friend have just finished a lovely meal at your favorite restaurant. But things take a turn when you notice that the waiter has scribbled an unexpected—and startling—message on your bill.

February 22

40 Days and 40 Nights

For Lent, someone you live with is partaking in the tradition of giving something up for 40 days and 40 nights—and it's one of the most bizarre things you've ever heard of anyone giving up.

February 23

Text Message Murder

You're sitting at work one day and receive a text message from an unrecognized number. The text says, "I have the money and hid the body." You think this is a practical joke from a friend, so you play along at first. But the more texts you receive, the more you realize that it isn't a joke. Write the text conversation.

February 24

Change of Heart

Reveal how your character got a new scar, a new friend, and a change of heart.

February 25

Brotherly Love

Write a story about two brothers who are competing for the affection of the same woman.

February 26

What's in a Nickname?

When out to lunch with co-workers, you bump into a close friend who refers to you by a nickname. Because of its unusualness, the nickname catches the interest of one of your co-workers, who asks for the story behind it. Start your story with, "This may come as a surprise, but ..."

February 27

Vowel-uable Writing

Write a paragraph in which every word starts with a vowel. Then write a second paragraph in which every word starts with a consonant. After you're done, have a friend read it and see if she notices.

February 28

Quotes/Clichés/Sayings

Start a story with one of your least-favorite quotes, clichés or sayings. End it with one of your favorites.

March 1

Day Dreaming

Recount your most vivid dream.

March 2

Matchup!

Write a story featuring an unexpected first date, an allergy, and a foot stool.

March 3

Literary Roadshow – Upton Sinclair Edition

(Write a story inspired by or including the following, from Sinclair’s *The Jungle*—)

“I hit him, sir,” said Jurgis. . . .

“You tried to choke him?”

“Yes, sir, your Honor.”

“Ever been arrested before?”

“No, sir, your Honor.”

“What have you to say for yourself?”

March 4

The Excuse

You’re late for work because you overslept, but your boss hates over-sleepers. He does love entertaining stories, though, so create the most outlandish excuse as to why you were late.

March 5

Matchup!

Write a scene featuring a lie detector, a dead bird, and an old friend.

March 6

You Can’t Name Your Baby That!

You and your spouse welcome a beautiful baby into your lives and, after going round and round on names, you choose one that’s very unusual. Write a scene in which you announce the name to your family, their reaction and your explanation for choosing such an odd name.

March 7

The Source

The call came in at the newspaper reporter’s desk late on a Sunday. Finally, he wanted to meet.

March 8

Business Trip

You're taking a business trip and, as luck would have it, you're upgraded to first class—something that's never happened to you before. As you sit down in your new, more comfortable chair, you notice that the person sitting next to you is a famous musician. And nothing like you'd imagined.

March 9

Subjective

Open your e-mail and randomly choose the subject line of an old message. Make that the first line of your story. Then, choose another subject line, and make that the last line of your story.

March 10

Hurricane Relief

A hurricane hits in the South and folks are asked to evacuate. You're out of the hurricane's reach and offer your home up to anyone seeking refuge. A family member takes you up on the offer. When she arrives, she describes—in vivid detail—her experience.

March 11

Propaganda

A plane flies above your house. Leaflets tumble from it and, as they hit the ground, you pick one up and read it.

March 12

Character Playlist

Take a character from one of your stories and examine his or her iPod playlist. What 10 songs best describe the character?

March 13

Riddles in Red, Yellow and Black

In scene, explain why there's a red and yellow substance on your shoes, a black one on your gloves, and a smile on your face.

March 14

Your Future Writing Bio

Write a one-paragraph bio about your writing career to date. Then, write the one-paragraph bio you expect to have in 2020 (including all your major writing accomplishments).

March 15

Dictionary

In a scene, define *envy*.

March 16

Allergic Reaction

You find out that you are highly allergic to something you love. Do you give it up (no matter how hard it is) or not (and deal with the consequences of the allergy)?

March 17

Legend Becomes Life

On St. Patrick's Day, an old legend seems to become a reality.

March 18

St. Patrick's Day Hangover

You drank a little too much green beer on St. Patrick's Day and can't remember the night. A friend calls to check up on you and fills you in on what happened—and why she has your pants.

March 19

Matchup!

Write a story featuring an uncashed check, a bad movie, and the word "Shakespeare."

March 20

Tripping Mr. Two

It made no sense to him—until he realized it was an anagram. Then, suddenly everything came into focus.

March 21

Get Me Off This Island

Your plane crashes on a deserted island. Only you and two other passengers survive. The only salvageable items from the plane are a pair of scissors, a stopwatch and a typewriter. Use these items creatively to get off the island.

March 22

Better Than You

Write about a ridiculous competition you start with a friend (e.g., a mustache-growing competition, longest-fingernail challenge, etc.).

March 23

Type Talk

He had a habit of always reading his words aloud as he typed. Only today, he really should have kept his mouth shut.

March 24

Finding \$40,000

You're cleaning out your garage and, hidden away in a back corner, you find an old shoebox. The box is heavier than it should be. When you open it up, you find cash—\$40,000, to be exact. Where did the cash come from, who hid it there and why?

March 25

Unusual Phobia

Create a character that has an unusual phobia. Write a scene that causes the character to face his fear.

March 26

Rear Window

You're about to enter the restaurant when you happen to glance up at a nearby building—and see something happening through the window.

March 27

Mystery Cookie

One day you come into work and find a cookie mysteriously placed on your desk. Grateful to whoever left this anonymous cookie, you eat it. The next morning you come in and find another cookie. This continues for months until one day a different object is left—and this time there's a note.

March 28

Dream Job

Your character gets his dream job—at least for four hours.

March 29

A Chance to Vent

Write a 20-line rhyming poem about something that really annoys you.

March 30

Inked

The tattoo artist took some liberties of his own.

March 31

Bankrupt Millionaire

Write about the first hour after a millionaire suddenly loses his fortune and finds himself without any possessions.

April 1

The April Fool

You're not the type to ever play a prank, but you had your April Fools' Day scheme planned for weeks. Problem was, when you did it, everyone thought you were serious. And they still do.

April 2

Sent to the Wrong Printer

You're at work and you print something personal (and sensitive). Unfortunately, you've sent it to the wrong printer and, by the time you realize it, someone else already scooped it up.

April 3

House Guests

In your new home, you discover an infestation of something you didn't even think, well, infested places.

April 4

Black Velvet Box

The temperature outside is finally above freezing and winter's snow is beginning to melt, revealing a season's worth of lost things. Disregarding hats and mittens, a man walking his dog becomes intrigued with a black velvet box. He opens it and is shocked to discover its contents. What's inside the box and how did it get there?

April 5

Matchup!

Write a scene featuring a staple gun, an unfinished manuscript, and a wedding.

April 6

Hypothetically Speaking

Write a paragraph in which every sentence contains at least one five+ syllable word. Begin with "Hypothetically speaking ..."

