

EBITDA fell by 20% this quarter as our top customer, accounting for 50% of recurring revenue, did not renew. Sales efforts have been aggressive in pushing for...

Hey! Hey! Notice me!

Pat closes her eyes. Oh no, not this again. She stops typing and looks around the office cautiously.

I know you can hear me. Remember me? I'm here again, and I need you to pay attention!!

Pat slips her heels on from under her desk. She stands up and walks toward the bathroom. Every step she takes feels heavier than the last. Nothing suspicious here, just taking a normal restroom break. She picks the nearest cubicle and locks the door.

Ah, good. You're here. So, my parents always told me I should pursue a career I disliked. They're disappointed in everything I do that doesn't meet their plans for me. But now I am unhappy, and I realize I don't have to fit their standards. I can pursue photography, just for the simple reason that it gives me joy!

Why can't these prompts come at a more convenient time? Pat thinks, jotting down her main character's inner whims. She presses the toilet flush and slips the little notebook into her blazer pocket.

There has got to be a better time and place to be annoyed by creative prompts than during office hours, she thinks as she turns on the tap and washes her hands.

**Patricia Camille Que**  
Literary Enthusiast



INTRO: CREATIVE WRITING  
SHORT STORY CHALLENGE

All Cindy had was a pen to create universes. Roger's only tools were a mouth that never closed and a mind barely filled. His petty words stormed through the potential she kept hidden. His lessons were always taught with pain at the forefront. After all, to seek bigger dreams, one must suffer, according to his beliefs.

With a heart determined to prove him wrong, she leapt over the hurdles and slashed through every insult. She faced him head-on. He was simply a delusional monster, after all. It was no surprise that, by the end, he was silenced. Only a fool would dare to combat her talents. She was a writer, after all.

**Shiandra Mendoza**  
Content Creator



INTRO: CREATIVE WRITING  
SHORT STORY CHALLENGE

The poster for a book club brought me to an abandoned building on the city's outskirts. The rundown interior almost turned me away, and I gave up trying to look for it until a little voice told me to keep going. I looked from empty room to empty room until I walked into what seemed like an oasis in the middle of a desert. A soft warmth enveloped the room, with authors and writers alike conversing and discussing seemingly every subject at random. It was a busy room that suddenly turned silent when I walked in. I was afraid I had ruined the atmosphere almost immediately, like blowing out the flame of a candle. I could easily tell I wasn't one of them—my wit was not as sharp, and my words were not as concrete. However, almost as quickly as the silence had come, a smile appeared on all their faces. They welcomed me into their small book club, nestled in the corner of the building. The warmth from the room lit a small fire within me, prodding me to learn and write more. It didn't matter to them how good or bad it was; they celebrated it nonetheless. The little voice inside me smiled, as it finally found its home with its people.

**Popey Quitain**  
**Freelance Writer**



INTRO: CREATIVE WRITING  
SHORT STORY CHALLENGE

--There are too many eyes in the room.

You're not used to this kind of attention. The sound of your voice feels foreign, even to you. You're so used to muffling it in your own mind or drowning it out with whatever other thoughts keep racing through your head, all around the clock.

The room's too quiet now. You can hear your own voice clearly, reciting every word you wrote with as much clarity as you can muster.

The eyes are still there. They're still looking. Don't look back. They'll eat you alive.

Your voice sounds disjointed. Whose words are these? Where did they come from? They can't possibly be yours; you would have remembered that—but even that doesn't feel right anymore. You can't remember writing this. You can't remember anything. So many missing spots in your memories, you can't decipher what's real and what isn't.

Don't look up. They'll never let you breathe another moment if you do.

Stop overthinking it. The claws in the back of your mind will dig themselves deep into your brain if you keep running over those thoughts, over and over, and over again. That pesky little parasite without a name always insisted on it.

**Erin Alcala**  
**Literary Enthusiast**



INTRO: CREATIVE WRITING  
SHORT STORY CHALLENGE

Anna felt that dull ache in her knees again as she sat down in her chair, waiting for the Creative Writing speaker to come online. Maybe this knee thing could be a sign of old age—something her fellow mom at school had rudely quipped after noticing her uneven gait.

What am I doing here? she asked herself. I could be as old as the other participants' parents, she thought. Then, the chimes on the computer interrupted her as tiny squares filled up the screen, hiding each participant who joined online, each with muted microphones and cameras. She could only hear the fast tapping of computer keys as someone forgot to mute their mic while working in their office. It was the only sound Anna heard as the participants patiently waited for Mr. Anthony Shieh.

Mr. Shieh then arrived online with a wide smile. Anna thought he was engaging and knowledgeable. She liked that he talked about the insecurity of aspiring writers, something she had always felt. That feeling of not being good enough to write, despite her published essays in the past. And despite still writing on her food blog, even though vlogs and reels are now the norm.

