

30 of the Best Short Stories You Can Read for Free

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These are some of the best short stories around, and what makes them even more delightful is the fact that every one is absolutely free. If you love to read this article is just right for you.

1. "The Zero Meter Diving Team," by Jim Shepard

"Mikhail lived a large portion of his life in that state of mind in which you take a risk and deny the risk at the same time, out of rage."

This story is about three brothers caught up in the horrific disaster that happened at Chernobyl on April 26, 1986. The startling consequences of the disaster make for a dramatic backdrop, as the brothers deal with the aftermath of the nuclear meltdown. "The Zero Meter Diving Team" is available for free, from [BOMB](#) magazine.

2. "A Tiny Feast," by Chris Adrian

"Titania was the only one among them ever to have ridden on a roller coaster, but she didn't offer up the experience as an analogy, because it seemed insufficient to describe a process that to her felt less like a violent unpredictable ride than like someone ripping your heart out one day and then stuffing it back in your chest the next."

"A Tiny Feast" is for those who love fairy folk. In the story, a toddler is exchanged for a hobgoblin, but the tiny child has a very serious illness. The story is available for free from [The New Yorker](#).

3. "Lorry Raja," by Madhuri Vijay

"He taunted me about playing in the mud, as he called it, breaking chunks of iron ore with my hammer."

"Lorry Raja" is a short story about children and families in India. These families were coerced into forced labor to mine for iron to build the Olympic stadium in China. It is available to read from [The Narrative Magazine](#). You will be required to submit an email address to access the full story.

4. "Bluebell Meadow," by Benedict Kiely

"She spread the bullets on the table and moved them about, making designs and shapes and patterns with them, playing with them as if they were draughts or dominoes or precious stones."

The "Bluebell Meadow" is set during the Troubles in Ireland. It is about two teenagers that although in love have the chasm of religious ideals between them. It is available for free from [Google Books](#).

5. "A Beneficiary," Nadine Gordimer

“That Saturday: it landed in the apartment looted by the present and filled it with blasting amazement, the presence of the past.”

A woman discovers a shocking secret about her mother in “The Beneficiary.” The story is available for free from [*The New Yorker*](#).

6. “The Man On The Stairs,” by Miranda July

“That is my problem with life, I just rush through it, like I’m being chased.”

This is a creepy and very short tale. It is available for free from [Scribd](#).

7. “Bullet in the Brain,” by Tobias Wolff

“He was never in the best of tempers anyway, Anders—a book critic known for the weary, elegant savagery with which he dispatched almost everything he reviewed.”

A normal day in a bank turns to terror very quickly. You can find “Bullet In The Brain” at no cost [here](#).

8. “Safari,” Jennifer Egan

“Lou is a man who cannot tolerate defeat—can’t *perceive* it as anything but a spur to his own inevitable victory.”

“Safari” is about a dysfunctional group of people who go on an African safari. The story is quite poignant in its telling. It is available from [*The New Yorker*](#).

9. “Hills Like White Elephants,” Ernest Hemingway

“I know you wouldn’t mind it, Jig. It’s really not anything. It’s just to let the air in.”

This story is set in Spain and is a conversation between a man and a woman waiting for a train. Ernest Hemingway liked to couch his stories with analogies. This story is no different. It is available to read for free [here](#).

10. “Drinking Coffee Elsewhere,” by ZZ Packer

“She continued to cry, but it seemed to have grown so silent in my room I wondered if I could hear the numbers change on my digital clock.”

This is a coming of age story. A girl entering college questions her culture, her sexuality, and more. The story is available for free from [*The New Yorker*](#).

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11. "Hollow," by Breece D'J Pancake

"On a knoll in the ridge, run there by the dogs, the bobcat watched, waiting for the man to leave."

This story is available through [The Atlantic](#) for free. The story is about a group of coal miners and the way they deal with the dangers of coal mining.

12. "Eveline," by James Joyce

"She sat at the window watching the evening invade the avenue."

The story is one of several short stories from Joyce's *The Dubliners* and is available for free. The story is about a young woman having second thoughts about leaving her homeland of Ireland.

13. "Interpreter Of Maladies," Jhumpa Lahiri

"In its own way this correspondence would fulfill his dream, of serving as an interpreter between nations."

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Ms. Lahiri won the Pulitzer Prize for this story in 2000. The story is about a family visiting India and their tour guide. The story is available for [free](#) here.

14. "All Summer in a Day," by Ray Bradbury

"The children pressed to each other like so many roses, so many weeds, intermixed, peering out for a look at the hidden sun."

A great read by one of the most brilliant science fiction authors ever, Ray Bradbury. The story is set on Venus and centers on the children of those who have settled there. It can be downloaded at no cost [here](#).