April 7

High School Haiku

Write a haiku (first line 5 syllables, second line 7 syllables, third line 5 syllables) about your first day of high school.

April 8

Up in the Air

A thud.

On the plane, everyone looks around.

Another thud.

And another.

Then, a knocking from below.

April 9

The Big Find

Two kids are Easter-egg hunting when they stumble upon a human skull.

April 10

The Name Game

Write a scene about two people having a fight—in the most awkward of locations—about naming something (a person, a thing, or a place).

April 11

A Letter to Future You (6 Months Edition)

Write a letter to yourself that you will open in six months. Include your current accomplishments and concerns, and remind yourself of one thing from today that you want to make sure “future you” does not forget.

April 12

Viral Video Vengeance

You decide you’re going to get revenge for a certain YouTube video that was posted of (or about) you.

April 13

Not-So-Happy Meal

You’re eating at your favorite restaurant and order your favorite meal. A couple of bites in, you nearly have a heart attack when you notice something in your meal that doesn’t belong there. What is it and how did it get there?

April 14

First Date, Last Day

Write a story about a couple on their first date—on the last day of something. (The last day of the year? The last day of a marriage? The last day of the world?)

April 15

Your First Memory

Walk us through your very first memory.

April 16

Real-Life Dialogue

Take the next conversation you have—no matter what—and work a sentence from it into the opening line of a short story.

April 17

Rejection Letter to a Rejection Letter

Most of us have received a rejection letter at one time or another. Write a rejection letter to a rejection letter, explaining why you find it unsatisfactory.

April 18

Recyclables

You buy a used car. On the way home you make a stop and are forced into buying something else you never knew was sold used.

April 19

Your Five Demands

You're a celebrity and are able to make demands on what must be provided in your dressing room (Jennifer Lopez insists on white couches). What are your top five demands and why?

April 20

Bored Bunny

After years of handing out dyed eggs, the Easter Bunny is in search of a new gift to give to kids. You're a pitchman for a company who's hoping to land the Easter Bunny's account. What's your product and your pitch?

April 21

Dinner Guests

If you could invite any three people to dinner (dead or alive, famous, fictional, etc.), who would they be, why and what would the topic of conversation be?

April 22

Earth Day Resolution

Start your story with, "In retrospect, I wouldn't say it was my best idea." End it with, "And that's how I attempted to make this world a better place."

April 23

Resent the Present

It was a birthday present he'd never speak of again.

April 24

What's the Best/Worst Advice You've Received?

Everyone is always offering advice on everything. What's the best piece of advice you've ever received? What's the worst (and why)? Craft an essay or story featuring both.

April 25

Battles

Write a scene about someone at war—on a battlefield in an actual war, at home, in a boardroom, in a relationship.

April 26

Something You Can't Live Without

Write a 22-line poem (rhyming or non-rhyming) about the one thing in your life that you can't live without.

April 27

The Announcement

You're at a big-box store, and the PA clicks on. You're surprised to hear it call your name—and even more surprised when it goes into greater detail about something else.

April 28

Worst Pick-Up Line

Your friend tells you he can pick up any girl at the bar no matter what he says. You bet him \$100 he can't. Create the world's worst pick-up line and send your friend off into the crowd. What happens?

April 29

RenFair

Things get a little too real at the Renaissance Fair.

April 30

Your Hollywood Doppelganger

Hollywood producers are making a film based on your life and have put you in charge of casting. They want it as realistic as possible, so they ask that you pick actors and actresses who look the part. Who would you pick to play your family and friends, and, more important, who will play you?

May 1

Sinking Ship

You realize the boat is sinking, but that's not the worst thing that could happen. The worst thing happened last night.

May 2

Birthday Blast

You're out to eat a nice birthday dinner with your family when the waiting staff marches out from the back room with a cake. With everyone around singing happy birthday, you decide this is the moment to make that life-changing announcement you've been considering.

May 3

Bending the Rules

The sign said "No Shirt, no shoes, no service"—but that didn't matter. He had to get inside.

May 4

A Poetic Moment

Write a 16-line poem (rhyming or non-rhyming) about a moment from your childhood that changed your life for the better.

May 5

Stalled

It's probably the best graffiti you've ever read in a bathroom stall. On a whim, you decide to steal it and use it in the boardroom.

May 6

Caller ID

You have a job interview. When you leave, you realize you've mistakenly taken the interviewer's phone and he's taken yours. The new phone rings and the caller ID reveals it's someone you know.

May 7

Between the Lines

Write a conversation in which your character is terrified to say what he really means, and hopes his partner can read between the lines. Have the last line mean everything.

May 8

How Are We Related?

There's a knock on your door. You open it up and there stands a man, worn and beaten, wearing nothing but a toga and a large tattoo. He claims to be a long-lost relative and can prove it based on a code in his tattoo. What's his story and what does he want?

May 9

The Cartographer

You take a map of the world, close your eyes, and put your finger on a random spot. *That's it*—that's where it'll happen.

May 10

Midnight Madness

At a midnight showing of your favorite classic film, something happens on screen that wasn't part of the script.

May 11

Mama's Boy/Girl

Write a fictional scene or a nonfiction essay conveying what Mother's Day *really* means to you, beyond cards and flowers.

May 12

Not Your Real Mother

Mother's Day is over and you've just finished a nice dinner with your mom when you receive a phone call. An unfamiliar female voice on the other end says, "Stop celebrating with her! I'm your real mother."

May 13

New Shoes

You often hear people say, "You'll never understand another person until you've walked a mile in his or her shoes." Choose a fictional character and walk a day in his or her shoes. Now write about it.

May 14

American Graffiti

You're downtown, and see graffiti in an unlikely place—graffiti like you've never seen before, concerning someone you know.

May 15

Alphabet Poem

Write a 26-line poem using all the letters of the alphabet. Have the first line start with the letter "A," the second "B," the third "C," etc.

May 16

Tweet Tirade

Based on a particular tweet or Facebook status update, your character makes an important—and critical—life decision. Show the decision in scene, or show what your character has decided to do in the wake of it.

May 17

Scathing Movie Review

A newspaper editor contacts you. She's afraid her entertainment section is a bit too bland and wants you to spice it up. Pick a movie that you've seen in the past year and write a scathing review.

May 18

Matchup!

Write a story involving a game of truth or dare, your favorite food, and a movie theater.

May 19

Song Parody

What if parody artist "Weird Al" Yankovic was suffering from writer's block and asked for your help? Take your favorite song and rewrite the lyrics in his style.

May 20

Unpacking the Package

A package arrives at your home, and you open it. Baffled at its contents, you turn it over and look at the label—it's for your neighbor.

May 21

Procrastination Punishments

Develop a list of five punishments to dissuade yourself from procrastinating. Each punishment should be tougher than the next. For example, the first punishment should be for the first time you put off work. The second, for the second time. And so on.