Anna felt inspired as Mr. Shieh talked about his struggles and triumphs in eventually getting published. It gave her hope that maybe she could publish a book someday. Maybe that manuscript she had initially written in notebooks, then hastily typed on the computer and tucked away somewhere, wouldn't be forgotten after all. Maybe the characters and places she had created in her mind could find their way into a reader's heart. Maybe she just had to believe and persevere, just like Mr. Shieh did.

Maybe this workshop could be the start of that dream. And finally, maybe that fantasy of having her name on a hardbound book in major bookstores, here and abroad, could become a reality. Just the thought of it made Anna smile. Looking down at her knees, she realized she no longer felt the ache.



**May Navarro**  
**Aspiring Author**



**INTRO: CREATIVE WRITING**  
**SHORT STORY CHALLENGE**

Kallie's eyes burn after twelve hours of work. She pulls her gaze away from her laptop and ignores the message notifications for once, the pounding in her chest for a different reason altogether.

Her heart rate hasn't calmed down since seeing the Instagram post Aiden, her best friend, sent earlier that day. The white poster advertised a beginner-friendly writing workshop set to happen that weekend. Accompanying the link was a brief message that sent fear into her gut, sour and gnawing: I think you should give this a try.

To quell her anxiety, Kallie buries her face in sweaty palms and takes slow, unsteady breaths like she'd seen on TikTok. It's all for naught; when her thoughts drift back to the workshop, dread swims through her body, rendering her a shaking mess on the couch, curled up with her back against the laptop. Her phone stays in her trembling hand.

The idea of signing up for a writing workshop terrifies her. It's not social anxiety that gets in the way, nor is it the thought of opening herself to well-meaning strangers. She'd been through the wringer many times in the past as a hungry aspiring author who dreamed of making it big and leaving an impact. Kallie burned through journals and ballpoint pens once upon a time; she made a name for herself by winning writing contests and having her work featured in school publications. Accolades had deluded her into thinking she could publish fast and easy post-grad, but the real world humbled her with piles of coldly written rejection letters instead.

After months of moping, Kallie applied for a job instead of going for her nth pitch. Copywriting paid the bills and exposed her to a different kind of writing that kept her mind sharp, but the unforgiving hustle demanded by advertising dulled her fire. Daily creative writing turned into twice-a-month attempts before fizzling out into nothing. She's written nothing for herself except grocery lists and meandering book reviews, and she believes her time has passed.

Despite this, Kallie continues to think of her younger, bright-eyed self. She pulls her phone up to her face, opens the web browser, and types in her full name. After scrolling past her LinkedIn and other accounts, she finds her name immortalized on older websites and uploaded anthologies. Kallie spends the next hour on the couch, scrolling through webpages and PDFs, her eyes no longer burning with exhaustion but with unshed tears instead. Cont. >>

**Max Buenaventura**  
**Aspiring Author**



INTRO: CREATIVE WRITING  
SHORT STORY CHALLENGE

Cont. >>

She feels like she's staring at a graveyard of past potential, each headstone marked with the title of old work. No parent should ever have to bury their children, yet Kallie mourns countless complex characters, intertwined storylines, and rich worlds she poured her heart into throughout her childhood and teenage years. Something in her aches to return home and heal her inner child, and as much as she insists she doesn't know how, Aiden's given her a map.

It's nearly 10 in the evening, but Kallie knows Aiden's still awake and waiting. I'm thinking of signing up, she texts. Her fingers won't stop shaking. But I'm so fucking scared. What if I suck now? Don't you think it's pathetic, after everything?

It's barely three minutes until her phone vibrates. Kallie reads Aiden's words over and over, her throat tightening at his response. You gave it a shot and that makes all the difference. I'm proud of you either way.

You're proud of a failure, she jests.

Can't call you a failure if you keep trying. She can almost imagine his voice, low and soothing. Do it for you.

It's the push she needs. Kallie scrolls back up to the Instagram link and reopens it, the same quirky visual greeting her tired eyes. Before losing her bravado, Kallie signs up for the class, pays the registration fee, and confirms her participation twice: first to the organizer, who thanks her profusely, and second to Aiden, who sends a heart emoji in response.

She's still terrified. Kallie knows she'll be tempted to run the same way she ran when facing failure for the first time. She'll pester Aiden until the weekend, consider revoking her attendance, mull over cutting her losses, and pretend this never happened. Yet there's a part of her that's begging to be heard, and Kallie doesn't know if she can ignore it any longer.

Kallie thinks of her younger self. She hopes she'll make her proud.



**Max Buena Ventura**  
**Aspiring Author**



INTRO: CREATIVE WRITING  
SHORT STORY CHALLENGE