15. "A Perfect Day for Bananafish," by J.D. Salinger

"With her little lacquer brush, while the phone was ringing, she went over the nail of her little finger, accentuating the line of the moon. She then replaced the cap on the bottle of lacquer and, standing up, passed her left—the wet—hand back and forth through the air."

This is a story about an atypical day at the beach. The entire book can be downloaded for [free](#) here.

16. "Tiny Smiling Daddy," by Mary Gaitskill

"Unless it was Kitty's coldness, her always turning away, her sarcastic voice. But she was a teenager, and that's what teenagers did."

The story revolves around the tumultuous teen years, although the child in the story is in her late twenties. The father reminisces about his daughter's adolescent years. The story can be read for [free](#) here.

17. "They're Made Out Of Meat," Terry Bisson

"And why not? Imagine how unbearably, how unutterably cold the Universe would be if one were all alone ..."

Aliens make a hilarious discovery. The story was nominated for the Nebula award in 1991. The story can be read for [free](#) here.

18. "The Yellow Wallpaper," by Charlotte Perkins Gilman

"If a physician of high standing, and one's own husband, assures friends and relatives that there is really nothing the matter with one but temporary nervous depression—a slight hysterical tendency—what is one to do?"

A story of a young woman's descent into madness after the birth of her child. The user can choose which format to download. Available for free [here](#).

19. "All at One Point," by Italo Calvino

"We say hello—at times somebody recognizes me, at other times I recognize somebody—and we promptly start asking about this one and that one (even if each remembers only a

and we promptly start asking about this one and that one (even if each remembers only a few of those remembered by the others), and so we start in again on the old disputes, the slanders, the denigrations.”

This is a very short story that revolves around the very beginning of the universe. The story is available for [free](#).

20. “Italy,” by Antonio Elefano

“I could only focus on you: your syncopated step, your forward lean, the way your legs seemed to disappear amidst the tables as you glided across the room.”

“Italy” is a bittersweet tale about a couple during many years of marriage. The story can be read for [free](#) here.

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21. “The School,” by Donald Barthelme

“Well, we had all these children out planting trees, see, because we figured that ... that was part of their education, to see how, you know, the root systems ... and also the sense of responsibility, taking care of things, being individually responsible.”

A story about an unusual school dealing with a rather mundane subject. The story can be read for [free](#).

22. “In the Penal Colony” by Franz Kafka

“The Condemned Man, incidentally, had an expression of such dog-like resignation that it looked as if one could set him free to roam around the slopes and would only have to whistle at the start of the execution for him to return.”

A man is condemned to die in a most unusual manner. Read the story for [free](#).

23. “Symbols and Signs,” by Vladimir Nabokov

“After eliminating a number of articles that might offend him or frighten him (anything in the gadget line, for instance, was taboo), his parents chose a dainty and innocent trifle—a basket with ten different fruit jellies in ten little jars.”

A couple goes to visit their son in a mental institution only to be turned away. The story is available from [*The New Yorker*](#).

24. “Gooseberries,” by Anton Chekhov

“But surely a corpse wants that, not a man. And I hear that our intellectuals have a longing for the land and want to acquire farms. But it all comes down to the six feet of land.”

A story about two brothers reestablishing themselves after their father’s death. The story is available [here](#).

25. “Sea Oak,” by George Saunders

“But she’s not bitter. Sometimes she’s so nonbitter it gets on my nerves.”

A story about an aunt who refuses to stay dead. The story is available for [free](#).

26. “The Ones Who Walk Away from Omelas,” by Ursula K. Le Guin

“But we do not say the words of cheer much any more. All smiles have become archaic.”

A story about the price of utopia. The story is available for free [here](#).

27. “The Veldt,” by Ray Bradbury

The story is about a murderous room. You can read it for free [here](#).

28. “The Bear Came Over the Mountain,” by Alice Munro

“Her hair that was as light as milkweed fluff had gone from pale blond to white somehow without Grant’s noticing exactly when, and she still wore it down to her shoulders, as her mother had done”

The story is about a professor’s wife losing her memory. It was later adapted into a film, *Away From Her*. The story can be found in [*The New Yorker*](#).

29. “The Nose,” by Nikolai Gogol

“Ivan Yakovlevitch donned a jacket over his shirt for politeness’ sake, and, seating himself at the table, poured out salt, got a couple of onions ready, took a knife into his hand, assumed an air of importance, and cut the roll open. Then he glanced into the roll’s middle. To his intense surprise he saw something glimmering there. He probed it cautiously with the knife — then poked at it with a finger.”

Two men awake to a very distressing morning. The story can be found [here](#).

30. “Drown,” by Junot Diaz

“Days we spent in the mall or out in the parking lot playing stickball, but nights were what we waited for.”

A young man returns home from college only to find many things have changed. Read for [free](#).