May 22

The Lace Reader

The shoelaces—they weren't meant for that at all.

May 23

Socketed

Three weeks ago, while folding laundry, you noticed a sock was missing. Last week, another sock disappeared. Where are they going? You've hidden a micro camera inside a sock to find out.

May 24

End of the Line

At the funeral, you fidget nervously as you wait in line to pay your respects. When you reach the casket, the face of the woman standing next to it changes.

May 25

Late-Night Phone Call

In the middle of the night, you get an urgent call from a friend you haven't talked to in years. Something terrible has happened. What is it and why is he/she calling you?

May 26

The Memorial

You haven't been back to the cemetery for years. But now you take a tiny flag, an apple, and another item out of your bag, and place them by the headstone. Then, you do what you always do when you're here: you remember.

May 27

Attic Writings

While rummaging through your attic, you find an old dusty typewriter with a half-completed letter in it. Immediately, you realize who the author was and her intentions. In honor of that person, finish the letter.

May 28

Out and About

You see him in a café and decide to follow him. Two hours later, you're sure—it has to be. It's a character from one of your favorite books, in the flesh.

May 29

Back From the Future

A knock at the door catches you off guard. Upon answering it, you're greeted by a man who says he's from the future—and he can prove it. More important, he says he has information that will save your life.

May 30

Bejeweled

On the side of the highway: milk jugs, tire chunks, and an open box of jewelry glistening in the sunlight. Explain how it all got there.

May 31

Songs That Inspire You

If a record company put together the soundtrack of your writing life, what songs would it include? List 10 that inspire, excite or compel you to put pen to paper.

June 1

The Midlife Crisis

He's having a midlife crisis. Only instead of a sports car, he buys ...

June 2

Neighbor's Garden Gnome

One day, you are out in your yard when the next-door neighbor's garden gnome suddenly walks over and starts telling you about "what is really going on in the neighborhood." Write this scene.

June 3

Hit the Road

A man turns to his left and punches the driver in the face, and the two begin fist fighting—in a car, on the road.

Write the conversation that led to the altercation.

June 4

Secret Passage

At your local public library, you are poking around the dusty back shelves. There is a particularly boring-looking book there, but for some reason you find yourself removing it from the shelf. As soon as you move the book, the bookcase opens in like a door, revealing a deep, dark tunnel.

June 5

First Comes Love, Then Comes Marriage...

A man pushes a baby carriage. Passing him on the street, you look inside—and stop in your tracks.

June 6

An Apple's Point of View

Write a story from the point of view of an apple sitting in a fruit basket on your kitchen counter, observing life around it.

June 7

Editorializing

You're a newspaper editor, and at the last minute before you send the latest issue to the printer, you decide to do it—you're going to change the Page 1 headline.

June 8

Your Writing Pseudonym

You're afraid that your name and personality just don't fit your writing style. To help sell your work, come up with a pseudonym and an alter ego for it.

June 9

Full Disclosure

They toured the house with the real estate agent.

"We love it," he said. "Is there anything we should know about the house's past?"

The agent looked down.

June 10

New Holiday

Come up with a new holiday. Explain why and how it should be celebrated.

June 11

Matchup!

Write a story featuring a pathological liar, a cow, and a cardboard box.

June 12

Obit for Your Favorite Character

Write an obituary for your favorite fictional character (literary, television, etc.), including how the death occurred.

June 13

Literary Roadshow – Kurt Vonnegut Jr. Edition 2

(Write a story inspired by or including the following, from Vonnegut's *Slaughterhouse-Five*—)

“What did his wife say?”

“She doesn't know yet,” I said. “It just happened.”

“Call her up and get a statement.”

“What?”

June 14

Nursery Rhyme Challenge

Rewrite a nursery rhyme (“Three Blind Mice,” “Jack and Jill,” etc.) from a character's point of view.

June 15

Matchup!

Write a scene featuring a guitar, a scar, and your hometown.

June 16

New Dictionary Words

Your good friends at Merriam-Webster called and you've been asked to create five new words for inclusion in next year's dictionary. What are your five words? (Don't forget to include each word's definition.)

June 17

Catchphrase

His father said it once when he was a kid, and it had such an impact on him that it became his mantra, his catchphrase, his go-to quote. For better or worse. Write a scene in which he uses it today.

June 18

Peculiar Gift

What's the most peculiar gift you've ever received? Describe the scene when you opened it, and your reaction.

June 19

Taxing Texts

Write the text message that made her laugh, made him cry, and changed things permanently.

June 20

Déjà vu

Around mid-morning one day, you realize that everything that is happening seems really familiar. After much thought you discover that (choose one of the following): A) you are reliving a day from your past; B) a dream/nightmare that you have had is now happening for real; or C) your life has fallen into a terrible and monotonous rut and now you must take drastic measures to find a way out of it.

June 21

The News Muse

Log on to a news website, and match up three random words from three article headlines to use in a story of your own.

For example, via CNN, you use “billion,” “targeted” and “swans” from the following headlines:

“Half a billion eggs recalled in 17 states”

“WikiLeaks founder: I was targeted”

“Sell queen’s swans, Britons suggest”

June 22

In 10 Words

Write a 10-word sentence that sums up your day.

June 23

Mistaken Surgery

You are in the operating room and are slowly being put under to have your gall bladder removed. Just as you are dozing off, you notice the doctor entering the room isn’t the doctor scheduled to operate on you. When you wake, your gall bladder is still there, but something else about you has been changed.

June 24

Reluctant Winner

On a vacation that you won, part of the prize is something you never, ever wanted. But it's part of the prize, and it's mandatory, so you do it.

June 25

Bullying the Bully

You're out at restaurant and bump into a childhood bully who used to steal your lunch money. Confront the bully.

June 26

Secret Recipe

An unexpected ingredient finds its way into a main dish at your dinner party.

June 27

Adversary to the Anniversary

A special anniversary is coming up and you've decided to go all-out to celebrate. The only thing is, this is an anniversary of something unusual and there's only one other person who knows what it's about—and he's uncomfortable celebrating.

June 28

Living the Dream

It's like one of those dreams where you're horrified to discover that you're walking around in the buff—only, well, real.

June 29

Voicemail

You get into work and find that your boss has left a voicemail on your phone. The message is urgent. What's peculiar though is that the message is not work related.

June 30

Wigging Out

“It was a wig?!” she screamed. “This whole time?”

July 1

Losing a Loved One

Someone you are extremely close to unexpectedly dies. Write that person a letter explaining what you will miss most about him/her.

July 2

Novel Moments

A fiction author is down on her luck. She’s contracted to write another novel, but has no idea what it will be. On an otherwise uneventful Monday, she leaves home and finds her inspiration—in the most unusual of places.

July 3

Rogue Firework

You’re hosting a 4th of July party at your house. Your closest friend is in charge of the firework show and it’s a spectacular display of colors in the sky—until one rogue firework misfires into your neighbor’s home and catches her roof on fire.

July 4

Your Independence

It’s Independence Day. Write about the day you declared independence from your parents. If you can’t remember, be creative.

July 5

View Askew

Choose a story from the news, and imagine two different writers witnessed the event—and then went home to write about it. Write their two unique takes on the subject—in a journal entry, a fiction piece inspired by the event, a poem, or any other form your characters desire.

July 6

Another Person With Your Name

While waiting at a doctor's office, you hear your name called. As you stand up, you hear another person say, "That's me," and head for the nurse. Another person with your name! You decide to follow this person throughout his day. What traits do you share? Where do you differ? And what is the one thing this person has that you envy and feel you need to incorporate into your life?

July 7

That Damn Cat

You could have done it. It all should have been simple. "If it hadn't been for that damn cat ..."

July 8

Movie Title Mistakes

A movie theater that plays old films has three titles listed on its marquee. You read all three in a row, as if they made up one sentence, and cringe. What is the sentence?

July 9

Job Description

Take the most boring job you've ever had and write a glowing job description for it.

July 10

Literary Roadshow – Albert Camus Edition

(Write a story inspired by or including the following, from Camus' *The Plague*—)

"He was going to make them right with a couple of pills or an injection, and people took him by the arm on his way to the sickroom. Flattering, but dangerous."

Now, he takes your arm. Who is this doctor? Reveal him in scene.

July 11

A Reunion to Remember

It's your 10-year high school reunion and, despite your reservations, you decide to go. The night is going smoothly, as you've managed to avoid the three people you were dreading—the kid you bullied, the kid who bullied you and the prom date you ditched at the dance. Just as you're about to leave, one of them confronts you.

July 12

Passing Notes

He'd written the note on the back of his hand so he wouldn't forget. Now, it changed everything.

July 13

Dollar Message

You're at your favorite department store buying a birthday present for a friend. As the cashier gives you change, you notice a message with specific instructions scribbled on one of the bills. What do the instructions say? Do you carry them out and, if so, how?

July 14

Dump Truck Dilemma

In front of your car, the dump truck stops. Your heart nearly does, too, when you see what's poking out of the back of it.

July 15

Your Evil Twin

While at the grocery store you bump into an oddly familiar face—it's your evil twin! The evil twin follows you home and tries to convince your family (or friends) that he/she is you. How do you prove to your loved ones that you are the real you and the twin is an imposter?

July 16

The Honeymooners

Write a scene from a couple's honeymoon involving a new pet, a handful of money, and a hospital.

July 17

Misdial

You've accidentally dialed the wrong phone number, but the person who answers sounds familiar. Immediately he/she recognizes you, but because you made the call you're too embarrassed to ask who it is. Using only dialogue, figure out who the person is.

July 18

Vacation From Vacation

With your cell phone and souvenirs in hand, your torn map falls to the ground. "He wasn't even supposed to be here," you mutter. And just like that, you need a vacation from your vacation.

July 19

Note Behind the Picture

A picture on your mantle unexpectedly falls and crashes to the floor. As you go to pick it up, you notice a note hidden behind the picture. The message is from the future—and written by you. It instructs you to do something important. What does it say?

July 20

To Be Married

It was a strange engagement. But she had reasons of her own for wanting to go through with it. And so did he.

July 21

Message in a Bottle

You're walking along the beach one cool and crisp morning when you notice something sticking out of the sand. As you get closer, you realize it's a bottle with a message in it. You crack the bottle open and read it.

July 22

Literary Roadshow – George Orwell Edition

(Write a story inspired by or including the following, from Orwell’s *1984*—)

“Julia.”

No answer.

“Julia, are you awake?”

No answer. She was asleep. He shut the book, put it carefully on the floor, lay down, and pulled the coverlet over both of them. He had still, he reflected, not learned the ultimate secret. He understood how; he did not understand *why*.

July 23

Doctor Visit

You go to the doctor for a regular checkup and she gives you some life-changing news. Write this scene.

July 24

A Man Walks Into a Bar

In London, you might drink tea. In Munich, beer. In Louisville, a mint julep. When you visit your spouse’s hometown, however, you discover they prefer a different sort of traditional libation.

July 25

The Stranger

You’re walking home from work one night and taking shortcuts through a labyrinth of dark city alleyways to meet someone on time. Suddenly, a stranger parts the shadows in front of you, comes close and asks you to hold out your palm. You oblige.

July 26

Fiction to Fact

Take the last piece of fiction you wrote, and imagine that it actually happened—and found its way to the news. Now, write a piece centered around the reactions of a character watching a recap of the story on television.

July 27

Olympic Scuffle

Two synchronized diving partners overcome a behind-the-scene scuffle to compete in the Olympics and win the gold.

July 28

A Suitor for the Suitcase

A man enters your subway car with a small suitcase. He places it under a seat and gets off at the next stop. You eye the “LEAVE NO PACKAGES UNATTENDED” sign. Another man boards the train, picks up the suitcase, takes something out of it, and moves it down a seat. At the next stop, he leaves and a woman enters, takes something out of it, moves it down a seat and exists. And then another. Finally, it’s placed under your seat.

July 29

A Real Puzzle

You and a friend are doing the weekly crossword puzzle. About halfway through, you notice something odd. It appears that the crossword creator is sending your friend a message. After reading it, she storms out of the room crying. Why?

July 30

Strange Happenings in the RV

The RV is full. The gas is low. From the expressway, nobody has any clue what’s inside. But that may change soon.

July 31

Snubbed by the Trash Collector

It’s garbage day and you put your trash on the curb, but when you return home from work, it’s still there (though everyone else’s garbage has been taken away). The next week, it happens again—and again the following week. Why is the trash collector snubbing you?

August 1

Literary Roadshow – Sylvia Plath Edition

(Write a story inspired by or including the following, from Plath's *The Bell Jar*—)

I woke to the sound of rain. It was pitch dark. After a while I deciphered the faint outlines of an unfamiliar window. Every so often a beam of light appeared out of this air, traversed the wall like a ghostly, exploratory finger, and slide off into nothing again. Then I heard the sound of somebody breathing.

August 2

My Resignation

After years of unhappiness, you've finally had enough and have decided to quit—but we're not talking about your job. Write a letter of resignation to someone other than your employer—your school, your family, your favorite sports team, etc.

August 3

Crafting a Cliché

Write the most cliché story you can, working as many unbearably overdone elements into the scene as possible.

August 4

Let Your Closet Tell the Story

Pick one closet in your house and explore. Take four of the items you find and use them in a short story. Let one item designate your location (Hawaiian shirt, vacation photo, etc.), one be your murder weapon, one be used for cleanup and a final item to be used any way you see fit.

August 5

You Had Your Reasons

The hotel was \$19.99 for a reason. And you were there for reasons of your own ... but not the kind everyone might think.

August 6

Your Monster Returns

When you were little, you swore there was a monster under your bed—but no one believed you. On the eve of your 30th birthday, you hear noises coming from under your bed once again. The monster is back and has an important message to deliver to you.

August 7

Paparazzi

You try to snap a discrete photo—but it just doesn't work out that way.

August 8

New Name, New Identity

You've left town—ditching your old, miserable life—hoping to start a new life for yourself. You've given yourself a new name, fake background and style. Write about your first encounter in your new town.

August 9

Scrabble Scuffle

Write about an intense game of Scrabble that takes an ugly turn for the worse.

August 10

Raising the Alarm

Yet again, you draw a breath, mumble an apology, and pull the fire alarm at the shopping mall.

August 11

Acceptance Speech

Poking fun at you, a relative gives you a dubious award at a family picnic (“Worst Horseshoe Player,” “Best Beer Holder,” etc.). In a twist, you accept the award and give a short speech. Write this scene.

August 12

Strangers on a Train

You're on a train and for some reason have missed your stop—which, as you soon discover with the stranger sitting next to you, is a blessing in disguise.

August 13

An Alliteration Challenge

Using as much alliteration as you can (Annie always ate apples) tell a story about your meeting with a group of alien ambassadors.

August 14

Leap of Faith

“Please don't. This isn't going to work. I'm not qualified at all for this.”

“Sure you are.”

She doesn't believe you, so with the crowd looking on, you prove your point.

August 15

Career in One Sentence

Sum up your writing career in one sentence.

August 16

Literary Roadshow – J.D. Salinger Edition 2

(Write a story inspired by or including the following, from Salinger's *The Catcher in the Rye*—)

“Daddy's going to kill you. He's going to kill you,” she said. I wasn't listening, though. I was thinking about something else – something crazy.

“You know what I'd like to be?” I said. “You know what I'd like to be?”

August 17

Meeting the Band

You're at the concert of your favorite band when your friend, who got you the tickets, makes a surprise announcement: "I got us backstage passes, too!" Write about your experience meeting the band.

August 18

Why Am I in Jail?

You wake up in jail and have no memory of how you got there. As you pace around the cell, you find five items in your pocket from the night before. As you look at each piece, the night slowly comes back to you. Write about your night, why you have these five items and how you ended up in jail.

August 19

13 Hours

"Only 13 hours?"

"Yes."

"It's not possible."

The dog barks, the child coughs.

"It's what you're going to have to do."

August 20

Unusual Side Effect

The government has issued a warning that a particular (and common) household item is having an unusual side effect on children. Worse yet, you own this item. You rush home to check on your kids.

August 21

A Novel Speech, Derailed

You're supposed to be giving a speech, but your mind seizes. You look up at the massive crowd, frantic, and start reciting the contents of an alarming letter you received last week, instead.

August 22

Birthday Celebration

If you could spend your birthday doing anything you wanted—anything!—what would it be and why?

August 23

Self-Destructive Actions

Take a short piece you've written (or whip up a new one), and hack the ending off. Then, write the most awesomely bad ending you can—and see how easily you can derail the piece.

August 24

Pizza Delivery Nightmare

You're a pizza delivery driver and it's your last stop of the night. The house is on an unlit, unfamiliar street. As you ring the doorbell, you're greeted by an unusual character who invites you in while he gets cash—and abruptly knocks you out cold.

August 25

Eve of the Eavesdropper

Cup to the wall, you listen and your pulse throbs. It's *too* perfect.

August 26

The Heckler

You're a stand-up comedian having a good night on stage—except for one loudmouth in the back of the crowd who keeps heckling you. As your set ends, you storm off stage to confront this person, only to discover it's (fill in the blank).

August 27

Matchup!

Write a scene featuring a book or magazine, a startling revelation, and one of your favorite things from childhood (be it a toy, a person, a pet, a place, etc.).

August 28

Mysterious Item

After returning from work, you walk into your house and notice an item that wasn't there when you left in the morning. What room were you in, what was the item and how did it get there?

August 29

You Can't Handle the Truth

It was a longshot, but your agent sold your memoir.

Now, meeting with your new publisher, you're beginning to think the whole thing might have been a mistake.

"It's incredible," the publisher says. "And, I assume it's all 100 percent true?"

You pause.

August 30

Fortune Cookie Prediction

It's lunchtime and you have Chinese food delivered. At the end of your meal, you open your fortune cookie—but this fortune is different. It's the most shocking revelation you could ever imagine.

August 31

You Can Have Your Cake

You bake the cake, careful to place the secret ingredient inside just right ...

September 1

Cube Packed Up

You arrive at work to find all the items in your cubicle packed up in a box. There's no note and you have no idea what is going on. Write this scene.

September 2

Recipient Ruckus

It all started when you accidentally sent the message (text message, e-mail, phone call) to the wrong person—the worst person it could have gone to.

September 3

Not Really Dead

One week after attending the funeral of a close friend, you receive a postcard in the mail with the words, “I’m not dead. Meet me tonight. Tell no one.”

September 4

Literary Roadshow – Jim Carroll Edition

(Write a story inspired by or including the following, from Carroll’s *Fear of Dreaming*—)

“There, now you really have something to cry about!”

He looks back over at me after a moment of silence, and we begin laughing again. I throw my arms around him and lay my head to his shoulders, continuing to laugh until my tears fall down the lapel of his suit.

[and/or]

When the traffic is still, I lower my hands and pass through. I arrive before the siren, through the Post Office doors ... yet the siren has been broken, some jealous women explain, and I am far too late.

September 5

Returning to Campus

On the 10th anniversary of your college graduation, you and your closest college friends decide to return to campus for a weekend to relive your “glory days.” Things go awry, though, when late in the evening one of your friends runs into an ex-girlfriend.

September 6

Self-Help Surprise

A self-help guru makes you an offer you can’t refuse, no matter how much you’d like to.

September 7

Dangerous Animal

You are a zookeeper, and one day a shady-looking man brings in what he calls an “exotic animal.” This animal is in a wooden box with small air holes on the top and the box is stamped DANGEROUS. He throws a picture on your desk and you look at the strangest creature you’ve ever seen. Write a scene describing the animal and the man’s story of how he found it.

September 8

In Your Pocket ...

In your pocket: A ring, a bullet and a match. In the diner, you hold your breath.

September 9

One Amazing Night

You’re standing outside a restaurant next to a phone booth when, suddenly, it rings. Your gut tells you not to answer it, but with each ring you can’t resist. Finally you pick up the phone—and end up having the most amazing night of your life.

September 10

The Cab Ride

“This cab ride isn’t over.”

“But it is?”

Nearby, a man treads water and the full moon rises.

September 11

Lowering the Ears

It started out as a haircut, but something happened.

September 12

Complaint Department

Write a formal complaint letter to your deepest, darkest fear.

September 13

Your 15 Minutes

You're watching a daytime talk show. A familiar face walks onto the stage, you drop what you're holding and she utters your name on national television.

September 14

Unusual Super Power

You wake up one day with an unusual superpower that seems pretty worthless—until you are caught in a situation that requires that specific “talent.”

September 15

State Fare

Something goes wrong—very wrong—at the state Fair's new specialty food booth.

September 16

CSI

You're at home watching “CSI” when you hear a faint scratching at the door. Upon opening it, you see a small dog looking up at you. You examine the dog's collar and see a phone number and the message, “If you find this cat, call this number immediately.” (Yes, that's right, cat.) Against your better judgment, you call the number.

September 17

Test Drive

You go on a test drive in a new car. With the dealership representative in the passenger seat, you pull to the side of the road, turn off the engine, and lock the doors. “There's something I should tell you,” you say.

September 18

You're the Marriage Ref

You and two friends are out to dinner when a woman walks up to you and says, “My husband and I have a disagreement and we'd like you to decide who is right.” She explains the issue. Both of your friends chime in, giving completely opposite opinions. The decision, though, rests in your hands. What do you decide?

September 19

The Terrible Decision

Choose a moment from yesterday or today, an otherwise normal moment when you could have done something extreme, something terrible, if you had just done one small thing different. Do it in scene.

September 20

Your Writing Tagline

M&Ms: “Melt in your mouth, not in your hands.” Miller Lite: “Tastes great, less filling.” Describe yourself (or your writing) in 10 words or fewer.

September 21

Plenty of Fish in the Digital Sea

You venture into the world of online dating. Browsing through profiles, you drop your coffee mug and it shatters on the ground—*it can't be*.

September 22

New Career

You were recently laid off. Instead of moping around, you've viewed it as a chance to start fresh. Pick a new career and write about your first day on the job.

September 23

Cellular Apologies

A stranger asks to borrow your cell phone. You agree. She turns away and talks on it for a moment, then faces you once more. “I'm sorry,” she says, eyes red. “I'm so sorry.” Then, she runs away.

September 24

My Family on Facebook

At an Internet café, you've accidentally stumbled across an unlikely family member's Facebook page. What do you find? How do you deal with it?

September 25

Sunset

The sun is setting in dramatic hues of pink and tangerine, but nobody is watching it—they're all staring at him, instead.

September 26

Back in Time

If you were given the opportunity to go back in time to one moment in your life, what would it be? Would you relive it the same way or would you live it differently?

September 27

Breaking Down

A tire blows out as you're in the car with someone on the verge of his/her own breakdown. Stuck in a small town, you're about to do something you haven't done in years.

September 28

If You Could be Someone Else

If you could morph into anyone (alive, dead, fictional, etc.), who would it be and why?

September 29

Literary Roadshow – Ernest Hemingway Edition

(Write a story inspired by or including the following, from Hemingway's "The Short Happy Life of Francis Macomber"—)

"Here's to the lion," he said. "I can't ever thank you for what you did." Margaret, his wife, looked away from him and back to Wilson.

"Let's not talk about the lion," she said. Wilson looked over at her without smiling and now she smiled at him.

September 30
Out-Of-Office

Write an extremely creative out-of-office message for your e-mail account.

October 1
Revenge of the Literary Legends

Write a parody or pastiche in the voice of one of your favorite deceased authors observing a facet of modern life that drives you absolutely mad.

October 2
A Life of Lies

You've been living a life filled with lies and it's time for you to come clean. There's one lie in particular that's been eating at you and you have to make it right. Start off your response with: "I have a confession to make. I never really ..." and explain the harm the lie caused and how you intend to rectify it.

October 3
He Didn't Have Time to Go to Jared's

You've just met—but because of what just happened, you're going to do it. You're going to propose.

October 4
Save Yourself

You're in an unfamiliar situation. People you know are there, though they are all acting strange. As the scene moves on, it becomes clear that you're about to be executed by friends—and you have no idea why. Find out why and attempt to save yourself.

October 5
**Something You Should Never See on a
Computer at the Library**

At the library, you see someone using a public computer—and the contents of her screen leave you speechless. Pretending to look at books, you peer over her shoulder and read.

October 6

Killing Your Best Friend's Wife

A close friend asks you to help him kill his wife and, to his surprise, you agree without hesitation—not because you particularly dislike his wife, but because she's the only person who knows this one deep, dark secret that could ruin your life forever. Write about how you confront her and how the murder plays out.

October 7

Birthday Baggage

It was your birthday. Describe an event from the day in scene, using an airplane, an autograph, and a scream.

October 8

Embarrassing CD

Your friend asks to borrow a couple of your CDs. While rummaging through your collection, the two of you stumble upon what you consider to be the most embarrassing album that you own. You definitely don't want your friend to know that you actually like that record, so make up an excuse as to how it got in your collection. The more elaborate the reasoning, the better.

October 9

Behind the Curtain

A fortune-teller rubs her glass orb and grabs your hand. She closes her eyes. She raises her head toward the sky and mumbles. Then, she bursts out laughing.

October 10

Create a New Human-esque Race

Create a new human-esque race and describe it as thoroughly as possible. Be sure to describe appearance, culture, values, beliefs, etc.

October 11

The Last Thing You Expected to See on the Menu

The waiter handed you a menu. Only what was written inside wasn't merely a listing of food.

October 12

You See a Face Through Your Dark Window

You always look out the dark windows and wonder if something is out there. One night when you look, a small face with bright eyes appears at the window. Write about what you do, and who/what it is.

October 13

Red Letter/Dead Letter

At a used book sale, you purchase a leather-bound volume. At home, you thumb through the pages and an old letter tumbles out. What does it say? Write the letter.

October 14

Bathroom Murder

You're in a public bathroom when two other people, whom you don't know, come in. They obviously don't know you're there, and they start discussing an elaborate plot to murder a famous musician. Recount the conversation to the police, explaining the plot, the place and the motive. Oh, and don't forget to name the musician.

October 15

“The Night It Happened”

Take one of the seasonal Halloween offerings—a haunted house, a haunted amusement park, a haunted maze, a haunted hay ride, a ghost tour, a booze-infused costume party—and write a scene about what took place there last Halloween that will forever be referred to in conversation as “The Night It Happened.”

October 16

Halloween Party Mishap

You arrive at an annual Halloween party only to discover that someone else is dressed in the same costume as you. Bad things start happening to you throughout the night and you suspect this person has something to do with it.

October 17

A Church-Mandated Penance

Needing to get something off your chest, you head to the confessional at church. After laying out your misdeed to the priest, you are given an unusual task to perform as penance—not creepy, just unusual. Write this scene.

October 18

Your Favorite Childhood Book

What was your favorite book as a kid? Recount the way it made you feel when you read it.

October 19

What's in Your Closet?

It's 3 a.m. and your nightly slumber was interrupted by a screeching sound. The noise is coming from your closet. What can it be? Scared as you are, you still decide to take a peek. Describe what you find.

October 20

That Wicked Old Scent

“It smells like something has died in the walls,” she said.

“Well, do something about it.”

“I always do.”

He remembers what happened last time.

October 21

Costume Contest

You're 12 years old and have entered a school Halloween costume contest. There's stiff competition, though you're confident you'll win—until you find out someone has bribed the judge.

October 22

The Field of Dreams

You have a strange dream—and then, as you arrive at work the next day, it seems as if elements from the dream are playing out in reality, scene by scene.

October 23

Swim Club Scare

You and a friend break into your neighborhood swim club late one night to go for an after-hours dip. While splashing around in the pool, a body floats to the top. Worse yet—it's someone you know.

October 24

Matchup!

Write a story featuring a Ouija board, a search engine, and a self-help book.

October 25

Magic Poem

Write a made-up magic spell, including ingredients, chants, and actions. Now, turn it into a poem.

October 26

Whiteout

“When did your hair turn white?”

“A long time ago. When I was young.”

“Why?”

October 27

Sorry I Had to Rig Your GPS, But This Is Urgent

You had planned to attend a co-worker's birthday party, and plugged her address into your GPS system, but the system guided you somewhere else. Oddly enough, there was a man waiting for you at this mysterious place. "Sorry I had to rig your GPS, but this is urgent," the person said.

October 28

Medieval Torture

You wake up chained to the wall of a medieval torture room. The torture devices are laid out on a table in front of you.

October 29

A Decision, a Laugh, a Howl

It's a holiday, and you make a decision that makes something go very awry—or, very right—depending on how you look at it. Meanwhile, it's cold but it's supposed to be hot, someone is laughing and a dog is howling.

October 30

Smashing Pumpkins

Pumpkin smashers have destroyed several streets' worth of Jack 'O Lanterns in your neighborhood and you fear your street is next. The next night you hide in your bushes, hoping to nab the culprits. You're shocked when you see who it is.

October 31

Haunted House

You've recently purchased a new house. Upon your first full night there, you begin to hear noises but think nothing of it—until you see something that convinces you the house is haunted.

November 1

This?!

It's been days. You're dehydrated and wild-eyed. And now this.

You traveled all this way for this?

November 2

10 Things Before You Die

You've been diagnosed with a terminal disease and have been given three weeks to live. What will you do with your time left? Make a list of the 10 things you want to do before you die.

November 3

Morals and Movies

You have just purchased tickets for a movie, and someone approaches you, tears in his eyes and something gripped in his palm, and asks a question—one that leaves you speechless.

November 4

Résumé Mix-Up

After six months of mailing resumes all over the city, you finally have a bite. Though under-qualified for the position, you attend the interview anyway because you desperately need work. As the boss starts to ask questions, you notice that he's not reading from your résumé—it's someone else's. Instead of correcting him, you go with it. Write this interview.

November 5

Literary Roadshow – William Golding Edition

(Write a story inspired by or including the following, from Golding's *Lord of the Flies*—)

Unwillingly Ralph felt his lips twitch; he was angry with himself for giving way. He muttered.

“That was a dirty trick.”

Jack broke out of his gyration and stood facing Ralph. His words came in a shout.

“All right, all right!” ... “I'm sorry. About the fire, I mean. There. I-” He drew himself up. “I apologize.”

November 6

On Strike

Your family isn't cooperating with your writing career, so you've decided to go on strike. Write a list of demands that must be met in order for you to return to your chores and household responsibilities. (Don't forget to make a concession or two to speed up the negotiation process.)

November 7

Cheers

"... In this drink?"

He shrugs. "There are always more ingredients than you'd ever guess."

I stare into its depths as it reflects candlelight.

November 8

Unforgettable Meal

A terrible thunderstorm leaves you without power. When the storm is over you head outside and notice a neighbor coming your way. She's afraid the food in her fridge will go bad, so she's invited you and two other neighbors over for dinner—and it turns out to be one of the most memorable nights of your life.

November 9

Wherever You May Write

Write a scene that takes place wherever you write. Take an object [or two] that is always present at your desk, and make it a key element of your scene.

November 10

Hospital Visit

A loved one is in the hospital and you decide to visit. As you're walking down a hallway, you hear another familiar voice coming from a different room. Stop in for a visit and write about it.

November 11

The Power of Suggestion

Ask a friend for a number between 100 and 2,000, and without any further explanation, ask her to say the first word that comes to mind. Write a story of the given number of words exactly, and make the random word the title as well as the final utterance in your story. A possible first sentence: “Do you trust me?”

November 12

Saluting Veterans

You’re walking through a cemetery and you pass the grave of a World War II veteran. Write a scene from his life story.

November 13

That Strange Day

It’s been raining for weeks and a single thought has been stuck in your mind: It plays itself over and over, and you can’t stop pondering what happened on that strange day – the day it started raining.

November 14

Retirement Party

After 42 years with your company, the day has finally arrived: your last day of work. Your co-workers throw you a lunch retirement party. After cake, one co-worker asks you to reflect on your years with the company. So you do—and you hold nothing back.

November 15

The Man Who Speaks in Poems

Write a prose story about a man who speaks only in poems.

November 16

Pet Peeve Punishment

What’s your No. 1 pet peeve? Develop a punishment for anyone caught in the act.

November 17

He Got His Wish

He always wanted a straight razor shave, so he went to get one on his birthday. After being led to a chair and leaning his neck back, he spotted the barber for the first time.

November 18

Unexpected Thanksgiving Guest

You're enjoying Thanksgiving at your aunt's house until your cousin shows up with an unexpected ... and familiar ... guest.

November 19

The Things You're Thankful For

Your family gathers for the holidays and you're looking forward to the feast. At the table, grandma—who knows you hate being the center of attention—asks you to stand up and name the five things you are most thankful for. Instead you decide to mix it up a little.

November 20

Back to School

In your opinion, it was always the worst thing that could have happened to you in high school—and it's happening to you at the high school reunion right now.

November 21

Thanksgiving Burgers

Write about the only time you hosted Thanksgiving. Explain how you all came to be eating hamburgers.

November 22

Loss of Appetite

You roll through your favorite fast-food drive-thru, order your usual and wait for the cashier to repeat it back to you. Only, he doesn't repeat it. Instead, through the speaker, you hear a very unsettling conversation.

November 23

A Thanksgiving Story to Remember

You're out with some old friends and they're all rehashing amusing holiday stories. You tell them that you have one to top them all. Two rules: Your story must begin with, "I remember that Thanksgiving like it was yesterday," and must end with, "And that's how (fill in the blank) got stuck inside the turkey."

November 24

Dreamy

Take your latest dream, no matter what, and work it into a scene in a story you're currently writing or editing.

November 25

Wrong Bathroom

You head into the bathroom at work, walk into a stall and close the door. Moments later, as you leave the stall, you notice two people standing there ... but there's one major problem: They are of the opposite sex. On the spot, you make up an excuse as to why you are in their bathroom.

November 26

Clash of Characters

Create a scene using four characters: One based on yourself, one based on someone you personally know, one based on someone you heard about in the media, and one spawning strictly from the imagination. Make the media story the hook or reason they're all together, and base the scene around that.

November 27

The Bird Isn't the Word

You're at Thanksgiving dinner, and discover that there's no food this year. Instead, there's something else on the table.

November 28

Old Habits Die Hard

You decide to give up an old habit—in exchange for something that was originally promised to you years ago.

November 29

Concerning Item on Your Co-worker's Desk

Your company is moving office buildings and you've been asked to stay after hours and help pack up the desks. While clearing through one particular co-worker's desk, you find something extremely concerning in his bottom drawer. Call one of your friends and ask for advice on what to do about it.

November 30

Literary Roadshow – Upton Sinclair Edition 2

(Write a story inspired by or including the following, from Sinclair's *The Jungle*—)

He had to bend down to her, she was so weak. She was pleading with him, in broken phrases, painfully uttered:

“Have faith in me! Believe me!”

“Believe what?” he cried.

“Believe that I—that I know best—that I love you! And do not ask me—what you did.”

December 1

Computer Woes

One morning you are sitting in front of your computer working on your novel when, suddenly, the computer starts talking to you. What does it say? Does it deliver an important message or just want to chat?

December 2

The Artifact

Your boat begins to rocks and you peer over the edge, catching a glimpse of something you thought was gone forever.

December 3

Your Keynote Speech

You receive a call from your alma mater, and they want you to be the keynote speaker at graduation. Write a speech that inspires the future generation to work toward their dreams.

December 4

Trapped in the Ice

Your car breaks down in the midst of a blizzard. Trudging through the snow, you discover something frozen in ice that will prove to be invaluable in the moments ahead.

December 5

Elf Pink Slip

The countdown clock for Christmas is ticking. Santa's elves begin working their magic on the assembly lines, but the line comes to a screeching halt when rumors leak that one elf is going to get let go that day.

December 6

Matchup!

Write a scene featuring snow, a painting, and an ex-friend.

December 7

Mall Claus

An incident spurs a mall Santa to reexamine his life.

December 8

Rewriting Rudolph

Rewrite the story of *Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer* from the point of view of Vixen (or any one of the other reindeer, such as Dasher, Dancer, Prancer, Comet, Cupid, Donner, Blitzen).

December 9

Holiday Parking

You head to the mall for some holiday shopping and, just as you're about to park, someone steals your spot. Do you do something for revenge or do you stay in the holiday spirit and not let it bother you—and let karma do the dirty work?

December 10

Rudolph, Reimagined

Write an unexpected literary fiction vignette about a character from a “classic” holiday film—say, perhaps, a lost moment in the life of Cousin Eddie from *Christmas Vacation*? The trials and tribulations of one Yukon Cornelius (as featured in the *Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer* claymation special)? A story titled “Ralphie’s Revenge”?

December 11

Anonymous Love

You’ve been playing Scrabble with an anonymous person online. After some Internet chatting, you realize that the two of you live in the same town and decide to meet at a local pub. What you didn’t expect was ...

December 12

Steal From the Real

Take a newspaper or log on to a news website and comb through the articles. Jot down two sourced quotes verbatim from different sections—say, one from a news story, and one from an entertainment piece—and incorporate them into a story of your own. Make one quote the first line, and the other the final line.

December 13

Not Your Average Pet

A friend knocks on your door. Her father has had a heart attack and she must leave town immediately to visit—only problem is she needs someone to watch over her very unusual pet.

December 14

The Nontraditionalist

“This was a holiday tradition.”

He glances around, wipes his boot on a rug. “After what happened this year, it’s not any more.”

December 15

A Game of Confession

Old friends have gathered, and are passing the time with a card game.

“Ante up,” you say.

“I have a confession,” your former roommate replies.

Everyone widens their eyes, but then lowers their heads. They know something you don’t.

December 16

Secret Message From Late Grandfather

You’re watching an old home movie when you notice a note in the hand of your late grandfather. Thanks to your giant TV, you are able to read the note.

December 17

Not a Creature Was Stirring ...

You wrapped the present with utmost care, and placed it under the tree. Then, laughed.

December 18

Holiday Party Shenanigans

After drinking a few too many eggnogs at your annual holiday party, you wake up the next morning realizing you did some things you now regret. Write an e-mail to your boss that will ensure you still get a raise next year.

December 19

The Wait is Over

After a year’s wait, you finally strike and buy “it.” But once you get home, you discover that it’s nothing—*nothing*—like you thought it’d be.

December 20

A Very Poor Decision

An ice storm has hit and the electricity has gone out. The odd neighbor who lives a couple houses down asks to spend the night—you have a working fireplace, he does not. Deciding to be neighborly you agree. Around 3 a.m. you conclude you made a very poor decision.

December 21

Selling Out/Buying In

You have done what you swore you would never do: You have written a book solely to pay the bills. Now, write the back-cover promo copy.

December 22

Talking Dog

Your kids have spent years asking you to get them a dog. You finally break down and get one, only to discover that this dog talks—but only to you. More interestingly, the dog loves to gossip about your kids and their lives. Write a scene in which your dog rats out one of your kids for doing something they shouldn't have.

December 23

Carol

There are carolers. But they aren't singing Christmas carols.

December 24

'Twas the Night Before Rewrite

Rewrite the poem "Twas the Night Before Christmas" as an ode to your family and your own holiday traditions. Start with "Twas the Night Before Christmas, and all through the (fill in the blank)," and go from there.

December 25

Up on the Rooftop

Something comes down your chimney, but it's not exactly Santa. In your bed, you stir as you hear footsteps.

December 26

Matchup!

Write a scene that takes place on the day after a holiday, featuring a ringing telephone, and something—or someone—lost.

December 27

What's in Your Favorite Actor's Trunk

While driving to pick up lunch, you accidentally bump into the car in front of you—a light fender bender—and it pops open the other car's trunk. When you get out to assess the damage, you notice that the driver of the other car is none other than your favorite actor. More important, you notice a body in the trunk.

December 28

The Ghost of Your Grandmother

You are dealing with a bout of insomnia due to a recurring nightmare that started two days after the loss of your grandmother. Suddenly, you see a ghost who claims to be her spirit. She orders you to take care of something she wasn't able to before she passed. If you do, she'll leave you alone. If you don't ...

December 29

Stop That Wedding

The love of your life is getting married to someone else. In a last-ditch attempt to win your soulmate back, you bust into the wedding and profess your love mid-ceremony. Start your story with the line, "Don't say yes!"

December 30

A New Year

You quit smoking, you quit drinking, and you gave up something else dominating your life, all in one day.

December 31

Resolute

It's Dec. 31, and you're scrambling to make a resolution come true that you made last year. The sun is setting, and it's time for action.

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